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Book Review

## Three "Heretical" Books on Development:

*Il était une fois le développement*/Rist, G. and F. Sabelli;  
*Faut-il refuser le développement? Essai sur l'anti-économique du tiers-monde*/Latouche, S.;  
*Des racines pour vivre. Sud-Nord: identités culturelles et développement*/Verhelst, T.;  
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The next issue (No. 96) will  
 be on the Jewish community  
 in Quebec.

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# INTER culture



exploring the frontiers of cross-cultural understanding

SHOULD WE SAY

# No to Development?

SPRING/APRIL '87

95

english edition

## INTERCULTURE

an International Research, Information and Exchange Journal

*INTERCULTURE* is a quarterly founded in Montreal in 1968 by Monchanin Cross-Cultural Center. It has a threefold objective:

- . to inform on contemporary cultures as living realities;
- . to promote research and encounter in full intercultural reciprocity;
- . to explore and raise intercultural questions and issues.

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*No culture, tradition or community, no matter how evolved, traditional or intercultural it may claim to be, can, by itself, establish the nature of criteria of human growth for the whole of mankind.*

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## SHOULD WE SAY NO TO DEVELOPMENT ?

DEVELOPMENT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY QUESTIONABLE. NOT ONLY IN ITS ETHNOCENTRIC STRATEGIES, FORMS AND PRACTICE, BUT ALSO - AND THAT SEEMS RELATIVELY NEW IN THE WEST - IN ITS NOTION AND ASSUMPTIONS. IN CERTAIN CASES, SOME GO SO FAR AS TO ASK: SHOULD WE SAY NO TO DEVELOPMENT ?

HERE ARE A FEW RECENT STUDIES THAT GO IN THAT DIRECTION.

THEY GO FROM THE NECESSARY PRACTICE OF DECENTRING (PERROT) AND THE DISCOVERY OF THE WESTERN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NOTION OF DEVELOPMENT (RIST) TO A MORE OR LESS CATEGORICAL NO TO DEVELOPMENT (SIVARAKSA, LATOUCHE, ALVARES, ESTEVA). THEY RUN FROM DISCOVERING DEVELOPMENT AS THE NON-UNIVERSALISABLE MYTH OF A GIVEN GROUP (RIST-SABELLI) TO DISCARDING THE NOTION ALTOGETHER AND REPLACING IT WITH INTERCULTURAL SOLIDARITY (VERHELST).

THIS ISSUE COMPLEMENTS ISSUES 77, 79-85, 93 of *INTERCULTURE*, ALL OF WHICH FOCUS ON THE RADICAL RELATIVIZATION OF DEVELOPMENT, BUT PARTICULARLY ISSUE 85 (TO APPEAR IN ENGLISH IN THE NEAR FUTURE) UNDER THE TITLE: "DEVELOPMENT, A UNIVERSAL REQUISITE ?".

THE EDITORS

# For a Cultural Decentration and Centration

by DOMINIQUE PERROT

Usually, development workers are adults that are professionally being trained in something other than intercultural exchange and cooperation. Consequently, were we to deal here with the minimal change of mind required by international cooperation training, it would seem more adequate to speak about sensitization rather than training. Despite this important reservation, one should explore this field of sensitization even if at times, there is little scope given to it in actual practice. This is so, because the task assigned to this type of "training" is often ambiguous: does

it consist in preparing the development worker for a confrontation with a certain otherness or in preparing him to live up fully to his project in order to ensure that it is set up and run in an efficient way?

From this perspective, we would do well to look more profoundly into what the project looks like, its shape and form, for it constitutes the main vehicle of international aid. When one takes into account the high level of failure of so many projects, a failure attributed usually to the disputable form of aid given, one be-

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gins to question what "training development workers" means. Or more simply, how does one train "appropriately" a development worker who is leaving within the framework of a "bad" project, when the project itself, as a means of help, is strongly questionable?

The development worker may well talk of "his" project, the fact remains that it is the project itself as a structure that determines, in great part, his actual practice as a development worker. So if many development projects consist in replacing a "vegetable garden by a parking lot for vegetarians without cars" (1) as René Bureau says it so well, *what is the use of sensitizing the development worker and what should he be sensitized to?*

These are the two questions that we shall tentatively answer. But we shall not approach the problem of "training" in a descriptive manner, showing what it is, how it is perceived, what are its results in such and such a country. Instead we shall look at it from a normative angle, seeing what it should or could be.

## *Thinking the other in terms of oneself*

Sociocentric attitudes, behaviour, ways of seeing and thinking (2) are characteristic of any human group. In fact, *sociocentrism as a phenomenon is universal* even if the forms it takes vary from one culture to another.

Moreover, the effects and consequences of such or such a group's sociocentrism are far from being identical. The example of Western culture is, in this regard, revealing; because of its technological and economical

power, it possesses the means to impose on others its rationality and its way of conceiving and implementing "development". The industrial societies that together form the Western culture are the only ones who can pretend to extend their mode of production and their way of living to the whole planet.

Thus, Western sociocentrism is *specific* in that it presents a threat to every other culture and in the fact that it has the means to see it through. Apart from this sociocentrism, exceptional in its capacity to impose itself materially, the Western culture has a great faculty for reflexivity which it has learned to develop throughout its history. Sensitization of the development worker should therefore greatly rely on his cultural ability to be reflexively aware of his own culture in order to decrease the effects of his own personal sociocentrism. The fact that the development worker, like every Westerner, hails from the only macro-culture able to impose itself on a world-wide scale means that he is subject to an extremely strong and insidious cultural centration.

Centration is viewed here as the double phenomenon of valorizing the realizations and aspirations of the group to which one belongs and of devalorizing the realizations of other groups. One valorizes one's group by overestimating it and one devalorizes the other group by underestimating it.

The individual is not simply a fact recorder. He is neither passive, nor isolated. His role, as illustrated by the works of Jean Piaget, (3) is active. From his very childhood on, he structures, classifies, selects, filters not only the ten thousand sensorial perceptions affecting him every

second (4) but all the messages he receives. Not only is he not passive, but he does not live in splendid isolation; he is part of a past, a history, a society which prevent him from ever considering himself free from this extremely complex network of links which hinders his will to be objective. Throughout his whole existence, the individual acquires reference systems. Progressively, the individual who belongs to an advanced industrial society, socializes through family, school, neighbourhood, friends, his profession, etc. Finally, he interiorizes that most encompassing, concentric circle which is constituted by Western culture itself and its values.

At every stage, he assimilates values that he will use in order to know "his" reality which he believes to be *the* reality.

The individual automatically puts himself and his group at the center of his perceptions and it is from this center that he judges the culture of others.

*To be sociocentered means therefore to think the other in terms of oneself.* It is the systematic and non-conscious illusion that one possesses an objective knowledge. It is to presuppose that one does not have presuppositions (Bourdieu). It is to ignore the extent of one's personal and social subjectivity.

Sensitization should therefore consist in bringing the development worker to think reflexively of himself as an individual subject who is culturally determined. To become aware of the constitutive centers of one's individual and social personality is a prerequisite if one wishes to distance oneself from them. These sources of

positive and negative valorization do not act mechanically. Different contexts will determine which of the following factors will predominate in a particular case: social class, sex, profession. In a given circumstance, an individual can react either as a factory worker, or as a man, or as a young person or yet as a Westerner. With development workers, one must analyze Western sociocentrism, that is, the whole constellation of values that belong to that culture, as well as those values that it rejects, criticizes or ignores in non-Western cultures.

If the development worker comes to understand better what centration means at a general cultural level, he will then be more apt to question the other value centers affecting his behaviour and ideology.

#### *Distancing from one's culture through decentration*

Being able to decipher one's centrations leads to *decentration*. The latter is not some final stage that one can reach at the end of a training period, but a never ending process. It constitutes the axis around which revolves the whole Western scientific approach.

If in the framework of a session preparatory to a departure to the Third World, one opts in favour of sensitization to the phenomena of centration and decentration, one will have to renounce giving priority to information as is usually the case. From what has been said so far, we maintain that it is useless to provide information on the Third World and development, if this knowledge does not itself undergo a certain decentration. One is no longer satisfied with

mere transitive information put forward as an objective mirror of reality, but one will begin to question the specifically Western rapport to this other reality. This reflexive approach to cognitive mechanisms will put the expert on his guard with regard to what he considers to be evident. Instead of naively speaking from his center, the development worker will attempt to distance himself from it without abandoning it (which is impossible). The phenomena of valorization/devalorization will always be at play; they cannot be eliminated by will but only brought to the surface of one's consciousness. This decentration does not lead to objectivity, it only tends towards it. G. Bachelard explains this mutation well: "It is in terms of obstacles that the question of scientific knowledge should be addressed. (...) Knowledge of reality is a light which always projects shadows somewhere. (...) The real is never 'what we could think' but is always what we should have thought. (...) In fact, we only know *against* a prior knowledge, by doing away with ill-conceived knowledge. (...) As it comes to stand before scientific culture, the mind is never young. In fact, it is very old, for it has the age of its prejudices. To learn is to become spiritually young again. It means accepting a sudden mutation which contradicts a certain past." (5)

Shaking up one's centrations through a disciplined relativization is not a simple task, for centrations function as efficient elements that structure both the individual and social identity. Consequently, it is quite common to meet up with the typical defensive reaction which consists in complaining that the training sessions are too theoretical and not practical enough, that they are too

problem-oriented while what one needs is useful and positive information. From then on, what is genuinely problematic, is quickly seen as being theoretical and abstract. Only that which is factual and apparently objective and neutral, which doesn't cause anxiety and is non-conducive to polemics is considered to be useful and practical. It is not easy to put across that there is a link between theory and practice. It is nevertheless necessary to draw attention to the dialectical relationship between cultural sociocentrism which affects knowledge, and development practices.

#### *Duality and ambivalence of sociocentrism*

Sociocentrism is a phenomenon which is both dual (*cognitive* and *pragmatic*) and ambivalent (*identitary* and *uniformizing*). Dual, for sociocentrism occurs at two levels which are constantly intertwined: at the level of knowledge and at the level of practice. And ambivalent, for there is a sociocentrism which we will call *identitary*, since it is the basis of one's identity, as its name indicates (whether sexual, social, national, macro-cultural, etc.) and also a *uniformizing* sociocentrism, which in turn is destructive of the other's identity.

It is with such a complex phenomenon as Western sociocentrism in its ambivalence and duality that the development worker should familiarize himself in order to hope for a wider and more enriching experience than that of mere efficient functionality within the limited compass of "his" project. The development worker is entitled to expect from his "training" that it cautions him against his distorting sociocentrism at the cognitive

level, since it results, in practice, in a standardizing sociocentrism. The positive and negative valorizations of cognitive sociocentrism are emotional in nature, and usually non-conscious. They induce a distorted perception. In order to have any impact, a sensitization session should stress this emotional (non-rational) character and bring to the conscious level this "automatic" and non-conscious perception. Let us exemplify this concretely.

Projection is a typical manifestation of cognitive sociocentrism. Having given value to an aspect of Western society, one projects it elsewhere assuming that it should exist there also. For example, our sense of work is considered to be the proper norm that experts should seek to follow and guarantee in the framework of a project. This sense of work comes from the awareness we have acquired in society that work is an almost sacred duty, that without work (employment), the individual is "nothing" but a problem (unemployment) in the eyes of society, that it is only through work that one is supposed to find happiness and one's sense of identity; that if work is to be taken seriously, it must be efficient and salaried, etc.

Armed with this sense of work as a value, but not always aware of it, the development worker exports it in the framework of his project in order for his project to "succeed". However, as R. Pannikar wrote: "There are no values that transcend the plurality of cultures for the mere reason that no value exists as such except in a given cultural context". (6)

How does this projection occur concretely? First, there is valorization of work in the Western sense, then as a logical consequence, devalorization of the Third World or of such

and such a society which "does not have the sense of work". The socio-centered development worker will consider that they lack this sense that he defines as the sense of work. There is thus a void, an absence, a deficiency that "development" is going to fill. These valorizations/devalorizations result in a distorted perception because in projecting this Western notion of work, one *does not see*, one ignores the specific notion of work that prevails in the society in which the project is to be implemented. There is negation of the local cultural realities. Finally one starts projecting all kinds of other deficiencies in what is simply a different notion of work; people are seen as "wasting" time in social relations, as being lazy and lacking responsibility, etc.

*The temptation to act in order to transform the other*

These three stages: the projection and discovery of something lacking, the scotomization and ignorance of a different reality, negative valorization, the denigration of cultural traits specifically "chosen" by the distorted perception, lead one to conclude that the other must be changed to one's image, which is the equivalent of trying, for example, to "develop" him. One then would like the other to learn how to anticipate and predict his future, to give full credit to the scientific approach, to abandon his traditional beliefs, seen as an obstacle to progress, to respect the demands of production which are themselves subject to a certain conception of work, itself dependent on a chronometered, divided and linear time. Thus, through the example of one of the manifestations of distorted perception, that of projection, one

can see how this mistake brings about a whole practice of standardizing. An adequate sensitization should allow the development worker to understand the mechanism common to all centrations (negative and positive valorizations) as well as their consequences first at the cognitive and then at the practical level. Since to the distorted cognitive sociocentrism corresponds the uniformizing practical sociocentrism of the Western "prey culture" (Joseph Ki-Zerbo).

In the case of projection elaborated here, this false knowledge which sees difference as a deficiency results in practices of maldevelopment. If the difference is considered as a void, an error or an obstacle, there will indeed be an attempt "in practice" to fill this void, suppress the error or reverse the obstacle. To "develop" a group where values prevail, such as the man-nature balance, a relative self-reliance, the richness of social relations and unproductive expenses, one will have to introduce salaried work, bring in the notions of profit, individualism, arouse admiration for techniques that dominate nature and rationalize its exploitation, in brief, one will have to disorganize beforehand the society to be developed. (7)

One can thus foresee that this sensitization will not consist in smugly establishing the development worker into his project, but in helping him to understand the cognitive elements that affect his practice.

No one can pretend to a total decentration, but everyone can aim at a relative decentration. The valorizations that center one's perceptions will always occur, but will be as conscious as possible and thus likely to

be diminished, or placed somewhat under control. "This is why one of the most important tasks for any serious researcher lies in the effort to know and make known to others his own valorizations by indicating them explicitly. This effort will help him to reach the maximal objectivity, subjectively accessible at the time of his writing (...)" (8) This task should also be that of the "serious" development worker, not so as to obtain at all costs this mythical objectivity but because he is involved in a development operation which is an interference in the *internal cultural affairs* of a given group. As such, he must minimally take some distance with regard to the meaning of his action. Should he fail to do so, he can no longer pretend to the title of development worker or to that of expert but merely to that of an emotional technocratic and missionary "crusader", whose practice is characterized by imposition and non-awareness.

Any advocacy of difference vis-à-vis the imposed uniformization should avoid falling into three traps:

1. Attributing to difference, to specificity a fixed content; inserting it in a catalogue of cultural "traits". The danger here is to adopt a backward-looking, nostalgic attitude toward a bygone period that one would like to be immutable and in conformity to one's regrets and fantasies.
2. Advocating differences which hide blatant inequalities. The perfect example would be the ideology advocated by the South-African regime of Apartheid.
3. Decreeing from outside what should be the differential identity of a society. For example: the State imposing to everyone its conception of a

unique national identity or the revolutionary movement imposing a normative identity according to the imperatives of a class.

#### *Identitary sociocentrism, a necessity*

However, one must take note that no decentration can occur without knowing one's own center, and - paradoxically - without adhering to one's own values. Once again, emphasis should be given to lighting up the non-conscious zones and not to eliminating one's own values. A Western development worker should therefore know the values upheld by the Western culture but as well recognize those to which he adheres - the values that constitute his identity (class, national, professional, etc.). There exists an identitary sociocentrism that must be safeguarded. Otherwise, we produce uprooted individuals with no anchorage and no link.

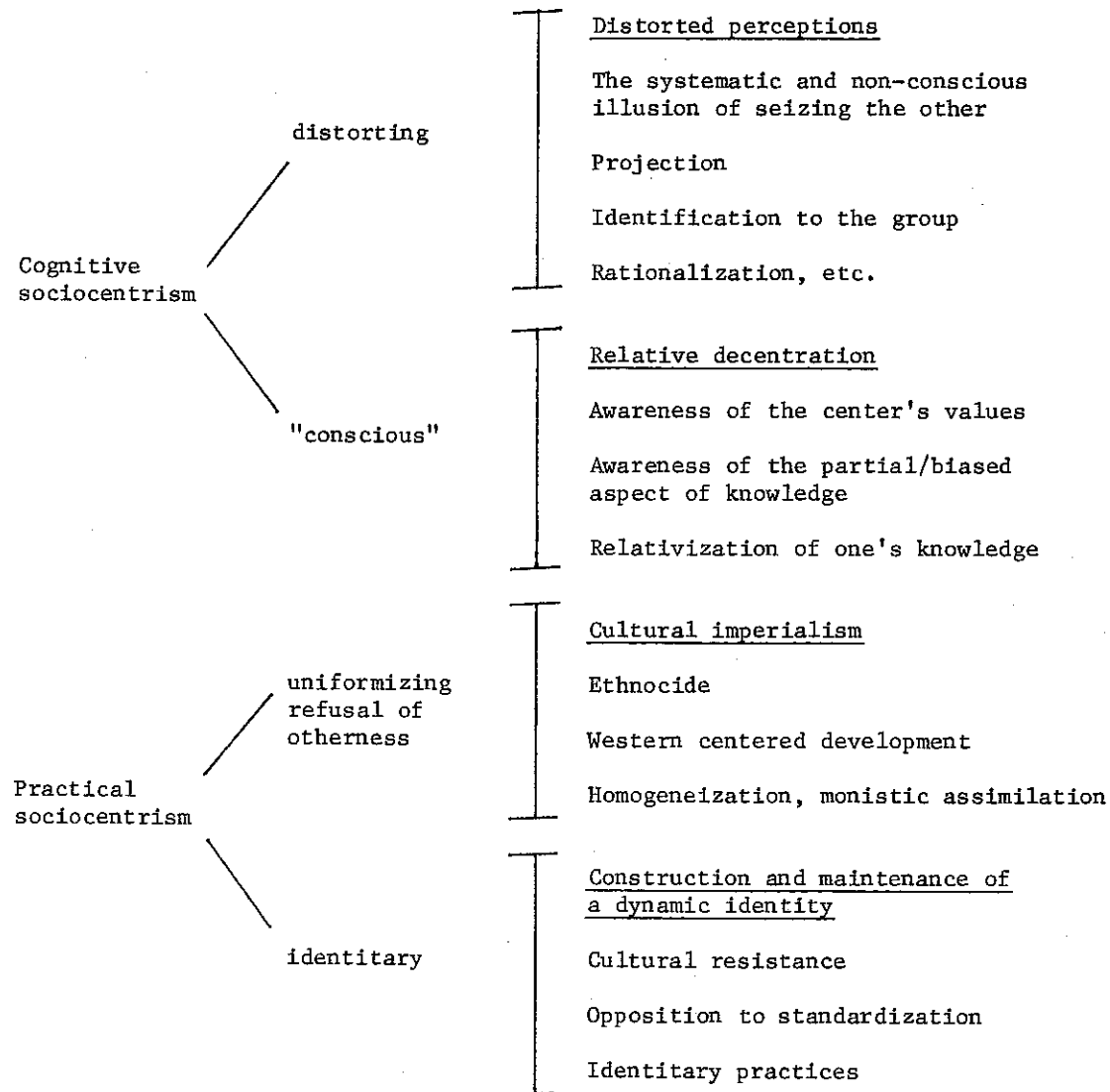
Furthermore, decentration must be achieved not only with regard to other societies but also toward the Western culture which suppresses, within its own bosom, radical differences and merely establishes distinctions among atomized individuals. It is crucial that the development worker knows where he comes from, culturally speaking, that is that he be able to recognize the content of his distorting and standardizing sociocentrism while maintaining his identitary sociocentrism. If he becomes aware of the values he wants to uphold in the face of the uniformizing grip of the Western development, he may be more sensitive to how dangerous Western development can be towards the cultures it seeks to develop according to a Western way of being.

One can see that to reach the proper balance is a delicate operation. In reality it is never finished, since decentration is a never-ending process and one's identity is something that has to be built each day. It is a lifetime venture undertaken throughout the history of a group and thus tallies poorly with the limited time devoted to sensitization. However, we believe that the stakes of this paradox must come to light, namely the *constitutive centration* of identity and the *decentration* required of a knowledgeable expert in development work, if the "training" is to have any bearing on the intercultural relation that is development. It is clear that as long as projects issuing from the dominant Western conception of development are such that the West cannot include itself in a relation that would be more than a mere occasion to transform the other into its own image, the development worker's sensitization as we have outlined it here can only be the beginning of a process which will render even more difficult the task of the development worker. Let us bet however that it will offer challenges that are more subtle and interesting than the demands of mere functional efficiency. Decentration can even go so far as to bring about a revolution in the sense of a complete reversal, at the end of which the development worker will find himself in the process of trying to develop his own society, so that others may have a chance to pursue what probably will not be called "development".

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1) René Bureau, *Le Péril blanc*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1978.
- 2) We use the concept of sociocentrism rather than ethnocentrism because on the one hand it appears richer to us (it includes the notion of class centration) and, on the other hand, more precise in that it explicitly refers to J. Piaget's theories.
- 3) Among others: *Epistémologie des sciences de l'homme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970. *Six études de psychologie*, Genève, Conthier, 1964.
- 4) P. Watzlawick, J. Helmick-Beavin, *Une logique de la communication*, Paris, Seuil, 1972, p. 93.
- 5) Gaston Bachelard, *Epistémologie*, texts chosen by Dominique Lecourt, Paris, P.U.F., 1971, pp. 158-159.
- 6) R. Pannikar, "La notion des droits de l'homme est-elle un concept occidental?", in *Diogenes*, no. 120, Gallimard, 1982.
- 7) "The economic development of an underdeveloped people is not compatible with the maintenance of its traditional customs and habits. To break away from them is a preliminary condition to economic progress. What is needed is a revolution of all institutions, and of all social, cultural and religious behaviour and consequently of psychological attitude, philosophy and life-style. What is required is thus a social disorganization. One must arouse misfortune and discontent in that one must develop desires beyond what is available, at all times. The suffering and dislocation this process entails may be served as an objection, but they seem to constitute the price that must be paid for economic development." J. L. Sadie, *The Economic Journal*, vol. LXX, 1960.
- 8) L. Goldman, "Epistémologie de la sociologie", in *Logique et connaissance scientifique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1967, p. 997.

# RECAPITULATIVE DIAGRAM



\*

# Is Development a Western Notion?

by GILBERT RIST

It is increasingly agreed upon that a great number of initiatives considered as examples of development cooperation have failed. To such an extent that the very notion of "development" has become suspicious and no longer raises the enthusiasm and hope it did ten years ago. Depending on one's experience and political conviction, each one tries to identify who is responsible for these failures: governments of wealthy countries do not devote enough money to public assistance; transnational corporations obey only to the law of profit, giving no consideration to the poor and re-

fusing to transfer their technology; the capacity of absorption of underdeveloped countries does not allow integrated industries to prosper; the international monetary system forces the governments to implement anti-social policies; the elites of the Third World are corrupted; the masses are unorganized, etc.

If all these reasons appear plausible, despite their various shades of the ideological spectrum, is it not because they come from the same cultural logic? In other words, if the diagnosis is unanimous - despite

Alike his colleague Dominique Perrot, Gilbert Rist teaches at IUED. He has recently published, in collaboration with a colleague of the Institute, Fabrizio Sabelli, a book entitled *Il était une fois le développement*, of which Robert Vachon presents a review in this issue of *INTER-CULTURE*, p. 43. The article published here appeared in *Revue Canadienne d'Études du Développement*, Vol. 5, No.2 (1984), pp. 233-242.

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divergences on etiology and remedy - is it not because the implicit values on which it rests are convergent and homogeneous? Regardless of the terminology used (underdeveloped countries, less advanced countries, newly industrialized countries), the fundamental alternative remains and everything is reduced to two categories: "developed" countries and those that are not. Can such a simplification account for the diversity of situations?

In order to overcome this impasse, "development" must be approached as a particular case of intercultural encounter; it must therefore undergo an epistemological critique which will reveal the constructed nature of the notion, elaborated within specific cognitive structures. Thus, the necessity of a brief theoretical examination.

## I. THEORETICAL INDICATORS

### A. The mechanisms of sociocentrism (1)

In order to grasp these preliminary considerations, one must begin by dealing with this notion of objectivity which reduces knowledge - through a phenomenon that Nietzsche called "immaculate perception" - to the power that an object would have of imposing itself upon the observer. Facts speak for themselves, such is the slogan of the naive empiricist who pretends to know without committing himself. However, Piaget (2) has shown beyond doubt that a child develops his knowledge - and thus his relation to the world - only through a process of dialectical and structuring construction which is based on the interaction between subject and object.

Works on genetic epistemology have revealed that at the beginning of his existence, a small child is incapable of distinguishing his self from the environment surrounding him: he is egocentered. From the moment he can decenter himself and be aware of his own perspective, he acquires the cognitive structures that he needs for his first knowledge of the world. Thus, centration is constitutive of a cognitive process but at the same time, decentration is necessary to obtain an "objectivity" constructed by the subject as he interacts with the object: in order to know, one has to look at the object from all sides, examine it under various perspectives and thus come to a relative adequacy of knowledge.

Thus one can take this model and transpose it to the realm of intercultural relations: enculturation, by definition sociocentric, can constitute the starting point of knowledge of other cultures, but the latter will inevitably be inadequate, partial, reduced to comparative procedures which universalize the mode of behaviour of the group to which one belongs. But one can only know others if one gets rid of one's fundamental sociocentrism and takes a distance from one's own values and cultural practices. The success or the failure of the encounter with the other will thus depend on the degree of decentration - or centration - of each person with regard to his own culture.

This brief reminder of some of Piaget's fundamental theories of epistemology reveal that our vision of the other and of the world depends neither on the intention of the knowing subject nor on his attentiveness to the "facts": it stems from a practice, a use of the world which differs from

one culture to another, and also no doubt from the position one takes within the culture. Hence the reason why what is seen as obvious to some appears debatable to others. This remark goes not only for what we call "good taste", (3) but also concerns the State organization, the rules of democracy, the importance one gives to market values, the relationship to space, etc.

### B. Sociocentrism : an inevitable phenomenon

There is a common overwhelming agreement on the harmful character of what we call "prejudices" which too often are taken for "knowledge". But beyond this commonplace acknowledgment, lies the question of how one can be made aware of it.

At the individual level, the answer seems simple: from the debate and confrontation of ideas emerges objectivity, which at the cultural level corresponds to Ralph Linton's aphorism: "He knows not England, he who only England knows". (4)

For, if the specificity of sociocentrism consists in knowing the other only in relationship to oneself, it is tempting to imagine that conversely decentration proceeds from a knowledge of oneself based on that of the other. Undoubtedly, this is partly true, but it is also common knowledge that discussions supposed to reveal the truth can turn into a dialogue between deaf people and that those who have long been in contact with another culture - whether it be former settlers or today's "development experts" - are not necessarily the most devoid of prejudice! This apparent dilemma comes from the fact that the understanding we have of the

other (the other's culture) can come about only through the cognitive structures elaborated in one's own culture. Consequently, the shock brought about by the intercultural encounter can either reinforce the good conscience of the knowing subject or prompt one to a salutary decentration. Thus, nothing is solved in advance, and the anthropological question that emerges from the dialectics between the different and the same, between the other and the self can only be solved if it is accompanied by a genuine disposition to question one's own values, thus by modifying one's cognitive structures through a different practice. (5)

To what extent is it possible to undergo decentration? That remains to be seen. Hence the renewed usefulness of Piaget's psychology which insists on the role of practical operations in the making of intelligence. One should not therefore make the mistake of thinking that "speeches on the topic" or "information campaigns" will bring about transformation in depth of one's views of the world or of other peoples: there must be a change in one's practical behaviour and attitudes. Ultimately, one could say that only assimilation - intellectual and practical - is liable to lead to a total understanding of the other! But this limit is itself theoretical for it does not take into account the persistence of values and behaviour acquired at the beginning of one's existence, before the encounter with the other. Furthermore, the problem that the intercultural encounter raises, cannot be solved by suppressing it. One must therefore admit that decentration will always be relative, never absolute.



C. *The transformation of Western sociocentrism into cultural imperialism*

Treating the other as "barbarian" no doubt is contemptuous or derogatory, but it does not necessarily imply the will to convert the other to "civilization". Sociocentrism can very well limit itself to emphasizing differences without trying to suppress them. One may feel different from - or superior to - one's own neighbour without assuming to have the right to change him. Hence, for millennia, societies based on different values and practices have been able to maintain a hold on their cultural identity. The aim here is not to idealize the past, nor to deny the existence of wars or invasions but to note that as a whole the latter was not accompanied by forced assimilation; the conqueror of the day did not impose his own culture, all the more so since the technology at his disposal was not radically different from that of the vanquished. Nomads trying to mass-convert sedentary people to their own way of life is unimaginable just as for the longest time no one thought of unifying weights and measures - not to speak of social practices - within the same kingdom.

In such a world composed of spaces that were not totally related, intercultural exchange was certainly frequent but it did not question the possibility for each society to control its mode of production or (to say it better) its social project.

Things did change however with the increasing military, economic and political superiority of the West. The predominant position that Europe acquired over the entire planet radically transformed the nature of its sociocentrism. It took on an imperi-

alist form; to the universal imposition of Western domination there corresponded a pretention that its values were universal. This goes to confirm once again that the view one has of the other's world is rooted in a practice: in this case, the superiority in armaments reinforced the intellectual arrogance. A considerable transformation indeed, which scientific discoveries and technical innovations of the 19th Century could only strengthen. All this brought about a cumulative phenomenon whose effects are still felt today. The dependency theory, based on the opposition between a center and a periphery, has eloquently brought this out in the open.

II. *THE WESTERN CHARACTERISTICS OF "DEVELOPMENT"*

The remarks which have been made so far do not pretend to account for the whole problematique related to sociocentrism, but they should suffice to illustrate why we're on the wrong track when isolating "the cultural aspects of development", as if the latter were merely secondary phenomena perfecting - or disturbing - "development". Because "development" is essentially a complex of practices, it must be understood globally as a cultural phenomenon, tied to a particular way of knowing the world and others. Consequently, the universal "desire for development" that we think we detect everywhere is likely to come from a simplified view of "reality" which is itself based on underlying values which are claimed to be universal. While planetizing (at least superficially) its economic, technical, educational and political practices, the West has progressively lost sight of its culturally determined character; in other words, it has forgotten that each culture - including the Western

one - constitutes a way of organizing the world and social relations and that, consequently, the centration it implies acts as a sort of filter which enables one, of course, to better detect certain traits but which simultaneously prevents others from appearing. Thus, it has persuaded itself of the inexistence (or the universality, which amounts to the same thing) of the filter and it has taken the image for reality. Hence, for example, the prevailing relative lack of differentiation in the image the West has about Third World societies. Because they are examined only in terms of the dominant mode of knowledge, they all appear similar: poor, starving, anarchic, incapable of economic rationality, in a word "underdeveloped". Is such a vision which unconsciously erases all the specificities and nullifies the perception of practices that do not conform to the dominant model, not the best legitimization of all "development" initiatives?

In order to launch a fundamental reflection on development - and its failures - one must first attempt to resituate it within its cultural context. Which is the same as bringing out the conceptual filters or the cognitive structures of modernity. Before attempting to influence the future of others, one must first question oneself.

A. *Growth and Evolutionism*

It is no coincidence if in Greek the verb to grow (*phyo*) is associated through its root to the notion of nature (*physis*): hence, to know the nature of an animal species, of a person or of the State is to be able to determine its development. Originally, this biological metaphor included the symmetric notion of decline (6)

and one will have to wait for Christian teleology and the optimism of the age of Enlightenment to manifest themselves, before the notion of progress could replace - in a definitive way by the XIXth century - the natural cycle. So, it is not a matter of indifference that Western thought, from its very beginning, considered society as an organism characterized by its growth. This constituted a fundamental paradigm whence the modern West came to identify the linear succession of development stages to life itself (7) and who would dare to be against life? The language itself becomes terrorist when it is based on evidences which cannot be questioned.

Of course, a critique of progress does not mean that other societies must be considered "immobile" or "outside of history"; like ours, they continually transform themselves according to internal and external pressures; they live on give and take. The ideology of progress, however, replaces history with a philosophy of history which in a normative way, pretends that social changes must necessarily follow an invariable and universally valid sequence. By assuming that all people must go through the same stages to reach the same goal (8) it becomes possible to classify them on the same axis and to thus evaluate the distance that each must cover in order to "catch up" on "the road to development". Hence, the other can never be recognized in his otherness: he only exists by comparison with the model, namely Western society; thus, it is always unfinished, incomplete, "on the way to development". The only thing that varies from one society to another is the *gap* in terms of that norm: some are considered as "living in the Stone Age", others are supposed to "be caught in the Middle Ages", finally, more lucky ones are "undergoing

their Industrial Revolution". One can see that such a perspective prevents the unusual, the different, the strange from emerging. In feigning to explain the variety of cultures, one reduces all cultures to the same standardizing denominator. The "sauvage" (a French colloquial expression for the Native Indian) can no longer be a source of self-questioning like he was during the 18th century, since he is merely "our contemporary ancestor" (Morgan). This is why "young nations" must be given time to "develop": the finality of history is also its fatality.

Thus, when experts try to explain "the development requirements" to the Third World peoples, they often forget the whole complex of cultural presuppositions underlying the notion. But, if these are not explicitated, the message cannot be put across. Let us just mention that in Boubi (Equatorial Guinea) "development" is translated by a term which signifies - like in Ancient Greece - simultaneously "to grow" and "to die" and that in Wolof (Senegal) *yonifur* means "the way of the chief rooted in tradition" and "conceived in the bosom of the village". One could go on giving other such examples which indicate the extent of the misunderstandings that risk cropping up regarding notions whose meaning is apparently "obvious".

#### B. Rationality

Behind the apparently neutral concept of rationality hides an ideological bias: what is true for some must be true for all. It is not a question of denying the existence of the law of gravity for everybody, nor to maintain that formally the sum of 2 and 2 is not always equal to 4. But, the idea that the rational man is

he who constantly calculates his cost/benefit ratio (in Latin *ratio* = calculation, evaluation, accounts) in the image of *homo oeconomicus* is a presupposition which, when applied to other societies, leads to incredible errors: the farmer who continues using the hoe and neglecting chemical fertilizers is seen as irrational; so are those slum-dwellers who waste their meager salaries on unproductive celebrations; as well as those who respect the numerous customs and traditions which hinder the "development" of the Third World!

The image of this illogical Native is not only conveyed by bewildered tourists or frustrated development workers. It can be found, as well, in the writings of Third World nationals ("Reason is Hellenic, emotion is Negro", Léopold S. Senghor) and in most official texts of the United Nations institutions: thus, for instance, the New Economic International Order does not hesitate to claim for developing countries access to "the advantages of modern science and technology" (9). But, why must this expression be used invariably in the singular? As if there were only one science and one technology; as if technology did not include "the genetic code of society" (A. Reddy), as if it did not simultaneously convey a social structure and a cognitive structure, and, consequently, as if technological choices did not entail, "ipso facto", choices of society.

Once again, it is as if the West had the monopoly on rationality, or more precisely, as if rationality could only take on the Western form. Anthropology has long ago shown that a great number of rules or systems of organization which appear incomprehensible from a Western perspective are, in fact, perfectly logical (10) and we know of many instances where the tech-

nical competence of indigenous peoples was greater than that of "development experts". One may object that magical practices which are still very much alive in many Third World countries, constitute particularly clear forms of irrationality. Without entering here into this vast field, one can say that Westerners very often have a tendency to qualify as "magical" what stems from a logic that escapes them. To give just one example, one will recall that the magical practice of the Azandé which consists of making chickens undergo the ordeal of poison in order to take all kinds of decisions (the site of a home, the destination of a trip or the choice of a spouse, etc.) or to determine the origin of diseases, appears as incomprehensible as absurd. And yet, Evans Pritchard had no qualms about considering this method "as satisfying as any other". There is no doubt that this type of "logic" is opposed to that of "development"; but this realization should not suffice to discredit the logic of other societies.

Besides, one must also admit that, in spite of its pretention to rationality, Western society is undoubtedly the most irrational there is. When measured by its own norms, it is the most wasteful in terms of human and physical resources, and all in order to ensure the reproduction of its productive system.

#### C. Time

How often does one hear Third World developers or tourists complain that other societies do not have "the notion of time". All it means is that they do not have *our* notion of time.

For a Westerner, time flows in a uniform manner, punctuated by the

perfectly controlled rhythm of hours, minutes and seconds. It is divided between the past which is "behind" oneself and the future which is "ahead". It may be trite to affirm it, but these "evidences" are not shared by all. Thus, for example, the Sara from Tchad consider that what is *behind* their eyes and that they cannot see is the future while the past is in front, since it is known. It would be bad form to dispute the logic of such a representation!

As for the Western equivalence of time and money, it is useless to note the incongruous character it holds for traditional mentalities for it goes together with the status of money as a general equivalent. To say that one "is gaining" or "wasting" his time seems as absurd as trying to convince someone that one "is wasting" or "catching up" air while breathing...

If one thinks about it, is it not the Western conception that should astonish us? How can one pretend that time is a scarce resource or that the time of some does not have the same value as that of others? (12) If it is thus possible to "make profit out of one's time-capital", it is because from the outset, time is divisible - like financial capital - into discreet and equivalent units, but this representation is constantly refuted by practice: life flows as a continuum of "strong time periods" and "weak time periods" which indicate that time is not a homogeneous and autonomous quantity but is linked to social relations and to the various activities that fill it. The impossibility to autonomize time is obvious in the Swahili concept of *hantu* that links time to space, (13) but it is also found in the old French which designated by the term "journal" the surface that a man could plow in a day.

These few remarks, although brief, should suffice to illustrate that the notion of time involves the whole of a way of being: to want to modify it, particularly in order to promote "development", brings about radical transformations of the social structure and of the world view.

#### D. Work and Productivism

Work undeniably constitutes a universal human activity: since his existence on earth, man has worked. But, the specificity of the Western notion of work lies in that for nearly two centuries, work has been at the core of economic value. (14) Thus, the generalization of salaried work propels the latter at the very heart of the industrial mode of production and by the same token transforms social relations: man exists socially only through merchandise produced by his work and not by the prestige conferred by his position within the social system. A fundamental inversion whose consequences are immeasurable.

If work was considered degrading by the Greeks - who reserved it for slaves - and was assimilated during the whole of the Middle Ages to torture (in Latin: *tripalium*), today it has become a *right* inscribed in national legislations and it is considered by international organizations as a "basic need" that "development" is supposed to satisfy.

In this regard, the Western ideology varies from traditional practices on two counts: first of all, work that is a marketable commodity becomes a "fictive merchandise" (15) and, thus, eludes the whole social relations complex within which it is set; secondly, it corresponds to an obsession with productivity; hencefor-

ward, it is the *time one works* that determines the life of the worker, leisure being only of residual importance. The capitalist who grows rich by renting other people's work would stop being a capitalist if he did not reinvest his profit to produce even more by thus absorbing "living work". (16) If Adam Smith could hope that the development of production could increase *wealth*, Marx has shown that all it did was to increase the *capital* and social pauperization: in order to work, one must henceforth produce, and that takes all meaning out of work. (17)

In traditional societies work is quite different, because man does not behave as a "free worker" subject to the law of the market, but rather participates in a "co'nurgie", (18) that is in a collective work which is inscribed into kin relationships and which creates not so much value as prestige and which is oriented more towards *social reproduction* than *production* of goods. Thus, it is the subordination of productivity to the realization of a social project which explains why people from the Third World constantly appear as "eternal lazy bums" in the eyes of Westerners. While the latter are forced to observe a strict dichotomy between time, work and social life, the former insist on confusing them, giving the impression of doing only half of their work. Whereas for them, working "the Western way" is considered as living only half of one's life.

#### CONCLUSION

One can thus see all the ambiguities surrounding an expression such as "development of the Third World". No doubt all mankind aspires to a better "quality of life", but the latter

can only be perceived within a given social and cultural context. As for what is called "development", it cannot be the object of a true consensus for it is constituted of a plethora of notions whose meanings are often radically different from one culture to another, as we attempted to sketch it for growth, rationality, time and productivity and as we could illustrate it for scarcity, utility, the relation to nature, the individual, private property, the State, needs, money, etc.

Thus, intercultural epistemology cannot be reduced to a mere academic exercise which would allow anyone doing it to acquire a detached relativism. Indeed, it is illusory to pretend to limit oneself to the mere description of the various ways of knowing the world, for the question of the place (*locus*) from which one speaks, the perspective that one

adopts - even if it is non-conscious - reappears constantly. The knowledge of the other demands more than a well-disposed mind; it requires a questioning of one's own cultural values, accompanied by "non-conformist" practices, two conditions without which there can be no real decentration.

In the last analysis, the stake is political due to the dialectical relationship between one's cognitive structures and one's practices: the way in which we speak with others always determines the way we treat them. Thus, the dominant ideology of "development" can only serve to reproduce and expand Western culture through the imposition of specific values camouflaged under their pretense of being universal. These are the ones we must begin to doubt and question if we want to give credibility to "development" cooperation.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1) One can find a more complete treatment of this question based on empirical research in: Gilbert Rist, *Image des autres, image de soi? Comment les Suisses voient le Tiers-Monde*, Coll. Etudes et développement, Saint-Saphorin, Georgi, 1978.
- 2) One may consult mostly: Jean Piaget, *Les mécanismes perceptifs. Modèles probabilistes, analyse génétique, relations avec l'intelligence*, Paris, P.U.F., 1961, as well as Jean Piaget and Barbel Inhelder, *L'image mentale chez l'enfant. Etude sur le développement des représentations imagées*, Paris, P.U.F., 1966.
- 3) See the numerous analyses of Pierre Bourdieu on this topic, particularly in *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*, Coll. Le sens commun, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1979.
- 4) *Le fondement culturel de la personnalité*, translated by Andrée Lyotard, preface by Jean-Claude Filloux, Paris, Dunod, 1968, p. 111.
- 5) If in Antiquity, the Greeks had not been as imbued with the excellence of

their culture, perhaps they would not have given comfort to their sociocentrism by lowering Barbarians to the rank of animals. Conversely, when the opponents of the royal power discovered in the 18th century the social harmony of Indians who lived "with no king and no law", their lavish praise of it was directly related to the critique of their own society or, if one prefers, to the degree of their marginality: their decentration was real, but the view they had of the Hurons was largely determined by their own preoccupations.

- 6) See Robert Nisbet, *Social Change and History*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1969.
- 7) Let us mention, for example, that a while back a big chemical firm published big ads in newspapers under the revealing title: "Without progress, life would be dead".
- 8) One immediately thinks of the famous work of Walt W. Rostown (*The Stages of Economic Growth, A Non-Communist Manifesto*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1960) which still serves as a scapegoat. However, it is generally more difficult to have people admit that many of the United Nations' resolutions rest on the same assumptions!
- 9) Resolution 3201 (S-VI), para. 4, letter p.
- 10) Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Race et Histoire", *Le racisme devant la science*, Paris, Unesco, 1973, pp. 28 and ss; cf. as well Bryan R. Wilson (ed.), *Rationality*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1981 (1974).
- 11) E. E. Evans Pritchard, *Sorcellerie, oracles et magie chez les Azandé*, Coll. Bibliothèque des sciences humaines, Paris, Gallimard, 1972 (1937), p. 319.
- 12) See, for example: "L'économie du temps et la nouvelle théorie du consommateur", in: Henri Lepage, *Demain le capitalisme*, Coll. Pluriel, Paris, Livre de poche, 1978, pp. 321 and ss. In counterpoint to this economist reduction, one can note that in Western societies, it is precisely those whose time has the most "value" that "waste" it the most (in mundane receptions, cultural activities, theater, concert, etc.) by a "potlatch effect" analogous to the practices of "primitive" societies (see Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction*, op. cit., p. 320).
- 13) This link can be expressed in the following anecdote: if one asks a Swahili person: "How far is your village from here?", he may very well answer without perceiving any contradiction: "It is five kilometers away by car, but by foot it is much further".
- 14) "Merchandise as value is materialized work", Karl Marx, "Le capital", in: *Oeuvres* (ed., Maximilien Rubel), Economie, t. I, Coll. La Pléiade, Paris, Gallimard, 1965, p. 630. Also: "Work is therefore the real measure of the exchange value of all merchandise", Adam Smith, *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations*, Book I, chapter 5, Coll. Idées, Paris, Vol. XX, no. 2, Issue 95

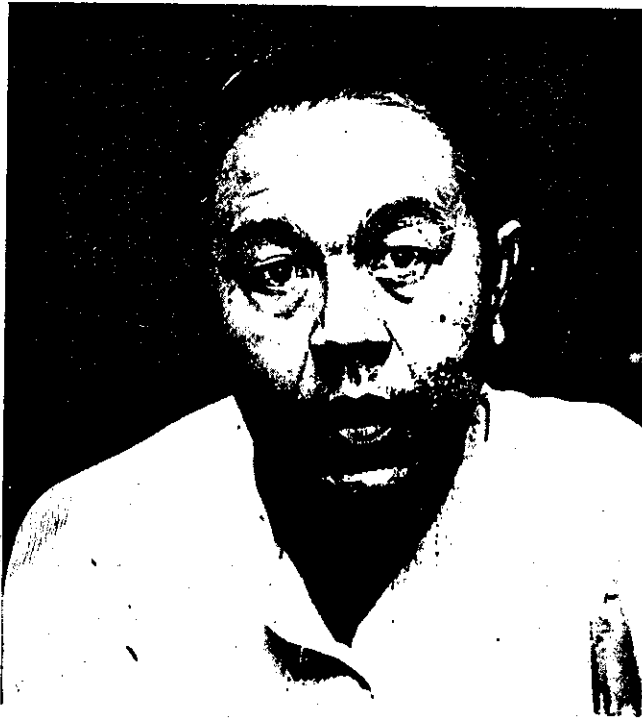
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- 15) Karl Polanyi, *Primitive : Archaic and Modern Economies*, ed., George Dalton, New York, Anchor Books, 1968, pp. 26 and ss; as well, *La grande transformation. Aux origines politiques et économiques de notre temps*, Coll. Bibliothèque des sciences humaines, Paris, Gallimard, 1983 (1944), pp. 102 and ss.
- 16) "A sum of money becomes capital only because it must be used up and spent with the sole purpose of being increased, for it is spent in view of its accumulation." Karl Marx, *Oeuvres*, op. cit., t. II, p. 405.
- 17) André Gorz, *Adieux au prolétariat. Au-delà du socialisme*, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1980, p. 100.
- 18) Fabrizio Sabelli, *Pratiques de la reproduction communautaire. Espace, échange, travail, rite, chez les Dagari du Ghana*, Université de Neuchâtel, 1984, pp. 160 and ss.



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SULAK SIVARAKSA

A champion of the traditional values of his people, Sulak Sivaraksa is by profession an historian and an exegete of Thai Buddhism. He is also a controversial publisher and librarian. In 1976, the Regime confiscated some 45,000 of his books considered subversive.

Emprisoned in 1984 for crime of lèse-majesté - for having declared that the king of Thailand ignored the realities of his country, living as he was in the isolation of his palace -, he owed the clemency of the king only to the protest that the affair raised abroad.

On the occasion of his last work, *Siamese Resurgence*, the magazine *Croissance des jeunes nations*' correspondent, Guido Franco, recorded his comments from which we have drawn the following excerpts.

AN INTERVIEW WITH SULAK SIVARAKSA

# Development a Threat to Thai Identity

by GUIDO FRANCO

S.S. The values of Thai society tend to disappear. We must have a renewal, a rebirth of traditional Thai values. As far as I'm concerned and as far as most of us are concerned, these are the Buddhist values. This implies that we must understand that this society can only survive in a natural context, understand that we must respect others, even those that are different, but also remain true to ourselves and not blindly follow certain models (yet, this is what we are doing now; we are copying the West without really understanding it).

G.F. You have talked of harmony with nature. Bangkok is just the opposite!

S.S. Precisely. We have stopped being ourselves and we copy what is done abroad without making any kind of discernment. Bangkok has become a second or third class Western city! "Progress" consists in accumulating concrete and ugliness, money and power, and unfortunately many people suffer from the consequences of all that.

During the era of Sukhotai (the first capital of Thailand), the king Kama-Kamheng was sitting only very slightly above his subjects. When the king was not sitting on his throne, the latter was occupied by a monk who preached while the king sat on the ground like everybody else. There was thus more equality. The

Taken from Guido Franco, "Bouddhiste à Bangkok", in *Croissance des jeunes nations*, no. 291 (Feb. 1987), pp. 30-32.

*Sangha* (the community of monks) was the model of the ideal society.

G.F. Are we not today in Bangkok very far from this ideal, egalitarian society?

S.S. We are indeed very far from it. At the heart of the traditional society was the *Wat* (the temple). The *Wat* was the center of spiritual and intellectual life, of teaching, of medicine, of art. But today, of course, all this no longer exists. We have commercial centers, "financial centers" (which are linked naturally to international capitalism), and military people (who are linked to superpowers and the armament industry); and all these walk hand in hand with the traffic of opium and heroin. Money, power and ignorance are at the root of evil in Buddhist society.

G.F. How could this happen?

S.S. Because, first of all, we don't know who we are. Secondly, because we are blindly following the models of a consumer society and of "technical progress".

G.F. The Thai are very proud of their identity, of their culture. How can one explain that they succumbed so easily to the temptations of a Western way of life?

S.S. In my opinion, it is because we have never been politically colonized. But we have been colonized intellectually. We were the only ones who could deal with the governments of Paris and London as equals. So, our ministers learned English. They admired the Western civilizations without really understanding them. That is the problem. We have copied Western materialism, but we understood nothing of the Western spirit, of its

values: equality, liberty, the rights of man. This is where we went wrong. We copied false models. When one doesn't know who one is, and copies someone else, one is bound to make errors.

Sometimes, I say jokingly that Thailand should declare itself independent of Bangkok. Bangkok represents only 10% of the Thai population and yet, all the wealth, all the power are concentrated here. The other day, a peasant came to give a conference in Bangkok. He proposed drastic measures: to return to our traditional medicine, to refuse our school system modeled on Western values, to refuse Western sports (working in our countryside provides enough exercise), etc. Look at the uselessness of our qualified university graduates! They find no work here, they cannot return to the farm which they have learned to despise.



## FROM "DEVELOPMENT" TO "HOSPITALITY" OF THE HAMMOCK: REGENERATING PEOPLE'S PLACE

In Mexico, you must be either numb or very rich if you fail to notice that "development" stinks... The so-called crisis... has now provided the peasants and others with the opportunity to dismantle the goal of "development".

It is now becoming more easy to arrive at a consensus on the damages wrought by development. It is not so easy, however, to convince others... that the experiment is over, that development is dead... "We" are opposed to any attempt by the "alternative" establishment to grant the notion of development a new lease on life through new levels: "alternative", "another", "humane" development. Indeed we get incredulous looks when we say that all these forms of "alternative" development are nothing but a deodorant to mask the stink of development... When "we" refuse to talk about any form of development or progress, however, "we" are immediately accused of wanting to return to the Stone Age... The stark fact is that we are not taken seriously unless we accept some version of "development".

In "our" hammock, "we" are not trying to promote development. "We" do not accept any form of aid... Since the complete failure of this monstrous experiment called "development" can now be recognized for what it is, they, the peasants, are determined to regenerate a hospitable world, following their traditional paths which are now enriched by the lights and shadows of modernity. *Homo sapiens* and *homo ludens* are celebrating their awareness of having awakened from the nightmare created by the impossible attempt to establish *homo oeconomicus* on earth...

The crisis is our chance to de-link well-being from development... What "we" are doing enables "us" to become radically de-linked from the institutional and ideological world that attempts to control us and which antagonizes us and blocks us... (Through its appeals to "participation" and "communication").

But such delinking can become effective, it seems, only through authentic cultural creation... by regenerating people's space... a new commons...

(Concerning globalism)... "we" are worried here, most of all, because "we" cannot conceive of any possibility of a "global design" that is not an inhospitable reduction of the perception of others to the shape of our own.

(Gustavo Esteva, in *Alternatives*, Vol. XII, no. 1 (Jan. 1987), pp. 135 ss)

# Should One Say No to Development?

"The development crisis is obviously also the crisis of its postulates and of its corresponding meanings." (C. Castoriadis, in *Le mythe du développement*, Paris, Seuil, 1977, p.216)

"Of all the meaningless words used by the bourgeoisie to fool the people it enslaved, the word 'development' is undoubtedly the most efficient, thus the most pernicious." (P.-P. Rey, *Les alliances de classes*, Paris, Maspero, 1973, p.11)

by SERGE LATOUCHE

Development is generally synonymous with a high standard of living and with universal accessibility to the good life. For the hungry masses of the Third World, it clearly means consuming as much as the "average American" and for the governments of these humiliated countries, entering the club of the superpowers (having the atomic bomb). With misery and hunger threatening two-thirds of mankind, must one not be an irresponsible intellectual from the center, comfortably settled in his chair, to propose that one should say no to development? (1) Marxists and liberals will

have no problem agreeing that such a thoughtless attitude should be anathematized. They will invoke, hands on their breasts, the urgency of the concrete problems that cry for a solution.

The fact that most volunteer development work in the Third World - of whatever kind - has failed, has made all development theories and models doubtful. As a whole, all development policies have failed. All techniques have proven inefficient. All recipes have gone bankrupt: the game of international specialization,

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the import-substitution policy, the priority to heavy industry, the promotion of industrializing industries, the specializations in the crenels of export.

Of course one can argue about the success of isolated experiences; the very fact that they smack of the miraculous reinforces the obvious massive failure to eradicate underdevelopment as a planetary reality.

Some have rightly spoken about the "myths of development". (2) For many Third World countries, the "decade" of development has translated itself into artificial industrialization and modernization of agriculture which have brought about: a rural exodus, the development of huge slums, unemployment in the rural areas, the transformation of farmers into vagrants, destruction of urban employment and cottage industries. Huge investments from public funds (i.e. financed by income coming from petroleum or from land taken away from the peasants) have been poured into the building of huge industrial complexes which are now rotting or running at a low level of their production capacity; these "desert cathedrals" are kept running only because they are constantly fueled by subsidies. Yet they create very few jobs. Development "on credit" did flourish both in the East and the South, thanks to the facilities of the international banking system. But it soon collapsed, with the crisis, on the maturity dates. The medicine of the IMF may not be the most adapted, but it is difficult to deny that the death sentences pronounced by the "gnomes" of international finance only forestall the inescapability of destiny. The smooth-running factories (often established by multinational corporations) promote the interests of the center and have

little effect in transforming the misery of the peoples. Finally, development is that of a monstrous and artificial Nationalitarian State and of a parasitic bureaucracy. "Rural development, writes René Dumont, seems to have been much more a development of bureaucracy than of peasantry". (3) In certain cases, development is mostly a development of criminality. (4) For quite a while now, the "crisis of development" has become a topic of analysis. (5) In his book *Le développement et la crise du développement*, Edgar Morin measures the depth of this crisis. He writes: "The development crisis does not simply consist in the crisis of the two major myths of the modern West, namely the conquest of nature (object) by man (the subject / sovereign of the world), and the triumph of the atomized Bourgeois individual. It is the deterioration of the humanistic-rational paradigm of *homo sapiens / faber*, according to which science and technology were seemingly supposed to bring about the well-being of humankind." (6)

Far from challenging the validity of this objective, these failures simply reinforce the conviction about the urgency of bringing about a "true" economic development. The identification of well-being with development is never questioned.

The objective symptoms of development become confused with its nature, the appearance with the essence, as if development were a material accumulation and not a judgment of value.

Is there a quantitatively measurable level of being which is significant in an absolute sense?

The drama of development/underdevelopment lies in this objectify-



ing of what is social. Cars, refrigerators and atomic bombs are not eternal elements of well-being and of power but historical *signs* of injustice or of difference.

Another more subtle form of objectifying consists in defining development as the integration within oneself of technological progress, and as the growth of human labor productivity thanks to machines: it is thus seen as "a complex of modern techniques that use machines whose purpose is to increase production and lower human cost", according to a brochure from the Algerian Information Ministry. (7)

Technology is here seen as a mere means, neutral, inscribed in the virtualities of man's given nature, and allowing for growing dominion over nature. This technological capacity is perceived as so natural and universal, that under-development is seen as the perverse refusal to take the available means to move out of it.

This objectifying of development is at the root of the "technological" conception of development strategies.

There is no question of accepting famine and misery. On the contrary. Nor of rejecting altogether development and its founding myths: progress, science, technology, rationality, humanism and universalism. It's a matter of questioning today what seemed obvious yesterday. Development may be something else than what it appears to be.

Development having become the projection of the Third World's desire and delirium, are we not caught in a simple quarrel of words? Every possible construction could find cover be-

hind this concept.

"Development, it is said, is no longer conceived as having to be a race to catch up, at the economic level, to more fortunate nations, a conception which has prevailed until not long ago, but as a fulfillment of developing societies' own potentialities, not to speak of a more equitable distribution of wealth both at the national and international levels. It is through this twofold action that integrated development will lead to the right to express civilizational values that come from the specific history and social situations of emerging societies. Without denying the fecundating contributions from their cultural areas, certain forms of authenticity are now being claimed as being elements constitutive of development." (8)

Thus the failure of development has fecundated the notion of development with some of the criticisms addressed to it. In the last analysis, development comes to mean the *authentic* desire of the peripheral masses. There is now a substitute to development stigmatized as "bad-development" or "counter-development" (9): it is 'endo' or 'eco' or 'ethno' development. (10) The very fact that Third World victims are unable to express and to give meaning to their aspirations in terms other than those which have been the instrument of their oppression is a testimony to a disquieting dispossession of their speech and language. What an obvious symptom of deculturation and of under-development as deculturation! The harm being done to the Third World is indeed radical. Those who suffer it no longer have even the words to express it.

*Development is first a Western paradigm*, before being mass production and gadgets for a few. By that we mean that it is not only a *historical experience*, falsely exemplary, which occurred first in Western Europe and then spread and reinvented itself in some limited zones, but also a complex of frameworks, structures, values, tied to the "hellenico-judeo-christian culture". Development is first a *world-view* which aims at increasing the standing of the one from which it emanates and to *depreciate the other*. These values, through external make-up, are made into a pseudo-model so that they can more easily be accepted by the other.

In choosing to be "developing countries", the Third World countries have accepted, partly consciously and partly unconsciously, to sell off their cultural identity in order to fit into the Western paradigm. The attempts to find a way out, by the addition of a subtle qualifier like "autocentered", "communitarian", "endogenous", "integrated" (11), "authentic" (12), "autonomous and popular" (13), are commendable efforts, undoubtedly, but not enough to escape the influence of the paradigm. Thus, Third World countries only succeed, at best, in becoming variants of the latter. Such is the case with that most spectacular effort which tried to make the mythical paradigm of socialism prevail over that of development. The notion of socialist development indeed seems to us to contain a real contradiction in terms. We are not so sure that socialism still has any meaning, but if there remains an ounce of genuine meaning to the concept, it can only be, it seems to us, that of a protest and a break which run counter to the terrorist meaning the West pretends to give to history, namely development. The imperialism of development is, in

a sense, the key to the development of imperialism.

To escape the paradigm's influence requires the complete rejection of the myth. There is no other development than Development. But is it forbidden to seek an *elsewhere*? To invent other paradigms? The Western diktat "outside development, no salvation!", despite its terrible power, maybe is not an absolute dead-end. One should not totally exclude the possibility of giving new meanings to history and to break the yoke of an ethnocidal monosemy.

For the Third World peoples, the way of development, whatever the qualifiers we may give to it, is undoubtedly a *dead-end*. For those countries as a *whole*, it risks resulting in "*bad-development*" as it is today called. Moving out of development/under-development implies overcoming the *terrorism of Western history* which has generated this trap of a matrix. However important may be its material foundations (and they are far from being negligible) *the paradigm is of the order of the imaginary*. *The opposition developed/underdeveloped is a continuation of the oppositions civilized/savages, christian/pagans, citizens/barbarians*, and replaces them. It cannot be reduced to them of course, although they are all often used interchangeably, but it *does play a comparable role*. (14) This time, however, the barbarians recognize themselves as such. Whether revolted or resigned, they live in the hope of being baptized into civilization.

"What the 'insufficiently developed' countries reproach to others in international assemblies, says C. Levi-Strauss, is not that they are being westernized, but that they are not given quickly enough



any local maturing. What then occurs is the hypertrophy of a "nationalist" and not national state, which takes precedence over the nation which it thinks it can build from the pieces and rubble left over by the colonizers and financed by the alms of the old metropolis and by levies on agriculture. The second is fallacious because the status of man, ironically reduced to an abstraction, is emptied of all content through a single differentiation which is maintained, created and exacerbated: that of the quantity of available resources.

Development is truly the continuation of colonization, like the civilization of well-being is the daughter of the well-being of civilization.

"If one does the history of battles, colonialism has failed. But one only has to do the history of mentalities to realize that it is the greatest success of all times. The nicest jewel in the crown of colonialism is the farce of decolonization... The white people are now behind the scenes but they remain the producers of the show." (19)

As a process of westernization, development strategies have therefore several centuries of experience (20). This makes the failure even more manifest.

In order to break the bewitching spell of development, the Marxist discourse must also be demystified; it is the ideological support of all attempts to socialize the paradigm. In Africa, it is said that traditional imperialism can be summed up in the three M's: missionary, military, merchants. In order to characterize the new social order, assured by the Third

World technobureaucracies trained in the West, should we not add a fourth M: Marxists?

"I think, says Levi-Strauss, that the communist and totalitarian Marxist ideology is nothing but a trick of history to promote a faster westernization of the peoples which have remained outside until a very recent period." (21)

The tardy and no doubt necessary desacralization of Marxism had made good progress in recent years in Europe. The French intelligentsia in particular had been strongly "marxified" from 1945 to 1968. Yet, to this day, the operation has not been completed. The tidal wave of criticism has not touched the analysis of imperialism and of underdevelopment. A considerable portion of the enormous literature on these topics still dons the "Marxist" label.

This section, namely Marxism, may seem very secondary to iconoclastic philosophers. A rigorous Marxist could rightly view this whole kitchen operation as an outside patch, foreign to Marxism. Marx has practically written nothing on the topic. The analyses that claim to be part of his heritage, come from Lenin's theses, which could be seen as *rather inconsistent ideological tinkering, hastily elaborated for polemic purposes...* But in fact, they constitute a series of themes, mutually linked, and finally a possible image which is pretty precise and rich enough. These theses can be seen as a *mythology*. "Myth," says Furtado, is a conglomeration of hypotheses, none of which can be verified" (22). That is precisely what it is all about. The image woven by the Marxist analysis has no other basis than its fascinating character. In that respect, it finds itself in the

same situation as any other system of interpretation. We have chosen to reject it and to favour another for three reasons:

1) Once its seductive aspect is broken, it becomes evident that the Marxist mythology of imperialism is part of the Marxist corpus at the level of the most debatable and contradictory points: the economic analysis of the tendencies of capitalism, particularly that of the law of the tendential drop of the profit rate. When taken seriously, the Marxist analysis is full of incoherences. It results in important contradictions between its claimed empirical verifications and its hypotheses. (23)

2) A system of interpretation shows its validity, not so much through its rigour as through its fecundity. "Myth," says Furtado, introduces in the mind a discriminatory element which perturbs the act of understanding". (24)

All the incoherences and contradictions of Marxist analysis could possibly be forgiven, if the *mythology* were to propose a *good* system of explanation, likely to throw light and transform the contemporary world order. One must admit that, apart from the believers who are satisfied with the incantatory repetition of the myth, these analyses are not very convincing. The Marxist theory of imperialism, the analysis of underdevelopment and the development strategies that stem from it, are a source of theoretical and specially practical blockages more important than the myths of the proletarian revolution. Indeed, the stakes are now at the level of the whole planet.

3) Despite its theoretical weaknesses and its final sterility (and

ultimately for these reasons), the Marxist system of interpretation enjoys a huge popularity in the Third World. It is close enough to the apparent contradictions on a world scale to constitute a credible ideology that can be used by the new bureaucratic "bourgeoisies" of "underdeveloped" countries. Any liberation of men and cultures that are oppressed by this bureautechnocratic international which is in complicity with the capitalistic one, cannot be accomplished without a critique of this fourth M.

Our purpose here is not to repeat or to develop this critique of the Marxist ideology of imperialism that we have done elsewhere. We forbade ourselves then to offer recipes or to elaborate a new strategy.

We are not trying here to describe the implications of this critique with regard to a development policy. Rather, we are making an attempt at drawing lessons from the limitations of the *Marxist system of interpretation* and more generally from the dead-end of the economic approach to underdevelopment. Theoretical impasses and concrete failures are a call to question the basic postulates and the imaginary meanings that form the grounds of our economicistic vision of world order. Another approach, another system of interpretation allow a different outlook on phenomena traditionally labelled and tagged as "under-development". This "culturalist" approach allows one to conceive in a radically different manner the struggle against underdevelopment and the outcome of its tragic issues. Such an approach makes it possible for Third World societies to hope to be themselves again. Doesn't that make it worth losing our very Western illusion of thinking that the solution to all problem can be found in technology?

# NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- 17) Gilbert Rist, *Processus culturels et développement*, 4th General Conference of EADI, 1984, p. 6.
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- 20) Three or four according to R. Jaulin and A. G. Franck.
- 21) Claude Lévi-Strauss, Interview in *Le Monde*, Jan. 21-22, 1979.
- 22) Celso Furtado, *Le mythe du développement économique*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- 23) On all these points, see our *Critique de l'impérialisme*, Anthropos, 1980.
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# No to Development!

by CLAUDE ALVARES

Few ideas in our time have been invested with as much respectability or historic significance as the concept of development. Societies have found themselves placed, like the sheep and goats of Judgement Day, either on one side or the other of a development spectrum. The histories of nations have been continuously reevaluated according to the level of developedness they may or may not have manifested in technology or culture (some societies have come to be considered 'advanced', others remain 'primitive'), as if the present stage of the so-called developed world is

the final goal towards which all societies should gravitate.

Naturally, there have been numerous critiques and analyses of underdevelopment and maldevelopment, but few development experts have questioned the very idea of development itself. Partly because the idea has fairly monopolized consciousness the world over, at least of a sizeable influential minority of people, partly because to be anti-development would be to expose oneself to ridicule.

Yet all hegemonic ideas lose

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their compulsion with the passage of time, and after an influential five decades, the decline of the concept of development is finally in sight. For the first time, it is coming under attack, and may even be exposed as a fake ideal: humankind's most expensive learning session in many centuries.

A few years ago in an essay in this paper, I proposed that development as currently understood and practised was directed largely against people: it was little more than a con-game, set out to increase poverty and unhappiness under the guise of eliminating them. I examined some major mechanisms through which this was being effected and, impressed with the evidence, decided to label our present period the real colonial age, and the earlier period 'historical colonialism'.

The con-game image proved to be fertile, for it seems now that the idea of economic development has been used by the ruling classes to induce people to accept not only enormous sacrifices, but the destruction or mutilation of older cultural patterns and physical and moral environments, and debilitating forms of dependence.

Objectively, one is astounded at the battles that have been fought in the field of development, with the pro-industrialists (and inevitably the profiteers) on one side, the traditionalists on the other. The major issue has been resource use - of land, forests, the seas, non-mechanized work. As the industrial system expanded, it did not hesitate to uproot all those who refused to be part of the 'great adventure of progress'. But the un-developed soon got the message - the brave new world they were being goaded into was not one over which they would have any control

whatsoever. In battling for their lifestyles, they were fighting for local autonomy, self-reliance, decentralized technologies using labour and inherited, centuries-old rights and values.

It is clear that the older economic model which presumed an inevitable channelling of all 'development' efforts into a monotonous uni-culture is dead. Development is now seen even in establishment jargon as multi-stream. However, what has never been explained is why those who are supposed to benefit from the 'great adventure' have not joined the picnic even after a great deal of cajoling, but have met development programmes with apathy, indifference and hostility.

Traditionally, development has always claimed to be counterposed to poverty, but in a sense this is misleading. In establishing a new economic order, the modernizers in fact increased poverty, especially among the 'subsistence' society. For development has always suggested that self-reliant producers must be deprived of their skills (e.g. by converting subsistence farmers into agricultural workers) and rights before they can start to benefit from the new system.

All 'inefficient' modes of subsistence or low productivity must be replaced by the more modern, 'efficient' system, that is the industrial system, ran the development argument. Indeed the view has always prevailed that industrialization must necessarily involve the uprooting of people for their own benefit in the long term (Marx himself described the uprooting of people in India during colonialism as a 'social revolution', and therefore as a factor partly redeeming colonialism).

Today the development debate has got itself into some exceedingly hopeless traps over the poverty-growth question. The old school still argues that without economic growth, poverty cannot be tackled. On the other hand, the system cannot have further growth because the internal market is too small, and therefore unless poverty is directly tackled, there can be no growth. But it is also obvious that *with* economic growth, there will also be an increase in poverty, for this growth presupposes the use of resources hitherto used by subsistence people for survival...

Moreover, from the days of historical colonialism, industrial expansion has meant intolerance (and destruction) of the existing systems of local industry. One has only to read accounts by patriotic Indians in the 19th and 20th centuries, for example, to observe how unhappy they were that British manufactures were killing Indian industry, that a formerly industrious and self-sufficient country like India was being converted into a producer of raw material for the outside manufactures of the colonizer. Similarly, in today's colonialism, it is not considered wrong to kill off subsistence work (ironic since much of it survived the earlier colonial onslaught), since the process is part and parcel of the process of a 'healthy' industrialization.

Everywhere, fresh suffering has been passed off as part of the pains of growing up, in a world where everyone should find his natural place. The idea of growing up is significant. Development has been seen as a process of maturing. Adults living in subsistence cultures have been considered as children in need of a variety of devices and special nurture. Maturity has been defined in

terms of 'advanced' societies, judged primarily on material abundance, an elaborate structure of science and technology, and nuclear potential. At the same time, a particular image of man, characterized by change, mostly technical change, has been sold across the counter as the goal of the future.

The drive for change was earlier formulated in elegant theories of prescription, by men like Walt Rostow, Talcott Parsons, modernizers like Lerner, psychologists like McClelland. An entire army of intellectuals generated itself to teach and guide the Third World on how to develop. The colonial age seemed never to have ended, for intellectual domination was complete. The intellectuals saw deficiency in everything connected with the Third World, except in their own theory of economic development.

Colonialism even lived on in independent ex-colonies, for the crucial mental image of 'backwardness', passed on by 'advanced' planners to the ruling elite of these countries as they faced the glamorous West, eventually alienated these ruling classes. They came to see themselves as the new bearers of the white man's burden, and their people as stubborn change-resistant primitives to be treated like recalcitrant children and forced to accept what was good for them.

An area was considered 'backward' by the planners if it did not have any 'modern' industry (even if a large number of people were living in it, satisfying their needs, providing for themselves). 'Backwardness' would be tackled by setting up a gigantic paper mill or a steel plant or by excavating the ores, all of which again presupposed the dispossession of the original inhabitants in the cause of progress or their transformation into

wage labour at the perennial mercy of contractors.

To underpin the theory of backward areas, modern economics introduced the notion of scarcity. Only an activity that passed through formal economic indices was of value. A farmer producing for his own consumption, for example, was not adding to the gross national product (GNP) - he was not producing goods that could be given formal meaning through market exchange. Similarly, the blacksmith or basket-weaver, producing goods for an agriculture tied to biotechnology, was not using resources in the formally auditable manner which a paper mill - using the same bamboo - would.

The same concept applied to breastfeeding: since it was 'free', it was valueless. Baby food tins and their advertizing, on the other hand, created jobs and added to the GNP, from packaging and processing milk to doctors, hospitals and multi-national corporations producing diarrhoea drugs, thence to expensive campaigns to teach people to breastfeed once again.

Such was the blindness. In India, officials even extended the imagery of backwardness to natural forests, replacing them with 'scientific' or commercial forestry, usually monocultures. Benefits such as biological diversity or ecological contributions were not considered.

A new development programme, called 'social forestry', provides the true model of what has come to pass in India. It is based on the eucalyptus tree. The eucalyptus is an anti-tree among trees. It can survive and flourish only because it practises chemical warfare: its alkaloids inhibit the growth of other plants or

trees. In addition, growing it means deciding to subject the land to irreversible damage, for unlike other trees its leaves do not disperse the fall of rain, but concentrate it directly onto the soil, leading to large-scale erosion. Notwithstanding, the eucalyptus is being planted in all social forestry programmes in India.

The ecological niche of the eucalyptus presupposes the evacuation of other species. In this sense, the eucalyptus is a good prototype of the industrial system: what is true about its intolerance is true of the industrial system in every sphere.

For important and compelling reasons, non-western ideas, habits, technologies and cosmologies continued to hold the allegiance of millions in the Third World. To history's advantage, the undeveloped held their ground long enough for the negative dimensions of the industrial culture to manifest themselves and force a fresh evaluation of subsistence life and work.

Although seen by the developers as simple resistance to incorporation and aversion to risk resulting from ignorance or backwardness, the rejection of development has arisen for three reasons. First, and most common, people have been unable to afford the proposed industrial input, and have reverted to a pattern of production that does without it. For this reason, chemical fertilizers have gone out of use, since they have been priced out of reach. Second, the new technology has often been tested and found inappropriate. The reversion to traditional seeds is one example of this. Third, development has sometimes been rejected from the very outset, as is frequently the case with organized tribal cultures.

In retaining traditional ways and methods, the undeveloped have, sometimes unintentionally, made a significant contribution to a more varied society of the future.

Two simple agricultural examples. The EEC-supported milk production scheme in India, 'Operation Flood', has imported a large number of livestock, such as Holsteins, Jerseys and Red Danes, which are not only unsuited to Indian climatic conditions but do not relate to agriculture as draught. The traditional Indian *goshalas* (animal farms), on the other hand, have preserved pure Indian breeds like the Halliyal, the Sahiwal, the Thaparkar, the Ongole and Gir, bred to centuries of experience in tropical conditions. These breeds are now being given a new lease of life as disenchantment with the exotic breeds begins to spread. Similarly, India's bewildering variety of rice species has been preserved by those who prefer to use their own seed from the previous year's stocks rather than being supplied by the Government's one variety.

Rejection of development began in the sixties as political consciousness started to spread among the dispossessed, who until then had seen no alternative to accepting the industrial pattern. As the rhetoric of Third World leaders turned increasingly radical, the number of conflicts rapidly rose. In most cases, actual resolutions went in favour of those in power, yet there were some extraordinary successes for those who were normally on the losing side.

The first major victory was the success of the anti-baby food campaign. Then came the fishing wars between beach seiners and mechanized trawlers, which in many Asian coun-

tries led to the exclusion of trawlers from the traditional fishermen's zones. In India, a move by the Forest Department to restrict tribal use of their natural environment in order to commercialize forestry use was shot down as hundreds of activists fought to permit tribals their rights to subsistence lifestyles. In North India, tribals began to mow down teak plantations which had replaced indigenous species of trees on which they depended, and in the plains came the first signs of farmers uprooting eucalyptus. In the Himalayan region, women hugged trees and drove away contractors, creating the now world-famous 'chipko' movement.

This rejection of development was a genuine grass-roots phenomenon, yet it also began to be echoed in the intellectual world: by the end of the seventies, significant anti-development thinkers started to ridicule not just economic growth, but economic development. For the first time since the onset of the industrial age, it was becoming possible to describe subsistence values and their positive qualities without being scorned or dismissed as regressive. The established dichotomies - backward-forward, traditional-modern, primitive-sophisticated, developing-advanced, inferior-superior - lost the sharp dividing lines that once separated them.

Almost the biggest challenger to economic development has been the Japanese agricultural scientist, Masanobu Fukuoka, who by growing rice for the past thirty years without tillage, chemical fertilizers or pesticides has brought into question the whole contribution of modern agricultural science and the economic system that feeds on it. It makes as little sense, observes Fukuoka, to talk of nature 'stagnating' as it does to talk

of people being economically or otherwise 'developed'. Fukuoka dissociates human goals from economic or industrial ones. His extraordinary view of life can be read in detail in the pages of *The One Straw Revolution*.

Coincidentally, it was in Japan, on the occasion of the international peace congress of 1980 that Ivan Illich delivered his unusual lecture in which he equated economic development with war and subsistence with peace. Most of Illich's insights into subsistence are set out in his book, *Shadow Work*.

Professor Stephen Marglin of Harvard University has recently expressed serious doubts about economic growth as an absolute preferred value. He seems disposed to the view that it is not a natural phenomenon, and that it manifests itself mainly in times of population imbalance. He compares growth to chemotherapy - 'preferable no doubt to cancer but dangerous and toxic in its own right and useful only until the organic balance of the body can be restored'.

A similarly sharp challenge to a developmental approach to medicine, disease and death has come from two Bombay professors of medicine, Manu Kothari and Lopa Mehta in *The Tao of Death*.

The industrial system remains an unusual system of resource exploitation, based neither on notions of permanence nor on any reasonable criteria of genuine efficiency. It might have been tolerated once, when circumstances under imperialism and colonialism made it politically possible to eliminate vast populations and their lifestyles, but if the system is permitted unchecked expansion today, or indeed if it is simply preserved at

present levels, it can only be at the expense of further erosion of those living subsistence lifestyles.

The attack on development should therefore be seen as an attack on a system that is harmful to the earth in all its dimensions. It may be that in the future some close alliance between forms of subsistence and modern industry will be achieved, but no one has done any thinking on the proper balance, and on which of the two must form the base. The possibility exists, however, that even with a loss of respectability, the industrial system may continue to expand to the total extinction of all subsistence niches.

Take three examples. In the so-called green revolution, heavy investments in the areas where the revolution is being solicitously encouraged has come to mean declining investment and attention to subsistence farming; in many areas, subsistence agriculture is actually suffering. Similarly, rural consumers are being deprived of milk and animal protein from animal and milk programmes because policies are now oriented towards keeping politically articulate urban voters happy. In forestry programmes, urban interests are monopolizing lands growing food in order to grow industrially useful trees. In a recent article in *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, Paul Lunven of the Food and Agriculture Organization concluded that in most development projects the nutrition component of diets has invariably deteriorated in quality.

For these reasons, I am not arguing simply for zero growth, I am proposing negative growth. To return to Illichian imagery: if certain lifestyles are permitted to be maintained even at current levels, one requires

war of a permanent kind. The advanced societies are exhausting their resources at breakneck speed, and are attempting, through multi-national and international financial institutions, to control the resources of others. The poor, however, will not give in this time without a fight.

This is my version of the

Third World War. A war waged in peacetime, without comparison, but involving the largest number of deaths and the largest number of soldiers without uniform. Unless the case against development is taken up in earnest before it is too late, the elite will solve it in the manner they have always preferred, at the expense of the rest.

## New Publications

*Ethnocultural Directory of Quebec, 1986.* Compiled by Réal Bathalon and Nicole Jetté. Mini-directories ETHNODOC, 3. ISBN 0-920719-09-0, \$20.00. On sale at the Monchanin Cross-Cultural Center.

This work lists 123 organizations, particularly those within the Montreal region, including 57 from ethnocultural communities, 45 in the area of social services and 21 cultural and intercultural research-action groups. It contains a description, in French and English, of their objectives, services, activities, publications, etc.

This directory is a reference tool which is addressed to social workers, teachers, civil servants, other professionals and anyone else interested in the field of intercultural relations in Quebec.

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*Juifs et Québécois français, 200 ans d'histoire commune* (Jews and French Quebecers: 200 Years of Common History) by Jacques Langlais and David Rome. "Rencontre des cultures", 3. Montreal: Fides 1986. 286 p.. Available at the Monchanin Cross-Cultural Center.

Such is the title of a recent work by Jacques Langlais of the Monchanin Cross-Cultural Center and David Rome of the Canadian Jewish Congress, both of Montreal city. This book is the fruit of a genuine experience of intercultural research and mutual listening and understanding which came in the wake of a symposium on the theme "Who is Quebecer?" held at the Monchanin Cross-Cultural Center in 1977. The proceedings of this symposium were published by Fides under the title *Qui est Québécois ?*, also available at the Center.

## Three "Heretical" Books on Development

Rist, G. et F. Sabelli, *Il était une fois le développement*, Lausanne, Editions d'En-Bas, 1986, 153 p.

Latouche, Serge, *Faut-il refuser le développement?* Paris, P.U.F., 1986, 216 p.

Werhelst, Thierry, *Des racines pour vivre. Sud-Nord : identités culturelles et développement*, Paris-Gembloux, Ed. Duculot, 1987, 210 p.

Three heretical, courageous and important books on development. From three countries: Switzerland, France, Belgium. Heretical, because the books go much beyond recording the failures of development and proposing new strategies; they question the very notion of development and its assumptions. Courageous, for they do so at a moment when the urgency of the situation makes any critical reflection look ridiculous. Important, for they help Westerners to decentrate and become critical with regard to their taken-for-granted, and this in the best tradition of Western scientific relativism.

There is a certain progression in the three volumes.

The first claims to be "neither for nor against development", but identifies it as the myth (the founding story) of a given group, and thus demystifies it. It questions the cultural foundations of development.

The second says no to development as a Western ideology.

The third does away with the word development and proposes intercultural solidarity.

### 1. *Development as a Myth*

Let us face it, says Rist. Development has been a failure, not only with regard to its own ideal framework, which is not a universal one, but with regard to other peoples' frameworks. Thus the failure is a very real one when we try to evaluate in what measure development encourages its target populations to reproduce their social existence on the basis of their history and milieu. Furthermore, development contributes to the breakdown of the social fabric.

Of course, notes the author, some do look on development as an inexorable phenomenon. But he retorts:

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is the project feasible? He doubts it. Because of two indicators: energy consumption and consumption of animal protein. Furthermore, history does not confirm the linear vision of history which serves as the basis for this supposed inexorability. The "course of history" does not run along deterministic lines.

Yet, people continue believing in development. This means that it has become a myth, not only in the trivial sense of chimera, of pipe dream, but in the sense of a founding story which guarantees a social order and gives meaning to the historical experience of a given group. As one starts identifying it as a myth, it is the demystification of development which begins.

One even realizes that it is not the Third World which needs development but the Western system which, in order to perpetuate itself, needs to develop, since productivity is its dominant imperative. Its reproduction depends on its growing productivity.

Rist tells the founding story.

Sabelli makes us aware that development is one of the myths or mythemes of the Industrial Epic. Not in order to do away with it but to keep it at a certain distance. By confronting it with other mythic worlds, its relativity surfaces along with its incapacity to generate elsewhere practices that, in one's own backyard, seem to be natural.

Perrot unearths four fundamental assumptions of development which are shared by all development enterprises:

- development exists,
- development is a good thing,
- development is universal,

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- development is known and knowable.

She affirms that one is rarely inclined to question these assumptions. Thus, the idea that development as a global objective could be something other than positive, would never cross the mind of development workers. No one asks the question: what is the notion specific to each culture which has the same existential function as that which the notion of development has in the West? (what Panikkar calls: the homeomorphic equivalents to the notion of development). The discourse on development is closed in upon itself. Rarely does one ask the question whether the "signs of development" (factories, wells, tractors, etc.) have a meaning for the "concerned populations".

Follow three articles on the "constitutive elements of the myth" (of development): order, equality, well-being. The West is a prisoner of these three, but has the impression of being master of its destiny.

Bruyère-Rieder underlines the important role played by the notion of *Order* in the world development dreams of the West, and also by the notion of *Science*, that "tyranny of a classifying logos". She reminds us that this Western order, imposed on all other societies, has as a first result, a destructuring effect on these societies, under the guise of planning, programming and "projects". This is nothing but the imperialism of Knowledge and the institutionalization of Happiness across the whole world (see for example The New International Economic Order)

Berthoud, on his part, denounces how, under the pretext of equality and freedom (which postulates identical "human nature" everywhere

and at all times), development is a process which seeks to introduce, all over the world, a way of being and living centered on the universalistic and individualistic values peculiar to the modern West. The objective is to produce the self-interested economic man. It is a process of cultural destruction of "Third World" societies. A process which has striking similarities to the one that made the West during the last century when the self-regulating market took over and gave priority to the notion of *standard of living* over that of *way of life*. The author brings out the constitutively anti-cultural nature of the modern State. It is naive, he says, to believe in the compatibility between this general westernization of the world and the multiplicity of values and traditions. Its glib rhetoric to claim simultaneously "the right to development" and "the right to be different". Violence and destruction of cultures are the necessary accompaniments of Western development and of its modern Nation-States. A Nation-State violence which is hidden under the culturalistic discourse of the international state bureaucracies.

Finally, Latouche is critical of that benevolent humanism: *good* development. In a provocative way, he shows how "well-being" is an ethnocidal concept. "To bring well-being contributes to negate being even more", for well-being, in the mind of the developer, is confused with "well-having", GNP, "the American way of life", materiality and utility. Latouche dismantles the uncontested imperialism of economics where the richness and misery of a culture (once again an economic vocabulary) is run through the dollar machine. Where cultural pluralism is reduced to the sole criterion: the standard of living. Where value is given to what has

none for the cultures under consideration; where one is incapable - even with the best of good will - to detect what is meaningful for the "indigenous peoples"; how this non-recognition of the other tragically serves to negate him and even to purely and simply eradicate him. He takes apart this infernal mechanism, where what generates misery is perceived as the only way out of it. He even shows how man himself is thereby reduced to the state of being essentially an animal that consumes products, and how famine as well as the dichotomy: well-being/misery, developed/underdeveloped, has become a symbolic instrument of domination which justifies any and all interventions in the Third World, to the point where "if misery did not exist, it should be invented". We must resist such blackmail, he says.

## 2. Saying No to Development

Latouche is saying that one should resist development as ideology, i.e. that preposterous specific belief in the mastery over nature; the belief in a cumulative and linear time, in attributing to man the mission to completely dominate nature. He invites us to question the basic postulates and imaginary meanings that form the basis of our paneconomic vision of world order. The West is a movement that destroys culture - it is an anti-culture, a process that denies differences, a uni-dimensional economic imperialism. He summarizes the cultural imperialism in the 4 M's: missionary, military, merchant, Marxist. He puts forward the hypothesis that the cultural imperialism of the West all started with the State (64). Western metaphysics has reduced culture to being a by-product of economics. The dichotomy developed/underdeveloped is just another version - an economic



one - of Western cultural colonialism. The West has decided to define peoples on the basis not only of an economic dimension, but of its own economic dimension. This economic logic is nothing but the terrorism of accounting. Difference is emptied of its meaning and reduced to backwardness. But the worse result of this Western penetration may not be so much economic destruction as the loss of "cultural identity". "Dispossessed of the knowledge of who they are", "uprooted from within", the Third World peoples are seen as having one sole desire: to be like the Westerners. The fetishistic instrument of this desire is said to be economic development.

The solution to the problem, says the author, is not a technical one, because there is not one single problem (defined by the West) but hundreds of them. And they are very different. The misery of the Third World is not a natural fact. Most often it is the direct or indirect result of domination. Furthermore, it is a creation of the Western outlook before being a reality created by the West.

One should therefore say no to development or to the dilemma development/underdevelopment. One must say no to development, i.e. to the exclusive dominance of the development ideology. An alternative? The author proposes the "recovering of one's cultural identity", but this is so risky (living in the past, recuperation, etc.) that it appears problematic to him. In the last analysis, he encourages one to go against the stream of history, since the latter has been monopolized by the West, which pretends to master all its meanings through terrorism. So his last advice, for the time being: say no to development.

### 3. Intercultural Solidarity

Verhelst's book addresses itself to the "progressive", front-line NGO militants of which he is part. With great respect for their action in the "Third World", he invites them to move beyond their Western assumptions and to give much more attention than they usually do to the indigenous cultures of "Third World" peoples. Could it be, he asks, that our development action also is a Trojan horse of cultural imperialism? He invites them to learn more about these indigenous cultures, their persistence, their vitality, their specific ways or resisting. He even invites them to learn from these cultures and to do a self-criticism of the West in the light of their own values. He even goes so far as to put aside the word development (but not without ambiguity: he speaks sometimes of endogenous development), and proposes no more no less than intercultural solidarity, i.e. that peoples of the North and of the South learn from each other in the realm of fundamental values and arts of living. The author underlines the spiritual contribution of the "Third World" but has little to say as yet regarding the contributions of the socio-familial, educative, medical, economic and legal-political cultures of the same "Third World". In brief, a book which will surely motivate the NGO's to get through the first stage of a genuine opening to cultures.

#### A Few Remarks

The three books are an excellent preparation to a second stage which is more demanding than *dialectical or scientific relativism*, and which one could call the *dialogical stage of radical relativity*.

The three books make a dialectical critique of the West, its culture, its myth, but say nothing about its positive side or about its alternative myth. Maybe because the stage of immersion or cultural interiorisation in a dialogical spirit has not yet been gone through. Only a dialogical approach can reveal the positive side of one's myths and bring one to an intercultural solidarity which will not be simply a glorious idea or wishful thinking, but a daily reality. For that to happen, one may have to stop

subordinating myth to logos and embrace a notion of myth which on the one hand goes much beyond one's respective founding stories, and on the other consists in ultimately escaping the logos and its objectifying critique, thus all the while making these possible. In other words, what may be required is an existential immersion in cultures radically different from one's own, thus transforming the dialectical opposition even within one's own tradition, into a creative polarity.

Robert Vachon

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