Is Development a Myth?
The Failure of Capitalist Economic Development in Developing Nations

Author: Clara Bensen

Faculty Mentor: Daniel Rodeheaver, Department of Sociology, College of Public Affairs and Community Service

Department and College Affiliation: Department of Sociology, College of Public Affairs and Community Service; Honors College

Bio:

Clara Bensen graduated *summa cum laude* from the Honors College and the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Texas. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies with a focus in international development and a minor in Spanish. Bensen was the recipient of both the Honors College Transfer Scholarship and the UNT Transfer Scholarship. During her time at UNT, she volunteered as a learning partner for the Intensive English Language Institute. She was also a member of the Phi Sigma Rota Honors Society for International Studies. In addition to presenting research projects at the 2009 and 2010 undergraduate University Scholars Day, Bensen spent her last semester at UNT working as a research assistant for the Center for the Study of Interdisciplinarity. She plans to spend a year traveling, writing, and working on independent research projects before pursuing graduate studies with a focus on interdisciplinarity.

Abstract:

Since the close of World War II, the term “development” has permeated Western discourse on a myriad of topics ranging from globalization and poverty to environmental issues and economics. Upon examination, it becomes apparent that the general definition of international development is synonymous with the Western capitalistic model, namely, that the only means by which an impoverished nation can develop is through the mechanisms of wage labor, industrialization, production, consumption, and commodification. It is implied that a nation is not truly mature until its political structure and annual GDP resemble that of developed nations, such as the United States. This paper seeks to critique the flaws inherent in this assumption in terms of their limitations on human and ecological flourishing. It will be argued that the capitalist development paradigm is neither sustainable nor feasible over a long term, but is instead fundamentally structured to advance inequality, exploitation, environmental destruction, and sociocultural degradation. This critique will be followed by a suggestion for the addition of an ethical and philosophical element to the study of human development where development is defined by a framework of values that extend beyond economic growth.

Introduction

On January 20, 1949, Harry S. Truman gave his presidential inaugural speech to the United States. A triumphant seven-mile long parade followed his speech while symbolically heralding a new world order. World War II had ended and an entirely different conflict had taken its place. Truman responded to this new environment in his speech, using the majority of his address to characterize the world in terms of three spheres: democratic “freedom-loving nations,” nations under “the false philosophy of communism,” and “underdeveloped areas” (Truman, 1950, p. 183). These characterizations easily translated themselves into the now-familiar Cold War blocs of the First, Second, and Third Worlds. In 1949, the idea of the economic underdevelopment of a Third World was a relatively new one, born out of the Cold War milieu. Truman defined the concept even as he expounded on the solution:

More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery.... Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of these people.... Such new economic developments must be devised and controlled to the benefit of the peoples of the areas in which they are established. The old imperialism-exploitation for foreign profit has no place in our plans.... All countries, including our own, will greatly benefit from a constructive program for the better use of the world's human and natural resources.... Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge. (Truman, 1950, p. 183)

Truman's speech embodies the Western approach to modern international development. From a normative perspective, the word, development, has a constructive and beneficial implication. When this concept is applied to global issues, the general idea of development is imagined as a decline in destitution, inequality, exploitation, and environmental degradation and an increase in human welfare, prosperity, and health, coupled with environmental sustainability. In the traditional Western paradigm, the actualization of these development goals is assumed to be through the mechanisms of economic development—more specifically, through the consumer capitalist model of economic growth.

The application of the capitalist economic development model has not been successful in relieving the suffering of the “miserable” people of the world. Indeed, an argument can be made that the Western obsession with economic development and growth has exacerbated suffering on a wide scale. The value system underlying economic development has defined levels of accumulation and consumption as universal indicators of well-being. These foundational values, lacking a solid ethical basis, have led to the pursuit of economic growth through models that are fundamentally unjust, unsustainable, and unattainable for the majority of the world's population, although this fact has not curbed continued attempts at their implementation. Both the miserable track record of economic development and the limits of the capitalist value system speak to the need for a reassessment of values within the study of development. An analysis of the history of capitalist economic development, drawing from the postcolonial and post-development schools of thought, lends supports to this position.

The Discovery of Poverty

The promotion of a “vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge” (Truman, 1950, p. 183) in underdeveloped areas took the nascent field of economic development

to the forefront of Western focus. By scaling back and analyzing the dominant themes of traditional economic development, it is possible to broadly identify the underlying paradigms that have characterized the field since Truman's inauguration at the outset of the Cold War. These paradigms, grounded in faith in economic and technological progress, are important to understand because they have defined the trajectory of traditional economic development research and pedagogy over the past sixty decades.

Truman introduced the Third World by proclaiming that, "More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery" (Truman, 1950, p. 183). His statement perfectly reflected the Western perspective that guided his approach towards development. Development was viewed as an inevitable and universal progression along a staged, linear continuum. The apex of the development continuum was embodied economically, politically, and socially by the modern Western model. "Underdeveloped areas" were seen as occupying lower and more miserable stages along the linear continuum, and, as Truman indicated, the West had both the capability and duty to alleviate suffering by enabling impoverished nations to advance to higher stages (McMichael, 2000).

There is much disagreement over the linear development perspective that Truman espoused. Postcolonial and postdevelopment scholars contend that instead of highlighting a problem that needed to be solved, Truman contributed to the creation of a problem through the discovery of poverty. Arturo Escobar (1995) describes the entire concept of development as an invention that emerged out of this post-World War II discovery of poverty and the subsequent division of the world into Cold War blocs. From the start, the concept of global poverty was primarily defined in terms of inequalities in per capita income between industrialized and non-

industrialized nations. Poverty became measured and defined by Western economic values.

Escobar (1995) writes:

If within market societies the poor were defined as lacking what the rich had in terms of money and material possessions, poor countries came to be similarly defined in relation to the standards of wealth of the more economically advantaged nations. (p.23)

Ashis Nandy (2002), an Indian social theorist, illustrates the incongruity of this categorization by relating the story of a U.N. development expert who admitted that, as a young man, he never realized he was poor until he read definitions of poverty provided by economists from the World Bank. The development expert also acknowledged the fact that during his career he had encountered many “poor” communities in Africa who were unaware of the fact that they were living in what the economically developed world would consider abject poverty. These communities tended to measure their wealth in non-monetary forms such as indigenous knowledge, a flourishing culture, and an adaptive relationship with the environment.

Majid Rahnema (2006) also expands on the relationship between poverty and development by distinguishing between poverty and destitution. He notes that for most modern economists, major governments, and international institutions, the definition of poverty is often reduced to a simple economic categorization of income level, usually less than \$1 or \$2 a day. Rahnema argues that this is far too simplistic and the idea of poverty—living simply with few possessions, a convivial and reciprocal approach to community, a reliance and appreciation of the limits of local environmental resources, and limited interactions with the global capitalistic economy—is not necessarily a negative model, and is actually a tradition long established in human history prior to the Industrial Revolution. Poverty, Rahnema writes, must be differentiated from destitution, which can be equated with misery and the loss of *potentia*, an idea associated with

the ability to exercise power or action as a form of wealth and means of survival. Rahnema finds irony in the fact that many of the global institutions which claim to be engaged in development and the eradication of poverty often transfer those living in poverty to a life of destitution through the impersonal demands of a modern market economy that is intended to be the vehicle of rescue.

The Roots of Economic Development

With poverty newly categorized as a worldwide problem with definable economic parameters, it became the responsibility of the economically developed nations to rescue the Third World from its deficiencies. Since the problem of poverty was perceived to be a result of primitive and stagnant economic traditions, the logical solution was to find mechanisms that would allow Third World countries to transform their economic structures to resemble those of the First World. In this way, the concept of development became virtually synonymous with *economic* development. Why should the economically advanced nations suddenly take an interest in developing the economies of poor Third World nations?

The First World push for Third World economic development was more than a sudden burst of altruism towards countries with comparatively lower per-capita incomes; it was a direct reflection of the need for Western capitalist expansion amid Cold War dynamics. Combating the “backwardness” and “underdevelopment” of Third World countries through economic development and Western modernization was a core part of George Kenan’s containment strategy against Communist advances (Mehmet, 1999; Saull, 2005).

Escobar expands on this idea by framing the trajectory of economic development in terms of the goals of the United States following World War II. Concerned with securing the capitalist free enterprise system against Soviet advances, the U.S. was dedicated to preserving the principal

capitalist nations against communism through continuous expansion; investing U.S. surplus capital accumulated from the war industry, ideally, abroad; developing overseas markets to satisfy the needs of a vast U.S. production industry; establishing access to raw resources and materials, ensuring its position in global competition; and, using military power to ensure access to resources and markets (Escobar, 1995). Through these terms, then, it is not surprising that the traditional economic development models promoted economic growth through the urbanization, modernization, and industrialization of Third World nations.

The creation of these models stemmed from a rapid expansion of neoclassical economic literature dedicated to furthering economic development in the first decades of the Cold War. Prior to this point, traditional economics had primarily focused on one-sector macroeconomic models appropriate for economically developed countries, but it became clear that these models had little relevance to non-industrialized Third World countries (Ranis, 2005). Early economic development models were set apart by the fact that they addressed what was perceived as the dualistic nature of economic structures within Third World countries, the divide between rural, agricultural sectors and urban, industrial sectors. The Harrod-Domar model (Harrod, 1948; Domar, 1946) defined economic growth and development as a function of labor supply and capital accumulation; Third World countries had a large supply of labor, but limited capital stock. In 1954, W. Arthur Lewis built on this concept by advocating capital accumulation through industrialization and manufacturing within a “dual economy” model featuring capitalist and traditional sectors (Lewis, 1954). In 1960, W.W. Rostow introduced his model based on Marx’s stages of economic growth which charted economic development from the traditional society to the age of high mass-consumption (Rostow, 1960). Influenced by ideas from social theory, these early economic development models shared the assumption that development was

best pursued through industrialization, capital expansion, and the diminishment of traditional sectors, mirroring the path that the economically developed countries had taken during the Industrial Revolution.

The Import Substitution Industrialization Strategy

The trajectory and implementation of these models was influenced by the introduction of the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis in the 1950s (Prebisch, 1950; Singer, 1950). The Prebisch-Singer hypothesis observed that the terms of trade between primary products (produced by less economically developed countries) and manufactured goods (produced by economically developed countries) declines over time to the detriment of primary product producers. The puzzle was ascertaining *how* to convert Third World primary producers into the industrialized manufacturers featured in Lewis and Rostow's models. The solution manifested itself in the form of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) and, later, Export-Oriented Industrialization (EOI). The ISI economic model functioned by encouraging the government-subsidized development of industrial and manufacturing sectors in Third World countries. Government subsidization combined with heavy trade protectionism attempted to create a safe environment for infant industries to mature during the transition from primary product production to manufactured commodities production. The hope was that ISI would lead towards an eventual export-oriented market (EOI) with moderate government oversight and an opening to global trade markets in areas of comparative advantage (Heller, 2009).

The economic nationalism of the Import Substitution Industrialization strategy was appealing to the governments of postcolonial nation-states seeking to solidify their national status as legitimate players in the global economic system. ISI promised greater equality in terms of trade, greater independence from the First World, and a strengthening of Third World

domestic production, consumption, and employment. Because the ISI strategy had roots in the dependency school and was often presented within the structure of inward-looking economic nationalism, including foreign import tariffs, heavy domestic government subsidization, and exchange rate controls, it first appeared to be at ideological odds with Western development goals (McMichael, 2002). This was not the case.

Omay Mehmet (2002) briefly outlines some of the ways in which the ISI strategy proved useful to the economic goals of the advanced capitalist nations. First, the economically developed countries often headed the push for industrialization and manufacturing through the transplanting of multi-national corporations (MNCs) from the First World into the Third World. These corporations were frequently welcomed and accommodated by Third World governments. Though it was difficult for MNCs to directly export their products to Third World nations with strict ISI tariff policies, it was possible to bypass this difficulty by setting up shop *inside* their borders. The Western multi-nationals heavily influenced local culture by advocating Western products and methods. Mehmet notes that MNCs have been criticized as monopolistic and exploitative, particularly in relation to indigenous cultures. In addition, although ISI strategies were intended to decrease dependency on the First World, by modeling themselves after Western economies, Third World nations became dependent on the First World mechanisms necessary for economic development, specifically, complicated, capital-intensive technology transferred through MNCs and various forms of foreign direct investment (FDI).

Compounding this dependency was the requirement for continual supplies of the foreign capital necessary to sustain the often wasteful government subsidy programs (Mehmet, 2002). As was previously noted, eager investors in First World countries hoped to gain from the anticipated development process and liberally granted these unsafe loans. It was hoped that the trickle down

benefits of the Western-influenced industrialization process would outweigh the faults of the ISI strategy. This too proved untrue. Much of the value-added profit gained through FDI was returned to banks in the First World rather than trickling down into Third World communities (Bergeron, 2004). With the exception of the East Asian nations that took a different route towards modernization, by the 1970s the ISI approach ultimately resulted in economic collapse, a vast increase in First World control, and high levels of debt and destitution for large portions of Latin America and Africa.

The Structural Adjustment Strategy

The next phase of economic development, that of the neoliberal structural adjustment programs, did little to increase development's track record. The Third World debt crisis of the 1980s emerged from the oil shocks of the 1970s, the corresponding restriction of U.S. money supply and credit lines, and years of unwise lending by private First World investors to wasteful government-subsidized programs in the Third World. By 1986, Third World debt was estimated to equal \$1 trillion (McMichaels, 2000). The debt crisis completely changed the direction of economic development. Prior to this point, the theoretical basis for economic development was based in Keynesian economics, which advocated the need for government intervention in monetary and fiscal policies to compensate for macroeconomic shortcomings. The perceived failure of this approach ushered in the era of the Washington Consensus, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. These influential institutions from economically developed nations claimed to focus on reform, debt-management, and poverty reduction in Third World countries. Reform was to be achieved through neoliberal policies based in free-market ideology, which advocated trade liberalization, privatization of state enterprises, deregulation, a decrease in public spending, and tax reform, among others. These methods were perceived to have

contributed to the economic success of newly industrialized countries in East Asia through the export-oriented industrialization model. Neoliberal prescriptions were incorporated in “structural adjustment” programs offered by the IMF and World Bank. Debt rescheduling as well as IMF and World Bank aid to floundering Third World economies were conditional on the adoption of the strict structural adjustment programs (Mehmet, 1999).

The programs were harsh and painful and their success has been debated; evidence of broad macroeconomic development is hard to find. Critics argue that IMF and World Bank policies were too simplistic, drastic, and broad, often requiring austere policies that economically developed countries were themselves incapable of following (Stiglitz, 2003; Rodrik, 2006). Even the World Bank vaguely admitted its policies might have been limited and misguided (World Bank, 2005). Theoretically, the proponents of economic development during the 1980s and 1990s were dedicated to enabling less economically developed countries to clean up the messes of previous economic development attempts, as they transitioned to greater independence and the ability to actively participate in the global economy. But even that claim is debatable.

The route by which former Third World countries incurred their extraordinary debt and corresponding structural adjustment programs is a curious one; lenders pushed imprudent loans in the hopes of making an easy profit, and borrowers gladly accepted the loans in order to develop the economic system that was presented to them as necessary by economically developed countries. The temporarily beneficial FDI of the 1960s and 1970s eventually transformed into a debt trap for most of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. The Washington Consensus, IMF, and World Bank claimed that their policies were directed at relieving this debt without acknowledging their role in creating it. Moreover, a fair argument can be made that the structural adjustment policies touted by these financial institutions in exchange for debt relief

ended up benefiting creditors in economically developed countries far more than the debtor countries. Susan George (1992) sternly addresses these actions, noting that the IMF and World Bank have used debt as an opportunity to intervene in debtor economies in favor of the creditor countries where the majority of their stockholders are located. She argues that the IMF and World Bank are more interested in debt servicing than debt relief.

George goes on to explain that the structural adjustment programs that were intended to make debt service possible, focused on an increase in exports and a decrease in government spending. Decreased government spending was usually directed at public service programs that would have tended to support citizens with lower income levels; indeed the poorest classes suffered the most from the loss of subsidies, increases in costs for basic goods, high unemployment, and lower wages. In addition, a host of issues followed the free market openness and privatization required by the structural adjustment programs (George, 1992). Philip McMichael (2000) remarks that foreign investors from economically developed countries now had far greater access to assets formerly managed by governments, not to mention the cheap labor and low restrictions present in debtor countries. Both McMichael and George observe that significant environmental damage throughout the world can be linked to the harvesting of resources for debt.

Current Approaches to Development

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, led to both the end of the Cold War and the Third World category. It also led to a re-evaluation of development approaches. Present economic development models have rejected the one-size-fits-all paradigm and have begun to appreciate the importance of acknowledging a wide range of diversity and the influence of social structure, history, culture, geographical location, and resource bases of countries located within

the former Third World bloc. In addition, there has been some recognition that economic development needs a human face and an expansion of focus on human factors as they relate to development. The introduction of the Human Development Index by the United Nations Development Programme in the 1990s is an example of this focus transition. Current economic development models focus on sustainable development, regional specificity, bottom-up approaches, microfinance, human development, gender empowerment, and participatory development (Kapoor, 2005). However, these current approaches also face difficulties.

Ilan Kapoor (2005) regards each of these methods as trends within the “development machine.” Like product differentiation and branding within a corporation, each development trend proclaims a “new start” and a “new brand” that erases the reoccurring problems of previous attempts. Kapoor argues that neoimperial and inegalitarian power configurations often still characterize the participatory development movement, enabling patriarchal traditions and class inequalities while ignoring the harmful tendencies of macroeconomic structures. Taking the postcolonial perspective, Kapoor writes (2005) “our discursive constructions of the Third World say more about us than the Third World” (p. 1204), referring to the fact that while appearing neutral, empowering and benevolent, participatory development still operates under the assumption that elite institutions are the agents of change, albeit in a manner that offers greater opportunities for self-effacement and a clear conscience.

This critique of current development trends seems to indicate that here, too, development has the potential to repeat the same themes of the past, because although the methods may have evolved, the underlying paradigm remains the same. Western development studies are primarily concerned with development as economic growth within a capitalist structure; this focus has not proven to be beneficial for those whom the West has deemed less developed, and a reassessment

of values is necessary within the study of development.

At this point, two positions must be made clear. First, it must be noted that critiquing the history of Western attempts at economic development under capitalism is by no means the same as denouncing the contributions of Western Enlightenment thought as a whole. Nor is it an attempt to exalt traditional ways of life while shunning modernity. There is a tendency to reject anything associated with the West in postdevelopment thought. It is as if being Western is, by default, detrimental and fit to be discarded. Adopting this perspective ignores and discredits valuable Western contributions to philosophy and science.

Second, it is important to remember that the majority of individuals contributing to the field of economic development have had altruistic intentions towards those they perceive as in need of help. Reducing the global structure down to a conspiracy in which all rich elites are actively and consciously subjugating the poor through development policy is a misguided, oversimplified perception that does not account for the complexities of power that occur within interacting systems inside the capitalist framework. When analyzing the detrimental decisions made by Western scholars, politicians, and organizations in the name of development, it is necessary to acknowledge that these groups are themselves highly subject to the demands of a capitalist structure. The capitalist economic system is not characterized by fairness nor compassion, but rather by profit, growth, and expansion. Thus, the good intentions and desires of development agents, however misguided or inappropriate, can be easily twisted to further the requirements of a highly adaptable system grounded in endless growth, power circulation, competition, and survival of the fittest. It is within this framework of thought that it is possible to more closely examine the myth of economic development.

The Myth of Economic Development

The traditional economic approach to development speaks in terms of how the world ought to be modeled based on a methodology that has not historically benefited the majority of the world's population. In addition, this "ought" of capitalistic development—the imitation and adaptation of the economic and social structures of the West and the eventual achievement of high standards of living and consumption—is presented as a teleological possibility for populations situated in economically poor countries. This is a false and detrimental paradigm for multiple reasons. Less economically developed countries will never be able to catch up. The raw resources necessary to make this "ought" a reality would require additional planets (Leonard, 2009). Under this model, any sort of notion of sustainable development is completely out of the question. Furthermore, economically developed countries have relied on extended periods of domination and resource exploitation to achieve their current economic status. Presumably less economically developed countries would have to mimic this pattern with regards to both human populations and the environment.

The Catching Up Contradiction

It has been noted throughout this paper that economic development under capitalism considers the Western model of production, consumption, and expansion to be the ideal of development. The achievement of this ideal is attempted through Western models of industrialization, modernization, technological advancement, capital accumulation, and formal education. In the myth of economic development, if a nation properly masters these methods it will eventually catch up with the economically developed countries. Maria Mies (1993) challenges this story, arguing that the failures of economic development are not due to impoverished nations lagging behind, but are instead the result of the overdevelopment of advanced capitalist nations.

From her perspective, an exploitative colonial relationship still exists between overdeveloped and less economically developed countries, between humans and nature, and between men and women. However the mechanisms of exploitation have changed. Where colonialism and the devaluation of indigenous culture and values were originally imposed through force, the delivery apparatuses gradually transformed from force to propaganda, educational programs, and economic dependency. Eventually the devaluation of cultural values is internalized by the colonized themselves to the point where they desire a different identity—that of their colonizers. This desired colonial identity is inevitably one which links “the good life” to a high material living standard achieved through growth and accumulation within the capitalist system.

Mies confronts the impossibility of the colonized achieving the good life or catching up. She points out that this impossibility is due to the fact that “the economic, social and ecological costs of constant growth in the industrialized countries have been and are shifted to the colonized countries of the South, those countries’ environment and their peoples” (1993, p. 58). This structure of exploitation is mirrored within the less economically developed countries themselves through patriarchal-capitalist sexual divisions of labor, inequality, and environmental damage associated with industry. In a structure where the costs of economic development are externalized to less economically developed countries, the idea of catching up is clearly impossible. Mies notes that if these costs were actually absorbed by the advanced capitalist nations themselves, unlimited growth would immediately halt. The impossibility of catching up is further supported by the fact that the advanced capitalist nations never quit advancing, especially in the areas of scientific research and technology.

The Fiction of Sustainable Development

An additional barrier to economic development is the simple lack of global resources necessary to universally deliver the standard of living of advanced capitalist nations. Though economic development implies that the Western lifestyle is achievable for all, this is a fallacy (Leonard, 2009). John Bellamy Foster (2002) analyzes the concept of sustainable development within the general economic development discourse. He observes that all the countries participating in the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio firmly declared their support for sustainable development, defined as, “the goal of striking a balance between present development and the potential for future development, the latter requiring some degree of protection of the earth’s resources” (2002, p. 79).

Nevertheless, the concept of sustainable development has, more or less, remained linked to continuously rising GNP and consumption. Calls for the preservation of natural capital and full cost accounting (which internalizes the price of environmental damage) have been attempted in order to give a sustainable development a “green” reputation. Such attempts cannot hide the fact that economic development continually demands raw resources and energy while producing waste. When the overdevelopment of advanced capitalist nations has already led to irreversible environmental degradation, it seems ludicrous to imagine that the widespread replication of this model in the less economically developed countries could lead to anything other than a planet-scale ecological disaster. The earth simply cannot sustain the demands of economic development, a fact no technological miracle can fix. Foster (2002) concludes:

Any discussion of the global ecological crisis must therefore concentrate on the excesses of the advanced capitalist states, and their impact on the periphery of the world economy. It is here at the heart of the capitalist world system that the problem of unsustainable development arises in its most acute form. Ecological

struggles are therefore connected inseparably to the struggle against imperialism, which takes on new meaning when viewed in terms of the exploitation of the earth's resources. (p. 82)

Capitalism and Economic Development

Economic development is inextricably linked to the capitalist structure and, in fact, acts as an active agent of capital. In order to examine the ethical ramifications of this statement, it is essential to evaluate some of the key characteristics of capitalism. First, although it is fair to say that the export of capitalist economic development has primarily originated in the West, it must also be noted that the global incarnations of capitalism are not homogenous, but rather highly adaptable to diverse conditions. Joel Kovel (2002) writes,

Expanding capitalism, like the expanding Catholicism of an earlier conquest, does not so much impose its ways *tout court* as meet the colonized life world halfway. The actual result, then, is generally syncretic with a considerable persistence of indigenous forms. (p. 54)

In their seminal work *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001) also comment on this concept. They observe that capitalism does not necessarily internalize or remake noncapitalist regions in a cookie cutter fashion. Capitalist transformation is uneven in its spread and varies according to geography and environment, all the while enveloping its diverse manifestations into the broader expanding body of capital. Hardt and Negri (2001) describe this phenomenon as a body: "...the different segments of the outside are internalized not on a model of similitude but as different organs that function together in one coherent body" (p. 227).

This capitalist body has some notable traits. Capitalism compresses time and space, it eternally demands expansion and growth, and its expansion is inexorably associated with

imperialism. Time is compressed as the production/consumption process gains increasing speed due to the push for growth, accumulation and profit. This time compression produces an enormous amount of waste, exemplified in the throwaway society. Space, too, is compressed through homogenizing processes common to the basic principles of capitalism. With both time and space compressed, capitalism is more easily able to infiltrate the gamut of sociocultural characteristics (Kovel, 2002).

Hardt and Negri (2001) cover the relation between capitalism and expansion, and expansion and imperialism. Capitalism is never content with a certain set of parameters; to continue it must constantly expand, absorbing and internalizing new territories. Discovering and internalizing noncapitalist markets outside of its current bounds is a requirement for capitalist expansion. The surplus value resulting from capitalist production has to go somewhere or it will become devalued and the capitalist markets will be destabilized. Therefore, capital must continually look beyond itself for new markets to penetrate. But capitalism does not just penetrate new markets; it must also replicate itself within “outside” societies, thus internalizing them holistically. Land, society, culture, labor, and human relationships all become subject to the transformative demands of capitalism. Furthermore, according to Hardt and Negri, the mechanism of this expansion is necessarily associated with imperialism. They argue (2001), “any political strategy aimed at reforming the contemporary configuration of capitalism to make it nonimperialist is vain and naïve because the core of capitalist reproduction and accumulation necessarily implies imperialist expansion” (p.228).

The Future of Development

This paper has shown that past attempts at economic development within the structure of capitalism have generally led to anything but development. Instead, they have tended to serve the

interests of a few while impairing many. The overarching message of economic development is that cultures are not civilized unless they are pulling labor from rural areas into urbanization, forcing social relations into modernization, and mandating technological advances and industrialization as a prerequisite for recognition in the global community. Under economic development, traditional societal structures are rejected in favor of modern structures that create the need for wage labor, emphasize individualism, and promote the production and consumption of an ever-widening array of goods and products.

It is under the shadow of these problems that the postdevelopment discourse has emerged. This paper has drawn from postdevelopment discourse to critique past attempts at economic development. Postdevelopment thought, while criticizing the past, also warns that any future contributions to the study of development will inevitably facilitate the continued monopolization of power by elite groups and the nation-state; the establishment of oppressive hierarchies; and the further expansion of Western ethnocentrism operating under the self-effacing guise of progress, development, aid, and care (Peet & Hartwick, 2009; Pieterse, 2000). To avoid these pitfalls, some postdevelopment scholars have suggested that the idea of development ought to be abandoned altogether, thus enabling each society to dictate its own terms of progress (Crocker, 2004). How can academics, NGO administrators, bureaucrats and politicians possibly be qualified to tell other people how to develop themselves? These critiques are valid, but the conclusions drawn from them may be less so.

Postdevelopment thought is limited by the fact that it attacks the very idea of development discourse. It tends to sweep away the entire spectrum of development discussion, from neoclassical economists to contributions from marginalized peoples and intellectuals from the global South. Even critical strands of development studies become irrelevant under

postdevelopment. In his critique of this approach, Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2000) writes, “The general trend in several sources is to stop at critique. What this means is an endorsement of the status quo and, in effect, more of the same. This is the core weakness of post-development” (p. 10).

By stopping at critique, the postdevelopment approach is limited in its utility. The position that discards any possibility of collective rationality and assumes that no idea of social good or advance can ever be expressed or pursued, must mean little to those hundreds of millions living in absolute destitution with basic needs unmet. In many cases, a failed attempt at Western economic development has been the mechanism that has rendered these people destitute. As was previously noted, this destitution and impoverishment is quite different from a sustainable lifestyle of poverty operating outside the bounds of capitalism. Instead it involves a fundamental loss of *potential*, or control, over one’s circumstances. Recommending a complete withdrawal from the discussion of development seems comparable to a scam artist who robs a vulnerable family, and, upon experiencing regret and remorse, attempts to fix the situation and absolve his guilt by doing nothing and letting the family fend for itself. This is neither logical nor admirable.

Furthermore, those who call for an end to development altogether may be disregarding the fact that the mechanisms set in motion by Western economic development continue with an agency of their own under global capitalism, regardless of their support by Western scholars and institutions. The forces of globalization have rendered it impossible for any one community, society, or nation-state to determine its own terms of development in a vacuum secure from outside influence. Complex networks of social, economic, and ecological systems interact and link the world together. Majid Rahnema (2008) remarks,

...in those communities that are now so torn apart by conflicting interests and currents

created by their exposure to modernity, it is not easy to determine who wants what. Not only are there different ideas about what the needs are, but the perception of what could satisfy them is often changing and confused. (p. 388)

In many ways, economic development has been incredibly successful in its ability to create modern needs and desires. The problem is that these desires are not actually attainable for the majority, nor, one could easily argue, desirable. Though there are global grassroots movements organizing against the advances of capitalism and harmful economic development, many impoverished citizens of less economically developed countries are now spending their hard-earned wage labor on Coca Cola and Britney Spears records. Many hope for the luxurious life promised them through television and Western media.

Widespread destitution stemming from previous economic development attempts and the unbridled spread of the capitalist agenda speak to the fact that, now, more than ever, there is a moral obligation to address the concept of human development. This position splits from postdevelopmentalism in that the critique is not leveled at the entire concept of development *per se*, or even at the concept of modernity, but rather at the twisting and debasement of these concepts within the structure of consumer capitalism. The study of development should not be completely abandoned, as postdevelopmentalists recommend. Instead it should be opened to redefinition and imbued with an ethical dimension that questions the moral underpinnings of the capitalist system while simultaneously advocating the pursuit of a better quality of life for those who need it most.

Advancing the study of development should not result in the hierarchical distribution of cloistered knowledge, originating from a select elite within academia, institutions, NGOs, and political bodies. Neither should it equate with the ethnocentric exportation of Western ideology

and policy to less economically developed countries. The history of development has demonstrated the ease with which seemingly good intentions can lead to harmful unintended consequences. Anyone interested in addressing the idea of development ought to do so with a great deal of care and the continual monitoring of motives. Foucault (as quoted in Kapoor, 2005) writes,

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism. (p. 1216)

In the interest of reducing this danger, the study of development should be broadened to include an interdisciplinary ethical dimension that extends far beyond the bounds of traditional economic and political science approaches. With a foundation based in ethics, the core of development studies ought to be concerned with asking questions that challenge the values of capitalism while simultaneously considering the basic attributes of a “good life” and how these attributes might be posited into an adaptable framework that could benefit a diverse range of societies and communities. From this angle, development studies would be enabled to address issues intrinsic to the structures and value systems of advanced capitalist nations to the same degree as those in less economically developed nations. Furthermore, the conceptual lens of development studies should not be limited to Western scholars, but should actively incorporate contributions from a wide variety of sources including the discourses of the marginalized, traditional folk knowledge, the wisdom traditions of the world, and scholars transcending the traditional developed/less-developed demarcations.

Conclusion

Economic development has not fulfilled its promises to billions in less economically

developed nations. In many cases, it has served to harm those it claims to help. Its future trajectory is bound to be equally destructive. Placing a new label on the same method does not result in genuine change. Any development approach based on the capitalistic pillars of limitless growth, consumption, and expansion is doomed to fail. It is clear that the conceptualization of development must be reconstructed outside the capitalist structure if suffering is to be alleviated and the human experience genuinely improved. In mainstream development study, there has been a noticeable absence of an ethical and philosophical framework that is capable (1) of critiquing the moral shortcomings and foundational values of capitalist economic development; (2) of imagining and expressing ideas of social justice and human good as they relate to development; and, (3) adequately addressing the myriad intersections of conflicting values found within global issues. The addition of this ethical framework to the study of development is vital.

Denis Goulet (1997), a pioneer in the field of development ethics, states, “If genuine development is found where a society provides essential goods to all in ways that enhance their self-esteem and expand their freedom to create, then no society is yet satisfactorily ‘developed’” (p. 1162). Goulet recognizes that the traditional economic concern with valueless, technical, and quantifiable mechanisms needed to be expanded to embrace a more philosophical paradigm of development, incorporating values, ethical conceptions of human good, and non-quantifiable costs. It is in this vein of thought that the distinction between “having more” and “being more” becomes significant (Fromm, 1976).

In development ethics, the focus is not necessarily on higher production outputs or rising GDP, but rather on creating greater possibilities for the enrichment of human life, a concept that may not be expressed in purely quantitative terms. Capitalist development actively equates the

good life with having more, and consciously manufactures needs and desires directed towards this having. Serge Latouche (1997) writes:

The reality of the “good” of well-being, which is proposed as an objective, is not the quality of life, but the quantity of gadgets considered as useful by the mere fact that they are being produced and consumed. Growth is a collection of ‘things’; well-being is nothing else but ‘well-having’. Development disenchantments the world by expelling the values from things. By reducing the universe of creatures to the production of utilities, economic growth degrades ethics itself. Well-being is saturated by goods and, in the process, becomes confused with them. (p. 139)

In opposition to this confusion associated with having more, development ethics is concerned with the psychological and philosophical dimensions of being more as an underpinning for human development and the pursuit of the good life. An ethical foundation grounded in the idea of being more does not suggest that development studies should be unconcerned with traditional economic development themes. Economics is concerned with the production, distribution and consumption of goods. Because humans (with varying degrees of intensity) are always engaging in these actions as a basic function of their existence, the contribution of economic analysis to the field of development study cannot be underestimated, especially in an increasingly globalized world of nearly 7 billion human members. The point is, rather, that economics ought to be one of a multitude of contributors to the interdisciplinary study of the idea of human development. A focus on being more is also not to suggest that the whole of humanity ought to reject the “having” of material possessions and attempt to return to some sort of pre-historic nomadism. Even in the vaguest sense of the word, humans must have

certain fundamental items such as food, water, and oxygen to ensure their survival. An ethical approach to development does not deny this fact. Instead, it perceives resources and material goods to be aids in the pursuit of being more rather than as end goals in themselves—an important distinction to note.

An ethics of development opens up a wide range of inquiry. It has the potential to create a research framework that allows for the questioning about what development can and should mean, for both advanced capitalist societies and less economically developed countries. If the trajectory of consumer capitalism is assumed to be at fundamental odds with human development and well-being, then a host of corresponding questions inevitably follow. How can communities influence oppressive economic structures without a radical reconstruction of state power? How can communities be empowered to set the terms of their own development? What basic economic, political, and cultural goals and strategies should a society or political community pursue, and what values or principles ought to influence their selection? Who is responsible for development? What are the potential moral issues associated with conflicting values or ideas of development? How do the themes of moral and cultural relativism, national sovereignty, and globalization pose problems to the ethical study of development (Crocker, 2004)? Goulet (1997) presents the ethics of development as a study primarily concerned with sorting through differing and conflicting ideas of what the good life is and how it should be pursued. What are the goals (economic growth, environmental protection, social equality, cultural preservation, etc.)? How should power be organized? How should resources be divided and used? How can modern ways of living be resolved with traditional societies?

Ideally, an interdisciplinary and ethical approach to development would underline the need for the empowerment of communities and populations to define their own development

while providing a basic and adaptable framework that requires modification and specialization based on specific circumstances. Unlike the specific policies mandated by economic development experts of the West, an ethical approach to development is concerned with establishing underlying value frameworks from which various communities, regions, and possibly even states can draw. Some might argue that focusing on a discussion of intangible philosophical values within the study of development is to ignore the very real and tangible struggles of large portions of the world's population. However, the addition of an ethical dimension to development research is only meant to serve as a philosophical groundwork. Social activists from a variety of backgrounds, disciplines, traditions, cultures, and geographical locations can work from this foundation to address tangible issues associated with development in their locality. Underlying values are significant in the trajectory of study and policy making. A value set that perceives economic growth and material accumulation to be the ultimate solutions to the problems of the world will produce vastly different results than a value set concerned with enabling humans to express the full range of their potential. As Simone de Beauvoir (1976) stated, "The characteristic feature of all ethics is to consider human life as a game that can be won or lost and to teach man the means of winning" (p.23).

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