



THE CARIBBEAN BETWEEN ENVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Glenn Sankatsing

Home: [Caribbean Reality Studies Center](http://CaribbeanRealityStudiesCenter.com) Feedback: crscenter@crscenter.com

A modified and more elaborate treatment of development and envelopment by the author can be found in *Quest to Rescue Our Future* (Amsterdam, Rescue Our Future Foundation, 2016, 555 p.) see www.rescueourfuture.org

Magistral Lecture presented at the international seminar “The Caribbean: Pluricultural Mosaic”, organised on the occasion of the 2003 Awards for Caribbean Thought by the University of Quintana Roo, the Government of the State of Quintana Roo and the UNESCO Regional Office in Mexico. Thursday 15 May, 2003, Hotel Meliá Cancún, Quintana Roo (Mexico)

At this meeting of Caribbean researchers, we are united by common concerns, held on this momentous occasion. Crossing linguistic, geographical and cultural barriers we gathered to discuss the current reality and future perspectives for the peoples of the Caribbean. Today, our region and societies find themselves in times of concern over their future. The diagnosis is extremely alarming, given the absence of a viable response for survival as a society in the Caribbean Basin.

We are being globalised into extinction, economically, culturally and socially. Apparently, there is no means of escape for our countries and the scholars of the society are yet to provide an answer. The key question is whether we will become the dinosaurs of tomorrow or whether a project of society is still viable for the countries of the Caribbean.

In this disturbing reality, contemporary social sciences have retreated into an embarrassing silence, with no new project to announce to the peoples living in desperation in three continents, and without any message to deliver to societies of misery, with disconcerted people living in anguish without escape route.

All development theories and paradigms of the social sciences of the last fifty years have failed, without exception. All paths to progress and to the future have been blocked. While the fate of our peoples continues to deteriorate, there is not one development paradigm left and not one single social science theory capable of providing a viable perspective for the future of our societies.

As Martin Luther King once said, “There comes a time when silence is betrayal”. This opportunity that brings together so many Caribbean scholars can serve to break the silence and bring about a fundamental reflection, not to satisfy supreme academic interests, but to ensure the very survival of our societies and cultures in the Caribbean Basin; a crucial reflection to provide us with a viable plan for the society in an encounter of our present and future, starting with the genesis of the countries of the Caribbean.

Our part of the world has been the outcome of the remarkable circumstance that, during half a millennium, the fate of our societies has not been shaped by our own evolution, development and internal dynamism, in response to the challenges posed by nature, environment and habitat, or in fulfilment of our own desires, aspirations and social goals.

Caribbean societies emerged as the scar of oppression, and were shaped from outside

as an artefact of a foreign venture. The basic principle of continuity and internal dynamism, underlying all processes of evolution and development, in nature as well as history, was absent in the genesis of our societies that was the product of structural discontinuity rather than self-realisation. But our region was only part of a larger global enterprise. The history of the last five hundred years of humanity can be summarised in one single phrase as the globalisation of the local experience in the West that turned all other human settings into 'trailer societies', towed not toward their own destiny but toward the destiny and teleology of the West, whose global mission was not to impart, but to collect. Colonialism, therefore, was not a regrettable accident, but a requirement.

Achievements of the West, separated from their specific historicity, were transferred to other latitudes, as universal, context-free yardsticks for the future of all geographic destinies and landscapes. Three continents, including ours, were reduced to "trailer societies", without the engine and heartbeat to shape their own history, and were subjected to the commands of the internal project of the West, and to the exclusive logic of its globalisation. Five discursive abolitions have formed the cornerstones of this globalisation process.

Firstly, the *abolition of context* was based on the universality claim, inherent in the transfer of context-free devices, deemed insensitive to the specificities of the environment, geography, culture and history of other latitudes. In trailer societies, not the model is adapted to suit reality, but reality is modified to accommodate the model. Cynically, models were imposed on us, the success of which required our own slavery, servitude and domestication.

Secondly, the *abolition of culture* was based on the tenet that the only beneficial course open for the future of all destinies is to adopt the Western culture. The indigenous society was civilised to the extent that it abandoned the culture of its ancestors, in order to imitate Western achievements through a process of modernisation that banished its own patrimony to the margins of social life.

Thirdly, the *abolition of evolution* was based on the claim that Western civilisation, as the spear point of human evolution, constituted an achievement that all others were destined to reach some day, either by their own efforts or by imitation. It was therefore in their own interest to give up their indigenous projects and discontinue their own genesis, in order to accommodate imitation, mimicry and transfer of Western guidelines as the prime agents for development and progress. The variegated tree of human evolution was thus pruned into the monotony of a single branch.

In fourth place, the *abolition of internal social dynamism* undermined the indigenous command over the engine of development and creation. Internal social dynamism measures the degree to which social forces endogenously operate as the engine of development and creation. "No sugar but coffee", was the message that turned numerous sugarcane fields into coffee plantations, not because of strikes, or because we no longer had a liking for sugar, or due to any other internal factor, but simply because of imperial command. Far from nativist or xenophobic notions of rejecting all things external, internal social dynamism is the capacity for self-realisation. In social processes, the external cannot be opposed to the internal, because the moment an external element is incorporated, it has already become an internal factor. It is a law of evolution that life always sprouts from interaction between the internal and external.

Internal social dynamism is a variable that measures the degree to which the future, development and evolution of a social unit are the products of the operation and use of endogenous mechanisms or inputs. It is the extent to which a social unit has its own life, internal logic and continuity created by social phenomena and forces existing within the society. For centuries in Caribbean history, the growth of the population was not even the product of sexual reproduction, since the cost and difficulties of 'breeding' slaves by far exceeded the cost of importing adult slaves from Africa.

Finally, the *abolition of history* was based on the axiom that universal history coincides with the genealogy of the West. Experiences not directly connected to the project of the West were contemptuously deemed void of substance, culminating in bizarre statements such as "people without history" and "the end of history". To their advocates we can respond that people without history were born in the future. The common origin of humanity endows all peoples around the world with exactly the same length of history. This Eurocentric proposal regarding history culminated in the documentalist bias that privileges written sources to the detriment of other cultural expressions. More crystallised history can be found in music, customs, oral tradition, rites and dance, in societies such as ours, structured under dominance, where the hands that wrote were the hands that tortured.

Culture is not simply some archaic ornament of society, nor is it a creative decoration of social life. Culture is the materialisation of the yearning to survive in interactive response to forces of nature and the institutionalisation of coexistence through rules and shared institutions in pursuit of order, stability and peace in a project of self-realisation. A critical reading of the document should therefore be coupled with the creative reading of the cultural crystallisation of history and the imaginative reading of the scars of oppression and the monuments of destruction erected in the social landscape.

These five discursive abolitions suppressed our essential internal life processes and shaped our condition of trailer society, truncating our own evolution, interrupting our history, alienating us from our environment, overwriting our culture, and undermining the creative force of internal social dynamism.

However – and this is the cornerstone of our project for the future – unless a society is completely eradicated, its own project cannot be extinguished. In nature, as well as in history, there is a cosmic desire to survive, grow, flourish, bear fruit and defeat death by reproduction. The history of the Caribbean should therefore be understood as the clash between two opposing processes: envelopment, a modelling from outside and development, commanded by the inner clock; in other words, a clash between forces of imitation versus forces of creation. Internal social dynamism and evolution can be devitalised to extremes, but can never be extinguished. The 'limbo' dance, with its tight movement notwithstanding the lowering pole, did not come from Africa, nor did it emerge in the Caribbean. The limbo was born on slave ships, where space was small and chains were short. Under the cruellest and most dehumanising of lived experiences, the joy of limbo was created by people on their way to centuries of slavery. This is the most tangible proof that people can be oppressed to the extreme of enslavement, but culture and development will always find their way; not the caricature of development dominant since the fifties that is measured by the degree of successful imitation of the external experience and modernisation. Such travesty of development has been amply falsified by

decades of persistent instability, political and socio-economic crises, critical poverty and famine on three continents.

You can provide the mango seed with water, protection and fertilisers for it to grow into a strong mango tree, but it will never become an apple tree. Development, therefore, cannot be transferred or donated; it can only be encouraged, stimulated and maintained. The right definition of development is the mobilisation of the own potentialities and social forces in a project of self-realisation, in interactive response to nature, habitat, resources and history. This presents us with a far-reaching conclusion that takes us to a new paradigm. What was referred to as 'development' for fifty years was not development but envelopment, a disrespectful process of insertion, annexation and incorporation into an external project, a process of envelopment, of wrapping in both senses. The legitimating development discourse that prevailed during half a century, represents the antithesis of development based on imitation, the denial of the principles of creation, evolution and progress and the destruction of real options for our societies to grow in a natural way.

The most powerful example is Africa, underdeveloped by Europe by means of envelopment, being denied the potential to develop out of its own origin. Envelopment is the reason why the cradle of humanity, Africa, today looks like its graveyard.

We never had development theories, but envelopment theories, based on the false development/underdevelopment dichotomy, a legitimating discourse to impose an alien genesis and foreign destiny on us. The failure of all development theories that were periodically dished out on a different tray, stands as the convincing proof. Our response is the new 'development/envelopment paradigm'. It conceives development not as the incorporation in an external destiny, but instead, as a project to rescue the internal social dynamism, context, culture, evolution and history, by mobilising the own potentialities and social forces for a project of self-realisation, instead of reducing us to remote controlled societies.

The development/envelopment paradigm is a powerful tool to reinterpret history, to overcome the stasis of half a century, to redefine our reality and to design the strategy for our own project of self-realisation that gives us back our destiny. A few areas in which this new paradigm has already served us in practical terms can illustrate that.

Firstly, the development/envelopment paradigm allowed the rereading and reinterpretation of our history. It revealed that a process of envelopment, imposed through the five abolitions, was responsible for the lack of development in our societies. The condemnation to grow not from one's own genes, but from another's genetic codes, mathematically resulted in a chain of discontinuity, maladjustment, instability, crisis and civil war on three continents. Envelopment suppressed our most essential internal life processes and shaped our present condition of trailer society, by truncating our evolution, interrupting our history, alienating us from our environment, overwriting our culture, and undermining the sources of our creative forces.

Secondly, the new paradigm served to dismantle the ambiguous term of 'globalisation'. Globalisation is not a recent phenomenon appearing over the last few decades. Long before Columbus' first voyage, its origin can be traced back to the moment when the earth ceased to be flat and became a globe with limits, inciting megalomaniac dreams on the division of a planet, whose space is exhausted today.

Globalisation is not a concerted, democratic or pluralist process, that fuses the best social developments of each corner of the world to serve the cause of humanity. Globalisation did not produce the global village, rather one single village went global through a process of envelopment, to the detriment of other social experiences and evolutions.

The concept of globalisation is ambiguous, since it can be a blessing and a curse. Globalisation, through increased communication, exchange and interaction around the world, which after all is one single race, promotes the development of a species anxious for solidarity, peace and global harmony. Neo-liberal globalisation, however, imposes one single economy and global culture, orchestrated as part of the envelopment process that infringes on the right to cultural expression and destroys any option for development.

Neoliberal globalisation is the new face of colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism. How can we imagine fair competition in free markets, if the obsolete machinery dumped in Germany is still precious technology desperately begged for in Ethiopia? Neoliberalism is not an ideology of the free market, but rather of *free marketing*. The belief that the 'free market' is crucial for democracy is a crude invention. Traditional capitalism opened markets through colonialism, modern capitalism through neoliberal globalisation, which brings about clashes, not of civilisations, but clashes of barbarities in ecology, religion, co-existence and development.

The planet has become far too small to accommodate more than one empire. Previously, at least the option for war did not exist between the Roman and Chinese empires, but today, in a single imperial centre the national design is made of the global economy. Sovereignty, self-determination, independence, non-intervention and non-interference, which always constituted annoying obstacles for the imperial megalomania, now belong to the past. The global state that imposes one single jurisdiction has brought an end to the external war, to the war for national liberation and to separatism. External factors ceased to exist and all spaces and shelters on the planet have been exhausted. The neoliberal globalization logic can only offer the scary option of civil war from within the empire, with state terrorism or terrorism of the subdued. In light of such dangerous trends involving the usurpation of geographic, social, cultural and economic space, the only way out is to establish new codes of co-existence based on development, which takes growth in diversity as a critical pre-condition for any global harmony.

The third application of the paradigm refers to the concept of 'developing countries'. Never did they perceive us as developing countries, but rather as countries of defective envelopment and inadequate incorporation. It is a suicidal act for capitalist logic to develop the main consumer market into a powerful competitor with bountiful natural and human resources. The 'development aid' that was granted, therefore, never really addressed our development but was envelopment aid that primarily focussed on the optimisation of the neoliberal incorporation into the global capitalist market.

A fourth use of the paradigm refers to the sustainable development model, which is quite fashionable these days. According to the development/envelopment paradigm, development is sustainable by definition, otherwise it is not development. The concept of 'sustainable development' is therefore a sheer pleonasm. Unless the asymmetric relations that prevail around the world are eliminated, 'sustainable development' is the equivalent of 'sustainable envelopment', and therefore a negation of development. Sustainable

development under conditions of domination will only sustain inequality and injustice, failing to open up any options for the development of our societies.

Sustainable development has served as a cunning discourse for achieving a suspicious global consensus among the opposing poles of an asymmetrical relationship, without any substantial material or structural change in the status quo, whose strategic goal is sustainable envelopment. The ambiguity of the concept of sustainable development explains why, despite the great jubilation at international summits of Heads of State with ample space for NGO's, as in Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg, no substantial progress has been made to prevent imminent disasters.

Similarly, structural adjustment programmes are not part of the development process, but only constitute a powerful agent of envelopment and incorporation into an alien project. The trailer society is maladjusted by definition, and that turns structural adjustment into perpetual adjustment, part of which has already been completed in half a millennium.

Finally, with respect to power and democracy, what prevails from the top is envelopment, due to the dominant political system that is not based on representation, but on the delegation of power. Elections do not capitalize the development process of social forces and the materialisation of their real interests, but are based on envelopment through the usurpation of power by a handful of individuals, self-appointed for autonomous governance. In Caribbean and Latin American political processes, suffrage has legitimised the periodic hijacking of the people and the country for periods of 4 or 5 years as an ambulant monarchy, to the extreme that corruption is not an aberration of democracy, but the premium of democracy.

The greatest structural defect of parliamentary democracy is the preponderance of atomistic individualism and the absence of a protagonist role played by the social forces that constitute the driving force of development. Development translated into representation is a glimpse at a democratic alternative to parliamentary democracy, by presenting the option of democratically mobilising social forces from below, to the verge of the traditional political arena and by allowing the emergence of a different brand of political leadership from within the social forces. The new paradigm provides an explanation as to why two current processes in Latin America seemingly similar in their discourse, are achieving completely different results: Brazil's hope with a leading role of social forces that closely resemble development and the trauma being suffered in Venezuela as a result of a process of envelopment, which pretends to serve the 'aspirations of the people' from an isolated vanguard.

These promising options of the development/envelopment paradigm for our society's future once again pose our initial question on the embarrassing silence of social science that failed so miserably in their development paradigms and theories, with such a high social cost in three continents during half a century. As researchers of our societies we are required to find the answers in order to draw lessons for the future. The main reason is that social science as a victim of its own disciplines became an accomplice of envelopment.

The early fragmentation of social science into autonomous disciplines introduced insoluble epistemological problems. For systematic research purposes, the complexity of social reality demands the temporary isolation of social phenomena in the form of specialisations, but it is a scientific crime to disassemble for purposes of study, and then forget to reassemble before making final statements. A child playing with 'Lego' toys will

understand this. That is exactly what social sciences have been doing for two centuries now, each one claiming a slice of the society as its exclusive field of competence, unable even to understand the language of the other disciplines.

The trouble with social science disciplines is even more complex. Social sciences were not discovered, they were created in specific socio-historical processes of the West, in response to the Renaissance, Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, rise of capitalism and the French Revolution. Had social sciences been developed in the Caribbean, instead of being unquestioningly copied, their disciplines would certainly have not been the same; surely, without the process that gave rise to anthropology, since we are not that exotic to ourselves. Moreover, societies based on community life with an organic link between production and family relations would not call for a dichotomy between sociology and economy. The system of social disciplines is therefore not universal, but rather an artefact of Western socio-economic and political history.

Sociology was born not as a scientific discipline, but as a device for the salvation of France, in the midst of chaotic events, to be later crystallised into the study of processes associated with the modern nation state. Non-western peoples were left to the care of anthropology, born out of colonialism, in the voice of Levi Strauss.

Economics was the direct response to the industrial revolution and the growth of capitalism. The market, as the tabernacle of capitalism, became the central point of economics that was not concerned with needs, not even of millions of human beings dying of hunger, but which focused exclusively on the demand of those who appeared on the market with purchasing power. Economics became progressively concerned with the optimisation of the system that was being globalised, until our modern neoliberal era, where economics is not a scientific discipline but the doctrine of capitalism.

For these reasons, contemporary social science disciplines that were transferred to all destinies lack universality and instead became systems of knowledge that accompanied and steered the social evolution of the West and its project of global expansion. Tradition was adopted, not science.

This complicity of social sciences as active agents of the envelopment of other destinies into trailer societies can be historically corroborated. Sociology was concerned with justifying and accompanying the process of Westernisation and modernisation, overwriting other cultures on a global scale by providing solutions for maladjustments to the modernisation process. Economics accompanied the globalisation of Western capitalism, using deceitful terms such as international, transnational and interdependent capitalism, so that no one could be held accountable for extra-territorial economic injustice. All societies around the world were portrayed as victims of some ungraspable transnational monster.

It should be reminded that capitalism was only endogenous in the West, where it was historically created. International capitalism is globalised Western capitalism, not the outcome of industrial revolutions in India or Indonesia, nor the result of rationalisation processes in Brazil, much less the product of class struggle in Nigeria. International capitalism has no heart, but it does have an operating base, definitely not to be sought in Latin America or Africa, but rather in Europe and its reincarnation, the United States.

The rejection of social science disciplines carries with it severe implications, for the multi, inter and transdisciplinary approaches should be rejected as well, since they too take disciplines that lack validity as their axiomatic premise. However, the valuable social

science contributions accumulated over the course of time cannot be simply discarded, for they still may provide useful tools in the study of society. This raises serious epistemological problems.

In seeking to square the vicious circle, we had to abandon the entire logic of the structure of contemporary social sciences, opting for the extradisciplinary approach. Its basic premise is that social phenomena and processes are mutually interrelated and united, and can be isolated only temporarily for purposes of study, but with the compelling obligation to reassemble before drawing final conclusions. The extradisciplinary approach puts an end to the inverted logic of current social sciences that the anatomy of academia determines the anatomy of society. The instrument was transformed into the tyrant, demanding that social problems and phenomena be adjusted to the dividing lines of academia, instead of designating social reality and social forces as the agents of development and the architects of history.

Development stems from a combination and interaction of three crucial factors in the historical process: social forces as the main actors, survival as the driving force and awareness as a guide and motivating factor. An awareness and strategy on the part of the social forces of viable channels for collective survival forms the base, starting with the pursuit of interests and objectives perceived as critical for the own group. In an ongoing process of concerted action, the specific goals of each group are formulated simultaneously, while negotiations and joint action at the collective level should pursue the harmonisation of divergent, even contrary interests among social forces, in order to reach a viable project for the self-realisation of the society as a whole.

Given the inherent desire for survival and self-realisation on the part of the social forces, awareness is the most outstanding factor in generating development. Operating within the ambit of awareness are factors capable of creating or hindering solidarity and concerted action such as ideas, discourse and interaction, but also the manifestation of the unifying factor of culture, through literature, poetry, music, dance and other expressions.

In light of the categorical failure of their theories and paradigms, in addition to their inability to present methods or devices for the self-realisation of society, social sciences contemptuously distanced themselves from the quest for coherent explanations for our condition. Postmodernism and postmodernist tenets provided a comfortable refuge for their frustration by proposing the suspension of the 'grand theories' and the end of the search for general explanations for the human and social condition, at the same time condemning the dispossessed of the earth to life imprisonment and their native lands to perpetual trailer societies. The outcome was the rise of conjunctural social sciences, victims of blind empiricism, to the extreme of relegating the study of the society to scientific journalism. Obsessed with empirical data and conjunctural movements, they were so busy explaining the mere facts, that they lost sight of the underlying forces accountable for the genesis of the facts. A new class of social scientists emerged, as neurotically up-to-date people who follow what is going on but do not know what is happening. The historical insertion of social sciences into the envelopment process explains why, despite their best efforts, they were unable to address such a vital survival issue as development.

The development/envelopment paradigm opens up promising avenues. The history of the Caribbean should be understood as the clash between two opposing processes: envelopment, a modelling from outside and development, commanded by the inner clock; in other words, the forces of imitation versus the forces of creation. The merging of the

development/envelopment paradigm and the extradisciplinary method leads the way to joint action for a promising project for the future that can mobilise one's own social forces and potentialities in a conscious process of self-realisation.

Social reality is the point of departure for a theorisation that can only be understood as an intermediate phase of analysis that should culminate in development operating at the practical level. Only this de-academisation of the social sciences can overcome the dilemma of the academic tradition of addressing reality starting from theory only to arrive at yet another theoretical academic explanation that continues detached from practice. The extradisciplinary method eliminates the dichotomy between theory and praxis through social reality based research that is immune to the tyranny of academia or ideology. Development as a theoretical and practical paradigm is therefore based on the self-mobilisation of one's own capabilities in all spheres of social life, such as education, culture, economics, politics and democracy, in pursuit of one's own project to rescue the internal social dynamism.

The present should never be opposed to the past, because the contemporary is a special case of history that links our lived genesis and our present into future-oriented action. In looking toward the future, development is the only means of overcoming our condition of trailer society in the Caribbean, not as victims of a crystallised past, but as the protagonists of a future history. Nowhere else than in the future will be found the solidarity and identity of our peoples, since there is no way back to Africa, Europe or Asia, nor to indigenous peoples or maroons in the Amazon forest. There is never a way back for a people, since nostalgia always takes the opposite road to history, evolution, progress and self-realisation.

Development conceived from the new paradigm is a glimpse of the promising project of joint action, not to rescue origins, but to rescue the future, as an alternative to a globalisation that is driving us to extinction. These are the precious lessons of our genesis, always with our eyes fixed on our future project of development and self-realisation, instead of apathetically vacillating among the horrors of our genesis. Ruins are not to be mourned on, but to be built upon.

Free distribution with reference to source: www.crscenter.com