

Preface to the New Edition

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Every time the Olympic flame is lit in front of the host country's president, the pulse of a nation quickens. But the Games have rarely been staged with more ambition to self-aggrandisement than in Beijing 2008, when China celebrated its arrival as a world power. Moreover, that which in the summer of 2008 was broadcast to the world through the language of the Olympics will in 2010 be reiterated in the language of a world exhibition in Shanghai, in which China will present itself to the global public as a platform for the scientific achievements of the twenty-first century.

The Olympics and the World Expo are symbols of the secular shift that occurred around the turn of the millennium: the ascent of China – and other countries of the South – to the exclusive club of global powers. It is scarcely possible to overestimate the significance of this shift for world history, and in particular for the people of the South. After centuries of humiliation, they finally see a Southern country on a par with the powers of the world. Countries once treated as colonial underdogs now measure up to their masters, and people of colour take over from the white man. Yet what amounts to a triumph of justice threatens to turn into a defeat for the planet. The desire for equity is largely fixed on development-as-growth, and it is development-as-growth which strains human relations and fundamentally threatens the biosphere. Indeed, China's success brings the dilemma of the twenty-first century into focus: politics is compelled to push either equity without ecology, or ecology without equity. It is hard to see how this dilemma can be solved unless the belief in 'development' is dismantled.

A CHANGING ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY

While discussing the end of the development era in October 1989, we were unaware that at that very moment 'development' had been given a new lease of life. For as the group of friends who eventually became contributors to *The Development Dictionary* gathered for what we called a living-room consultation in State College Pennsylvania, to review key concepts of the development discourse, on the other side of the Atlantic the events that brought down the Berlin Wall in November 1989 were coming to a head.

Like most of our contemporaries, we were blissfully ignorant of the way in which the fall of the Wall turned out to be a historical watershed. In hindsight it has become obvious that the events of 1989 finally opened the floodgates for transnational market forces to reach the remotest corners of the globe. As the era of globalization came into being, hopes of increased wealth were unleashed everywhere, providing fresh oxygen for the flagging development creed.

On the one hand, the age of globalization has brought economic development to fruition. The Cold War divisions faded away, corporations relocated freely across borders, and politicians as well as populations in many countries set their hopes on the model of a Western-style consumer economy. In a rapid – even meteoric – advance, a number of newly industrializing countries acquired a larger share of economic activity. They notched up growth rates far higher than those of the old industrial countries, playing their cards as energy suppliers (United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, Russia), as export platforms (South Korea, Thailand, China) or as sizeable markets (Brazil, China, India). In any event, quite a few Southern countries broke away from the group of money-poor economies and transformed into a new generation of industrial countries, narrowing the distance that separated them from the rich economies. For them, it is as if President Truman's promise at the birth of the development period in 1949 – that poor nations would catch up with the rich – had finally come true.

But, on the other hand, the age of globalization has now superseded the age of development. This is mainly because nation-states can no longer contain economic and cultural forces. Goods, money, information, images and people now flow across frontiers and give rise to a transnational space in which interactions occur freely, as if national spaces did not exist. Development thinking used to concentrate on nation-states' transition from agrarian to industrial societies. The state was conventionally considered to be the main actor, and the national society the main target, of development planning. For this reason, development thinking increasingly lost its way, as both the actor and the target of development withered away under the influence of transnationalization. With the state moving out of focus, the development concept looks strangely out of place in the era of globalization. Development, in short, became denationalized; indeed, globalization can be aptly understood as development without nation-states.

As a result of this shift, development came to mean the formation of a global middle class alongside the spread of the transnational economic complex, rather than a national middle class alongside the integration of a national economy. Seen from this perspective, it comes as no surprise that the age of globalization has produced a transnational class of winners.

Though they exist in different densities at different points around the globe, this class is to be found in every country. In the large cities of the South, glittering office towers, shopping malls filled with luxury brands, gated communities with villas and manicured gardens, not to speak of the stream of limousines on highways or the never-ending string of brand advertisements, signal the presence of high purchasing power. Roughly speaking, half of the transnational consumer class resides in the South, and half in the North. It comprises social groups which, despite their different skin colour, are less and less country-specific and tend to resemble one another more and more in their behaviour and lifestyles. They shop in similar malls, buy the same hi-tech equipment, see the same films and television series, roam the globe as tourists and dispose of the key instrument of assimilation: money. They are part of a transnational economic complex which is now developing its markets on a global scale. Nokia supplies it everywhere with mobile telephones, Toyota with cars, Sony with televisions, Siemens with refrigerators, Burger King with fast-food joints, and Time-Warner with DVDs. Western-style development, to be sure, continued spreading during the globalization period, but boosted the expansion of the transnational economic complex rather than the formation of thriving national societies.

DESIRE FOR EQUITY

It would be misleading to recognize only the desire for wealth in the scramble of countries and classes for income. Though it goes without saying that the time-honoured vices of greed and arrogance are omnipresent drivers in this scramble, it is also true that from the point of view of the South there is more to it. Behind the craving for skyscrapers and shopping malls, gigawatts and growth rates, there is also the desire for recognition and equity at work. A quick glance at China may illustrate the point. The ascendancy of China to the ranks of a world power is balm on the wounds inflicted during her two centuries of colonial humiliation. And the success of the middle class is a source of pride and self-respect that puts the Chinese elite on a par with social elites elsewhere on the globe. The Chinese example brings to the fore what has been part and parcel of development all along: the desire for justice is intimately linked to the pursuit of development.

Looking at *The Development Dictionary* today, it is striking that we had not really appreciated the extent to which the development idea has been charged with hopes for redress and self-affirmation. It certainly was an invention of the West, as we showed at length, but not just an imposition on the rest. On the contrary, as the desire for recognition and equity is framed in terms of the civilizational model of the powerful nations, the South has emerged as the staunchest defender of development. Countries in general do

not aspire to become more ‘Indian’, more ‘Brazilian’ or for that matter more ‘Islamic’; instead, assertions to the contrary notwithstanding, they long to achieve industrial modernity. To be sure, the element of imposition has not been lacking since Commodore Perry appeared off the coast of Japan in 1853, forcing it at gunpoint to give access to goods from the USA. Self-defence against the hegemonic powers has been an important motive of the drive for development until today. Nevertheless, what might once have been an imposition has more often than not turned into a basis for identity. In this way, however, as indeed the book points out, the right to cultural self-identity has been compromised by accepting the development world-view. Despite decolonization in the political sense – which has led to independent states – and despite decolonization in the economic sense – which has made some countries into economic powers – a decolonization of the imagination has not occurred. Quite the reverse: across the world hopes for the future are fixed on the rich man’s patterns of production and consumption. The longing for greater justice on the part of the South is one reason for the persistence of the development creed – even if, in this century, neither the planet nor the people of the world can any longer afford its predominance.

However, it is crucial to distinguish two levels of equity. The first is the idea of relative justice, which looks at the distribution of various assets – such as income, school years or Internet connections – across groups of people or nations. It is comparative in nature, focuses on the relative positions of asset-holders among each other, and points towards some form of equality. The second is the idea of absolute justice, which looks at the availability of fundamental capabilities and freedoms without which an unblemished life would be impossible. It is non-comparative in nature, focuses on basic living conditions, and points to the norm of human dignity. Generally speaking, conflicts about inequality are animated by the first idea, while conflicts about human rights are animated by the second.

As it turns out, the demand for relative justice may easily collide with the right to absolute justice. To put it in political terms: the competitive struggle of the global middle classes for a greater share of income and power is often carried out at the expense of the fundamental rights of the poor and powerless. As governments and businesses, urban citizens and rural elites mobilize to forge ahead with development, more often than not the land, the living spaces and the cultural traditions of indigenous peoples, small farmers or the urban poor are put under pressure. Freeways cut through neighbourhoods, high-rise buildings displace traditional housing, dams drive tribal groups from their homelands, trawlers marginalize local fisherfolk, supermarkets undercut small shopkeepers. Economic growth is of a cannibalistic nature; it feeds on both nature and communities, and shifts

unpaid costs back onto them as well. The shiny side of development is often accompanied by a dark side of displacement and dispossession; this is the reason why economic growth has time and again produced impoverishment next to enrichment. The globally oriented middle classes, although they push for development in the name of greater equality, largely disregard the plight of the poor. No wonder that, in just about all newly industrializing countries, social polarization has been on the rise along with growth rates over the past thirty years.

To invoke the right to development for the sake of greater equity is therefore an untrustworthy undertaking. This is particularly the case when governmental and non-governmental representatives call for accelerated growth in the name of helping the poor. Most of the time, they take the poor hostage when garnering relative advantages from the richer countries, without much of an intention of guaranteeing the fundamental rights of economically disadvantaged communities. At the core of this cover-up – as this book argues – lies the semantic confusion brought about by the concept of development. After all, development can mean **just about everything**, from putting up skyscrapers to putting in latrines, from drilling for oil to drilling for water, from setting up software industries to setting up tree nurseries. It is a concept of monumental emptiness, carrying a vaguely positive connotation. For this reason, it can be easily filled with conflicting perspectives. On the one hand, there are those who implicitly identify development with economic growth, calling for more relative equity in GDP. Their use of the word ‘development’ reinforces the hegemony of the economic world view. On the other hand, there are those who identify development with more rights and resources for the poor and powerless. Their use of the word calls for de-emphasizing growth in favour of greater autonomy of communities. For them, development speech is self-defeating; it distorts their concern and makes them vulnerable to be hijacked by false friends. Putting both perspectives into one conceptual shell is a sure recipe for confusion, if not a political cover-up.

A PARENTHESIS IN WORLD HISTORY

It is the legacy of the twentieth century that the desires of nations for a better tomorrow are predominantly directed towards development-as-growth. However, the multifaceted crisis of the biosphere turns this legacy into a tragic liability. As the book points out in a variety of ways, the development viewpoint implies both a chronopolitics and a geopolitics. In terms of a chronopolitics, **all peoples on the globe appear to move along one single road**, following the pacemakers who are supposed to represent the forefront of social evolution. And in terms of a geopolitics, under the

development gaze the confusing diversity of nations across the globe turns into a clear ranking order with the GDP-rich countries at the top of the pack. This way of constructing the world order has revealed itself to be not only obsolete, but also mortally dangerous. Assigning the Euro-Atlantic model of civilization to a vanguard position either along the course of history or across the social ranking order has by now lost any legitimacy: it is proven to be incompatible with the planet.

In retrospect it becomes clear that some of the very conditions that have been responsible for the rise of the Euro-Atlantic civilization are also responsible for its fall. Why was Europe able to leap ahead of the rest of the world in the early nineteenth century? An important part of the answer (as US historian Kenneth Pomeranz has shown) is to be found by looking at the resource base. At the end of the eighteenth century, both of the two major civilizations of the world – Europe and China – were constrained in their economic development by the scarcity of land available to grow food, supply fuel and provide raw materials. But it was only Europe – first of all England – that succeeded in overcoming this limit by tapping into new resources. It began massively to import agricultural goods such as sugar, tobacco, cereals and timber from America, and, above all, set out systematically to utilize coal for industrial processes. As foreign land replaced domestic land and carbon substituted for wood, the English industrial economy was able to take off. Put more generally, access to biotic resources from colonies and fossil resources from the crust of the earth was essential to the rise of the Euro-Atlantic civilization. There would have been no industrial society without the mobilization of resources from both the expanse of geographical space and the depth of geological time.

As the planet's biodiversity disappears, fossil-fuel resources dwindle and the global climate destabilizes, the conditions that brought about Europe's success are no longer available. Resources will be neither as easily nor as cheaply accessible. In particular, dwindling oil supplies and threatened climate chaos suggest that future historians will consider the past two hundred years of Euro-Atlantic development a parenthesis in world history. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the automobile society, high-rise housing, chemical agriculture, or a meat-based food system could be rolled out across the globe. The resources required would be too vast, too expensive and too damaging for local ecosystems and the biosphere.

Since the Euro-Atlantic model of wealth emerged under exceptional conditions, it cannot be generalized to the world at large. In other words, the model requires social exclusion by its very structure; it is unfit to underpin equity on a global scale. Therefore, development-as-growth cannot continue to be a guiding concept of international politics unless global apartheid is

taken for granted. If there is to be some kind of prosperity for all world citizens, the Euro-Atlantic model of production and consumption needs to be superseded, making room for modes of well-being that leave only a light footprint on the earth. Production and consumption patterns will not be fit for justice, unless they are resource-light and compatible with ecosystems. For that reason, there will be no equity without ecology in the twenty-first century.

RESILIENCE IN DIVERSITY

It is against this background that *The Development Dictionary* is of continued relevance. Breaking with ‘development’ as a habit of thought is part and parcel of an overdue decolonization of minds. We, the authors of the book, started with the premise that Western hegemony leaves its imprint not only on politics and economics, but on minds as well. Just as domestic furniture carries the imprint of its age, mental furniture is also marked by the date of its formation. In this respect, the development discourse is an outcome of the post-war era of fossil-fuel-based triumphalism, undergirded by colonial perceptions and the legacy of Western rationalism. Cleansing the mind from development certainties, however, requires a conscious effort; therefore, the authors of this book have ventured to expose those key concepts that make up much of the mental furniture of ‘development’. As it emerges, just to name some examples in the book, ‘poverty’ incorporates a materialistic prejudice, ‘equality’ is transmogrified into sameness, ‘standard of living’ reduces the diversity of happiness, ‘needs’ make the dependency trap snap, ‘production’ brings forth disvalue next to value, and ‘population’ is nothing but a statistical artefact. Exposing the epoch-specific nature of key concepts liberates the mind and prompts it to find a language that is equal to tomorrow’s challenges. *The Development Dictionary* is meant to help in this endeavour.

In particular, it will not be possible to reconceptualize equity without recovering the diversity of prosperity. Linking the desire for equity to economic growth has been the conceptual cornerstone of the development age. Delinking the desire for equity from economic growth and relinking it to community- and culture-based notions of well-being will be the cornerstone of the post-development age. Indeed, today, to a much greater extent than when this book was written, initiatives are launched all over the world that, in a smaller or larger way, aim at transcending the conventional development idea. There is an upsurge of initiatives in the industrial world in both the northern and the southern hemisphere that edge away from the fossil-fuel economy and aim for a solar economy, which goes under the name of ‘green economy’ in Europe and the USA, and of ‘ecological civilization’ in China. Moreover, there is quite a bit of creativity at the margins of the mainstream,

be it the search for a ‘sufficiency economy’ in Thailand, the call for ‘earth democracy’ in India, the rediscovery of the *cosmovisión Andina* in Peru, or the groping for ‘degrowth’ in France and Italy. And, last but not least, there are myriad communities – professional, local, digital – affirming in their specific contexts that resilience, beauty and meaning can be found outside of the logic of growth and expansion.

Looking at the multitude of post-development initiatives, two themes emerge. First, a transition from economies based on fossil-fuel resources to economies based on biodiversity is paramount. In contrast to the ever-expanding nature of ‘development’, the recognition of limits is at the root of numerous attempts to re-embed the economy in the biosphere. Examples abound in architecture, agriculture, energy production, forestry and even industry. What is more, opting for solar energies and materials is consonant with a certain amount of deglobalization. For decades, a lack of local fit and adaptation in those areas had to be compensated for by the import of fossil energies from far away, but without them a new appreciation of the land, habitat and seasons becomes essential. While the massive use of fossil-fuel-based resources allowed one to disregard the character of specific places, bioeconomic systems – be it in cultivation or in construction – find their strength in connecting with local ecosystems and energy flows. For this reason, decentralization and diversity will be guiding principles for solar economies.

Second, post-development initiatives attempt to push back the predominance of the economic world-view. They oppose the secular trend to functionalize work, education and the land in order to boost economic efficiency, insisting on the right to act according to values of culture, democracy and justice. In the global South, for instance, initiatives emphasize community rights to natural resources, self-governance and indigenous ways of knowing and acting. In the global North, post-development action instead centres on eco-fair businesses in manufacture, trade and banking, the rediscovery of the commons in nature and society, open-source collaboration, self-sufficiency in consumption and profit-making, and renewed attention to non-material values. At any rate, what appears to be the common denominator of those initiatives is the search for less material notions of prosperity that make room for the dimensions of self-reliance, community, art or spirituality. Their underlying conviction is that human well-being has many sources beyond money; drawing on them not only provides a base for different styles of prosperity, but makes people and communities more resilient against resource crises and economic shock.

In such a perspective, however, the conventional politics of justice is turned upside-down. In the development age the rich world was able to

sidestep the hard issues of justice, because economic growth was seen as the main tool to bring greater equity to the world. Growth was a substitute for justice, and inequality was no problem as long as the have-nots were able to improve their position along the way. Indeed, for decades development experts defined equity primarily as a problem of the poor. They highlighted the lack of income, lack of technologies, and lack of market access of the poor, advocating all kinds of remedies for raising their living standard. In short, they worked at raising the floor, rather than lowering the ceiling. With the emergence of bio-physical constraints to economic growth, however, this approach has definitely turned out to be one-sided; it is not just the poor but also the rich, and their economy as well, that have to be called into question. At any rate, the quest for fairness in a finite world means in the first place changing the rich, not the poor. Poverty alleviation, in other words, cannot be separated from wealth alleviation.

It was in October 1926 that Mohandas Gandhi already sensed the impasse of development. In one of his columns for *Young India*, the mouthpiece of the Indian independence movement, he wrote:

God forbid that India should ever take to industrialisation after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom (England) is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.

Nearly eighty years later this statement has lost none of its relevance. On the contrary, its significance has exploded since today there are, just between India and China, no longer 300 million but 2,000 million setting out to imitate Britain. What would Gandhi say if he met Hu Jintao at the inauguration of the 2010 World Expo?

Berlin, 2009