

# **DOMINANCE OF THE WEST OVER THE REST**

Just World Trust  
(JUST)



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## Preface

The authors of the essays that make up this volume have one thing in common. They are all friends of Mr. S.M. Mohamed Idris.

In fact, *Dominance of the West over the Rest* is dedicated to him.

It is, in a sense, altogether appropriate that a book which discusses the impact of the West upon the world should be dedicated to Idris. For Idris has, for at least four decades now, been deeply concerned about the negative consequences of Western dominance upon the rest of humanity.

It is a concern which has taken him to the helm of a number of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Apart from being Chairman of the Just World Trust (JUST), he is also the Co-ordinator of Third World Network (TWN) and, at the same time, President of both the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) and Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM).

His active involvement in these NGOs reflects an unswerving commitment to a just world - which he has always believed is only possible if Western global dominance is brought to an end.

The Just World Trust (JUST) expresses its deepest gratitude to all the paper-writers. In spite of busy schedules, they found the time to produce new papers or revise existing manuscripts. Many of the papers were written in 1994; others arrived in 1995. However, a few of Idris' friends who were invited to contribute were not able to make the deadline.

The sentiments expressed by the various paper-writers, it should be emphasised, do not necessarily represent JUST's views. Our contributors have elected to write on different themes of their own choice which are either directly or indirectly connected to the larger question of Western dominance.

The unenviable task of persuading contributors to send in their pieces - which takes up a lot of time in collective efforts of this sort - was left to Sanen Marshall, Deputy Co-ordinator (Publications), JUST. Without Sanen's energy and dedication which was of tremendous value at every stage in the preparation of the book, *Dominance of the West over the Rest* may not have seen the light of day.

Chandra Muzaffar  
1995  
*Director,*  
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July

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# 1

## Resisting the West's Intellectual Discourse

Claude Alvares

### Introduction

Turtles are important philosophical devices in India, where it is not human life alone that is vested with significance: after all, unlike Europe, we are not an anthropocentric culture by any stretch of the imagination. We accept readily that illumination or insights may come through fables and allegories. Further, in a conversation dedicated to a critique of the West's intellectual discourse, it would be surprising if I spoke in a language other than that of fables, proverbs and allegories.

I am aware that such fables and allegories have long since been driven out of modern scientific discourse which has not only wholly disenchanted nature but also disenfranchised large numbers of species and human beings and replaced them with the poverty of homogenised truths routinely tortured out of frogs or mice punctured or slaughtered mindlessly in laboratories. In fact, allegories are turned into objects, like anthropological myths, to be endlessly dissected and analysed even if by so doing one eventually misses the whole point of the fable and ends up simply with more dead frogs.

So there is this story about the Englishman who came to India to discover what the Indians had to say regarding the foundation of the universe and he was told that the universe rested on a platform. Not satisfied, he asked on what the platform rested. He was told the platform rested on the back of an elephant. And the elephant, on what did that stand on, he persisted? Why, a turtle, was the answer. And the turtle? On the back of another turtle. And that turtle?

'Ah, Sir,' was the reply, "after that it is turtles all the way down!"

This turtle tale is crucial for what I have to say here today on the subject of

knowledge and power. The West, which has apparently been a very powerful force/idea and a very powerful enforcer and advertiser of itself over the past couple of centuries, has created a vast corpus of knowledge about the world, about itself, about others.

This vast corpus does not hang in the air, but neither is it fixed by any thoroughgoing empiricism. It is rooted in certain assumptions. Assumptions are unprovable propositions. They allow us to do business but also in the process distort the way we look at things (We know that Western philosophers, notably the phenomenologists, attempted to get by the string of turtles and to do presuppositionless philosophising and failed).

Each way of knowing, each epistemology, has its own assumptions, which are like the turtles in the fable. A particular system of knowing rests on a platform of assumptions. The assumptions do not in turn rest on anything more concrete than other assumptions. Epistemologies, theories of knowledge, in their turn are profoundly limited by culture and therefore the charge that all sciences in a fundamental sense are ethno-sciences. This applies, of course, also to modern science otherwise known by its more ethnocentric label, Galilean science.

Over several centuries, the outward edifice of this elaborate system of knowledge - not the assumptions on which it was based - became so imposing and complex it was accepted as inevitable or scriptural by those societies that lived outside the borders of Europe and over which the West came to exercise political control. This acceptance in fact cannot be seen outside this framework or context of political domination and the new relationships established between the dominating and the dominated states or societies.

Thus, while most people know of the Francis Bacon principle that "knowledge is power", the reverse principle, power is knowledge, has been equally influential if less well known. Less inscrutably formulated, power (and not necessarily empiricism) decides and defines knowledge. Paul Feyerabend once recounted how a gaggle of Nobel Laureates issued a collective appeal against public belief in astrology. When asked, most of the Laureates admitted they had neither researched nor studied the subject. It was sufficient that they belonged to the intellectual ruling class, that they could issue statements of truth even if these were not based on statements of fact.

Prior to the intrusion of Europe into Asia, Africa and America, the societies living in these environments had erected their own systems of knowledge based on, if we can continue the imagery, their own turtles. They practised their own science, were proficient in metallurgy cured their sick, followed their own mathematical and logical systems. Transmission of this knowledge was partly through ‘oral tradition’ or as Ngugi wa Thiong’o calls it, “orature”. For example, Professor Wande Abimbola talks of several oral traditions of knowledge like the Mwindo epic of Central Africa, the Ozidi of Nigeria and the Ifa found in many West African societies. His work on the Ifa has established that this is an elaborate literary system based on 256 categories of knowledge dealing with history, religion, medicine, philosophy and science. The Ifa system functions thus both as a corpus of traditional African knowledge and as an academic system.

Much of this knowledge, some of it very practical, from the colouring of textiles to the technique of plastic surgery was, as I have shown in *Decolonizing History*, appropriated by Europe and made part of its own material life.

The intrusion of Europeans into such societies and the gradual establishing of political dominance by some over others stimulated the inauguration of a wholly new discourse about societies. Political dominance in fact came to be as routinely and unabashedly expressed in the form of knowledge as it was through the barrel of guns. We have shown in *The Blinded Eye*, that when Columbus and silk did not find the monstrous races they expected to find on the lands they landed on, they forthwith set about inventing them. Columbus dubbed the Taino and the Arawak ‘cannibals’ so he could claim they were inimical to Christianity and thus proceed to enslave or exterminate them.

Edward Said has already written controversially on the invention of the discourse called ‘orientalism’ and its direct political uses in controlling the East and the theme has been further documented by Rana Kabbani. But there are less controversial discourses that have had even greater repercussions that are only now being acknowledged and which include sociology, political science, psychology and art.

The reinvention of people and the downgrading of their epistemologies were both intimately related to the exercise of power: without the exercise of power

it would have been difficult to legitimatise such actions even in 16th century Europe. It was necessary to demonise and belittle the nature of those one wanted to exploit. Once you call a person a slave, you can exploit him. Before that you must be able to show, howsoever clumsily, that slaves are not human beings.

It has taken several decades of political independence for our societies in Asia, Africa and South America to begin to disengage their intellects from this Western knowledge system and to examine the assumptions on which it was and continues to be based. In fact, it has taken some time for us to even discover that there were any assumptions at all since we were told - and facilely accepted - that there were no assumptions, that this was all sheer empiricism, and a total allegiance to such empiricism - in which the West has naturally all the skills and competence - would enable the rest of us to become like the West: adult, normal, civilised, unIndian, unChinese, unKenyan and other classes of “un-ness”. (The assumption that white was virtuous and black was evil led to theories of blanching blacks to allegedly improve their virtue!)

Even today we are advised that we must accept modern science as an enterprise because it is based on facts and not assumptions, that the truths of modern science are non-negotiable, beyond culture, creed, colour and class. But we are also told to import Western sociology, historical perspectives, psychological discoveries and even write our stories in a dominant European language if we wanted them to be considered ‘ literature-, (There was no place for ‘ orature’ , for instance, in the new scheme of things). And while we plodded to digest the, truths already revealed to the West after sheer experiment in these faculties, the West, in the interests of humankind, was already far ahead up there, uncovering several more which we would be gainfully employed metabolising in the next generation.

There was widespread acceptance of the idea that the motive force channelling the continued progress of the human species was the self-propelled, inherent dynamism of the West. The West was the model in light of which everything else was to be eliminated or superseded. We, in our part of the world, had to suspend our own perceptions of reality, surrender our pharmacologies, empty our very minds. This was required because in the eyes of the ruling West, we were undeveloped, as undeveloped as little children. We had perforce to undergo the rigours of schooling in the dominant paradigm, learn

how to do sociology and political science, try to grow up into sound Westerners because nothing of our own cultures was of any value, except for anthropology.

Nobody would have objected to this mass slander if it did not have frightful consequences. Someone may have a wrong perception of you, but so long as it does not harm you in any way, the wrong remains an idle force. But in the case of the expansion of the Western model of intellectual, discourse, the results in fact were fairly obvious to all who wished to see.

If you take the single case of continental Africa, for instance, you can see the Western model as applied to Africa in all its tattered glory, having inflicted more damage to African society, economy and ecology than was possible during the colonial period or even the period of the slave trade.

For the past several decades, we have had so-called development in Africa, but Africa itself and the Africans themselves have mysteriously not developed. No African culture has emerged as a personality on the planetary stage. No knowledge comes out of Africa, but only the mind of the West in Africa is continuously disclosed in all its true incompetence and blundering. There is an African saying: 'When eggs and pebbles are put in the same basket, it is never the pebbles that break.'

The fact is that over the decades that Africa became independent, none of its languages, literatures, institutions, religions and systems of thought have had any impact on the social, political, economic and technological experience imposed on the continent. Islam and Christianity are recognised as religions in all constitutions, but no African religion gets that place since anthropologists have long since reduced African religion to folklore.

The discovery that any further importation of the West can only undermine the heritage, culture and being of Africa is now quite widespread. It has convinced thinking Africans that Africa would be not just better off, but well off, if the West, that is Europe and America, were collectively drowned in the Pacific.

But one may not have any sore feelings. This is the way it happened, and there is no question of blaming anyone or anyone feeling guilty about it all. The past cannot be changed, but our theory of karma informs us the past can rigorously determine the future unless we take steps. The future can be changed - it depends upon right action - and that is the most important lesson of

history as we know it.

Once the assumptions behind the West's intellectual discourse became known in all their grimy details, we found them unacceptable. Some of the intellect workers from our own countries might still stick to the European model, but the ordinary people have long since decided to ignore them and act on their own. It is now up to this intellect class to make up its mind: whether to sit on the fence, return to its people and their culture, or continue to suck up to the Western academic system and waste the rest of its time in diffusing the so-called wisdom of the centre.

We have come to an important crossroad. There is an African saying: "Beware of any goat you see in a lions den." After having wasted nearly half a century trying out half-baked ideas from people who understood nothing of either African culture, or Indian culture, or of Chinese or Arab culture, but who experimented because like the scientist standing over tiny laboratory mice, they had unaccountable power, we stand at a crossroad where we see the West is really a plague. Jalal Al-I Ahmad refers to a new disease, 'occidentosis', the plague of the West.

In the light of this debilitating illness which wishes to destroy our immune system and to replace it with foreign bodies, we feel the need to send Columbus packing back home. Not only the Columbus outside, but the Columbus within. It cannot be done in a year or two but may take a couple of decades. Once one is aware that the paradigm of knowledge is a result of political decisions, efforts to change it, modify it or reject it are inevitable. The Blacks of America once felt that slavery was their natural condition. Once awareness set in, the political relations had to be transformed and knowledge reflected this change of perception except for a few fossilised racist minds who are better relegated to museums.

Columbus died insane, but he was actually insane the greater part of his life: there is a permanent insanity loose in this appallingly aggressive system of knowledge that will not allow other people, other societies, other economies elsewhere to live in peace but must try constantly to impose itself or intervene or poke its fingers into business that is not its business. All in the pursuit of gold.

I have divided this lecture into three parts. In the first part, I want to examine these assumptions on which the West has constructed the elaborate



edifice of its knowledge system which for decades has been automatically imposed on us through our schools, universities, colleges and other institutions.

In the second part, I want to record a little of the revolt against modernity, against its reductionist perception of man and nature. I take modernity as a representative symbol of the way in which the dominant economic groups (inheritors of the mantle of Columbus) and the governments they control want this planet to be organised and run.

In the third part, I want to set out a concrete agenda that will enable us to redefine and realign the relationship between knowledge and power, to restore the suppressed knowledge of the powerless and to restrict the knowledge of the powerful. If I can get myself understood, forget about it being accepted at the moment, I shall consider my effort more than adequately compensated.

## **Part I: Power is Knowledge**

On the face of it, the dictum, 'power is knowledge' is hardly revolutionary. In India, power even went to the extent of keeping knowledge, actually preventing its spread to certain classes or groups of people. The Vedas in our country could not be read to women or those of the lowest castes. So it is not difficult to understand the intimate relationship that has always existed between knowledge and human interests.

What has emerged as remarkably new in the context of our discussion is the application of the principle to a new relationship which was established between politically unequal cultures, some dominating, the rest, dominated. This led to the invention of wholly new categories of knowledge, documented extensively not only in Edward Said's 'oriental discourse' but also in seemingly uncontroversial disciplines like anthropology.

As a result, much academic knowledge in circulation in the Western world about the rest of the world because it was the direct result of political overloading, was not only distorted but acutely contaminated by the ethnic concerns, goals, theories, obsessions, anxieties and peculiar assumptions and above all political goals of Western scholars and universities. It remains even today largely so defined, legitimised and decided by them irrespective of whether there is any concurrence from the objects of this discourse. But this is

inevitable for it has been created specifically for the purposes of the West and for the exercise of its power and dominion and only incidentally for application elsewhere. And here nothing has really changed from the days when Columbus set about reinventing the Arawak and the Taino - from people to slaves - as a prelude to demolishing them.

This then is the first assumption: because we were able to install ourselves as overlords of humankind, and because we invented modern science, our culture and its contents were the only ones that mattered. We not only decided what is acceptable knowledge and what is not; we defined the possible content of minds everywhere. This assumption which was based on denying the existence of minds outside the West, was even accepted passively by the ruled for several decades partly because they were not given too much of a choice in the matter. The ruled were reckoned to be equipped with a mental ability of children, in need of complete direction and civilisational guidance.

S.N. Nagarajan has summed up the entire discussion in a short series of irrefutable statements he made way back in 1987 in Penang, Malaysia: “What does the Western model really conclude about us?” he wrote.

1. Your crafts are useless.
2. Your crops and plants are useless.
3. Your food is useless.
4. Your cropping patterns and agricultural patterns are useless.
5. Your houses are useless.
6. Your education is useless.
7. Your religion and ethics are absolutely useless.
8. Your culture is useless.
9. Your soil is useless.
10. Your medical system is useless.
11. Your forests are useless.
12. Your irrigation system is useless.
13. Your administration is useless.
14. You are finally a useless fellow.

Nagarajan goes on to ask whether in such circumstances, Western science would not finally generate human bulls to produce half-breeds which

may be better than the native breeds.

There is in fact an interesting short story about precisely this prospect in Khamsing Srinawak's collection of *The Politician and Other Thai Stories*. The story, appropriately titled *Breeding Stock*, is narrated through the perceptions of a Thai village woman who is initiated by her forward looking husband into a series of new developments based on imported American technology. The first of these is the problem of the chickens: 'The Thai authorities have said that our Thai chickens are out of date; too small and the price is no good so we have to get roosters from America. Then, as America sends some breeding pigs, 'only a little smaller than our own water buffalo', it's the turn of the Thai sows. After that, it's the turn of the cows. This time the imported bull, giant of course, is accompanied by an American, 'enormous'.

'The Agriculture Officer said that the Government ordered these bulls from America because our own cows are good for nothing. They are old-fashioned, grow slowly, neither good for food nor work. And I suppose he's right.'

While the role of the bull is clear, the function of the American ('the size of him!') is not. So the woman asks whether 'they are sending him to our District.' To which her husband replies: 'No, they're just using him in Bangkok for the women there.'

'I feel sorry for those Thai cows', murmurs the woman. The story ends with the man grunting: 'Well, for Thai people too.'

There is an African saying: "Even if the hare is your enemy, you have to admit he's fast on his feet." But the West's intellectual discourse had decided that the total worth of whatever 'these other societies' had produced was precisely zero.

The point about this set of assumptions is that like all assumptions, it had really no empirical basis. It was not based on any empirical finding except a politically inspired dictum that this was so. No reasons were given except the historical fact of colonial defeat.

Now there is in the very same system of Western knowledge a fantastic and highly sophisticated debate on what constitutes objective knowledge. We in our part of the world have been given homilies for decades about the West's predilection for science and objectivity and how objectivity is good for progress and the reason the West has progressed is because of this in-built safeguard it

has worked out for correction of wrong hypotheses. But nothing of this discussion was made applicable to the West's knowledge about other societies.

The truth about the nature of the West's discourse on the rest of humankind might offend the West, but it offends truth even more.

Let me take you through some fine examples of Western scholarship and objectivity documented in my doctoral dissertation in 1976 in the area, for instance, of reporting on technological development in different societies. This dissertation was prepared within the portals of a Western technological university and I came through neither bloody nor bowed. I am selecting here for purposes of brevity the Western reporting on the technological abilities of different societies within the human family.

Most, if not all, available histories of technology have remained the work of Western scholars. This has afflicted these histories with certain methodological and other infirmities which have had the effect of reducing them to mythological works of a kind. This is especially so when they are studied with regard to aspects of the history of science, technology and medicine in the non-Western world.

For instance, there is this history of technology and engineering written by the Dutch historian, R.J. Forbes. Forbes's work appeared in 1950 under the title *Man the Maker*. In it, he conceded that technology was the work of humankind as a whole, and that 'no part of the world can claim to be more innately gifted than any other part.' A few years thereafter, Forbes produced his rich and prodigiously detailed *Studies in Ancient Technology* which set out a remarkable description of the different technologies of Asia, Africa, pre-Columbian America, and Europe.

However, it is in *The Conquest of Nature*, that his Eurocentric assumptions finally came to the fore: in that work, (and as the title itself indicates) Forbes went on to subsume the technological experience of people from diverse cultures under a philosophical anthropology that was unmistakably Western, if not Biblical: the domination of nature myth originating in Genesis. And after a discussion about the grievous consequences of a seriously flawed modern technology, he even proceeded to end his book promising redemption from the technological genie through the Christian event of Easter! How does one prescribe a text like this to Hindu, Confucianist or Muslim readers?

This distorted and distorting Eurocentric perspective continued to hold sway even over the more standard (five volume) *A History of Technology* edited by Charles Singer, E.J. Holmyard and A.R. Hall. The first volume of this work appeared in the same year as Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilization in China* and the editors themselves acknowledged that up to the period of the middle ages in Europe, China had the most sophisticated fund of technological expertise. Three of the Singer volumes dealt with pre-industrial technology where logically China (and India) should have been given major space and the Western technological development would have appeared in proper perspective in the nature of an appendix. However, Chinese, Indian and other technologies were completely ignored and Western technology made the only focus of the exercise.

I have given several more examples of this kind in *Decolonizing History*. Suffice it to say here that these histories which still have an honourable place in university libraries are permanent reminders that the scholars associated with them nonchalantly played their cultures political games, either knowingly or involuntarily. Either way, this seriously eroded the credibility of their work as it exhibited their own sorry commitment to objectivity, and in addition, demonstrated their general incompetence when called upon to deal with the subject matter as it related to societies other than theirs.

But these were not exceptions; they merely confirmed the rule - that our dominant descriptive and evaluatory ideas of technology, of the artifacts associated with culture, both in the Western and non-Western world, have been formulated over the past couple of centuries with reference to the West's experience of these phenomena. If the West were a worthy ideal, fair enough. But as we have shown in *The Blinded Eye*, the norm by which the West has allowed itself to be governed has retained a certain pathological tinge, its perceptions often clouded by hysteria. There is a persistent anxiety to reduce nature, species, people everywhere to this hellish perception of reality.

As far as studies on human beings themselves were concerned, power allowed this to be appropriately reflected in the emergence of two brand new profoundly anti-human sciences: the discipline of sociology which focused on members of so-called advanced societies in terms of statistical digits fixed in a language that can only be described as bordering on sorcery; and the subject of anthropology which occupied itself with non-Western cultures, limited to

cultures featured by primitive or pre-industrial tools. Anthropology's political origins have been rather unabashedly disclosed by Claude Levi Strauss in his controversial Smithsonian lecture:

“Anthropology is not a dispassionate science like astronomy, which springs from the contemplation of things at a distance. It is the outcome of a historical process which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other, and during which millions of innocent human beings have had their resources plundered and their institutions and beliefs destroyed, whilst they themselves, were ruthlessly killed, thrown into bondage, and contaminated by diseases they were unable to resist. Anthropology is daughter to this era of violence: its capacity to assess more objectively the facts pertaining to the human condition reflects, on the epistemological level, a state of affairs in which one part of mankind treated the other as an object.”

It is within such a power context that the histories, ideas and technological experience of non-Western societies could be written off or ignored: the latter, after all, were conquered peoples. And conquered people may not write history. When these cultural artifacts are seen through such an anthropological prism, the emerging picture is bound to be far removed in character from a scenario that emerges from even a sociological perspective. What is more, it is bound to be even more far removed from reality itself. But what was the Western perception of non-Western people prior to the invention of anthropology?

Immediately after the encounter commenced, the graph of European reaction rises with esteem and wonder; and then, as political conquest and overlordship increase, the graph alters course and begins to record increasing denigration instead. A remarkable transformation of image takes place as the political relationship between Europe and non-European societies changes to the advantage of the former, rendering the Europeanisation of the world picture almost an act of divine will.

Ashis Nandy has stated in his analysis of colonialism that colonial oppression damaged the souls of the colonisers as much as it damaged the minds of the colonised. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Western political dominance was clearly installing distorted ideas not only about the rest of the world but rebounding, to distort Western man's image of himself as well. By 1835, for instance, the British had acquired a flattering notion of their own

civilisation (Victorian England was seen to have reached the top of the pyramid of civilisation; just as Francis Fukayama today talks of American society as The Last Man) and a thorough going contempt for Asia and its intellectual products.

By the beginning of this century, the Western mind had already convinced itself that Western science, philosophy and religion were the only permissible human approaches to metaphysical truth ever attained by the human species and that the Christian religion provided wisdom and insight incumbent on all people everywhere to believe.

The result is reflected in the general output of academia: a “history of art” turned out to be nothing but a history of European art and a “history of ethics”, a history of Western ethics. While European music was music, everything else remained mere anthropology. The contemporary evaluation of human activity in the West as compared with the rest of the world’s peoples was unabashedly provided by the late Jacob Bronowski in the *Ascent of Man* (in words almost echoing Macaulay in 1837) where he asserted that Western man had reached the peak of human progress because he was “active” while his Eastern counterpart being passive had been left behind.

Now, there were obviously perverse consequences of such a view: scholars in several societies outside Europe schooled in an educational system imposed on their societies through the colonial establishment, readily incorporated similar ideas about their own histories. The colonisation project succeeded in convincing many of our intellectuals and scholars that only the West was active. They facilely accepted the idea that activity *per se* was desirable compared to judicious or necessary activity; that only the West was capable of thinking in the abstract sense. As Ngugi wa Thiong’ o concludes: “The final triumph of a system of domination comes when the dominated start singing its virtues.”

The new global knowledge system therefore merely required competent, hired disciples to diff-use its truths to those ignorant of them. This has become the dreary function of our educational systems. Whether it is geography or economics or sociology or psychology, the expansion of the West’s intellectual discourse has been seen in terms of a diffusion of knowledge from the centre to the peripheries. The main issues and controversies are debated in the centre; they are then transferred to the peripheries through texts and authors and subject to onward diffusion. No creativity flows backward from the periphery

since it is assumed none exists there at all.

Every Third World intellectual in every university or college, first-rate or third-rate, will admit without dispute that the fragmented bits and pieces of so-called knowledge he learns has been imported lock-stock-and barrel from some university abroad, designed by other minds, designed by minds for other contexts. If he does physics, this is related to some subject being done abroad. If he does psychology, it applies some theory from Europe or the USA. Nothing in the university system which he teaches is his own creation even in a superficial sense.

In such circumstances, it is far better to allow students access to pornography than to the weary and mediocre output of such a system of dependent knowledge, itself born out of rank academic prejudice, arrogance and scholarly deceit.

## **Part II: Resisting a Distorted Discourse**

It would indeed be surprising if all this politically instigated and highly distorted and self-promoting information regarding the intellectual discourse of the West and of the nature of the rest of humankind did not find any resistance whatsoever from any source. It did and continues to do so.

The revolt against the new modernity in fact first emerged within the Western world itself witness the Luddite movement and the heady history of the levellers recorded by Christopher Hill in *The World Turned Upside Down*: these movements provided ample proof that human beings were objecting to machines being made the measure of man. But the Luddite movement failed and what the Luddites had grimly forecast came to pass: the installation of vast production megamachines to which individuals and nature had to adapt or else exit.

In fact, the audacious application of the European model to societies outside Europe's borders could be attempted simply because it was first tried on the European population itself where it seemed to have succeeded quite well. The result had been a fairly homogenised individual; the reduction of its most important preoccupations to consuming in the supermarkets; and, finally, on its part, a total allegiance and respect for the machine.



From there, the mantle of rebellion fell on Tolstoy and Thoreau and Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi in 1908 wrote a tract called *Hind Swaraj*, in which he took apart bit by bit the entire edifice of, and assumptions on which, the Western civilisation stood, what it had to offer and where it would lead all those blinded by its superficial glamour. The little booklet is worth reading even today, almost ninety years after it was first written. In it Gandhi takes up for response all the questions that normal people advance about whether doctors are bad, and do lawyers serve any social purpose, is Parliament better than a gang of call-boys, should modern civilisation be the objective of all people everywhere?

Through his answers, Gandhi provided a searching critique of bourgeoisie civil society and its assumptions as he knew it - particularly its English variant - and rejected the very idea that Hindustan (India) must eventually become a copy of Englishstan. He declared that modern civilisation and its perceptions of nature were abhorrent to the well-being of people not just in India but in Europe itself. He also concluded that “deportation for life to the Andaman (islands) is not enough expiation for the sin of encouraging European civilisation.”

Gandhi took, as was his wont, a frank, open, seemingly confrontationalist view of these developments. Others dissented, but refused to participate in voicing their dissent. Ashis Nandy has recorded in *The Intimate Enemy* that there was an acute methodological difficulty in participating in debates about the desirability of European ideas. Those who responded had to do so using the categories offered by those organising the debate itself. This category he called “the players”.

But there were those who refused to enter the debate simply because the categories in which the debate was being held set the limits and direction of the debate and precluded entirely the presentation of an alternate or rival set of assumptions. These he called, the “non-players”. They comprised not just traditional leaders (in Africa, for instance, called keepers of tradition), but the common people as well. It is to this massive category of people that we owe the continuing vivacity of tradition, of Africanness or Indianness or Chineseness. It is they who have protected ways of life that are in complete disregard of what Gandhi identified as “bourgeois civil society”.

In the post-colonial period, inaugurated approx. fifty years ago, circumstances permitted a new set of direct responses including open warfare

against the ruling European paradigm. Over the past five decades, we have had no world wars, but all one has to do is to look around the planet to observe a world war of massive proportions taking place on a daily basis. I have called these “development wars”.

In wars, as we understand them, there is destruction, bloodshed, displacement of people, misery, even while one group may emerge victorious. These features are all present in today’s development wars with one vital difference: in earlier wars, not much damage was intentionally done to normal economic life including the production of food. Today the development war is based on a direct assault on subsistence and food production and the numbers of victims is therefore in the millions.

In Goa, where I come from, our people have resisted the efforts of DuPont to raise a Nylon 6, 6 factory (the largest in Asia) because it would disrupt their lifestyles and their environment. Here too one person died and two women had their thighs smashed by police guns. In today’s world which is run according to the dictates of the Western model, those who do not use resources according to Western wisdom or the second Law of Thermodynamics have no right to sit on such resources and must make way for more efficient processors. The Western model is simply incompatible with the lifestyles of people from other traditions. In many places, people refuse to make way. They fight. Sometimes they lose. Very often, they also win.

Thus there has been considerable resistance to the ideas, projects, programmes, ways of being and doing, and to even the God of the West. (For three centuries, a grandiose effort was made to convert the Hindus, for instance, to Christendom. The effort turned out to be one of the most abysmal failures of history). That this is the way to order nature, ecology, economy, society - and that this should be done because it is allegedly superior - has been rejected a thousand million times.

In *Decolonizing History*, I have made the suggestion that cultures are incommensurable - one culture cannot be said to be (or assumed to be) superior to another. There is no independent measure in relation to which all cultures can plausibly and necessarily be pitted for comparison and for eliciting a record of merit or debility. Cultures may be criticised only from the standpoint of the values and ideals they say they stand by. They cannot be criticised or judged

from the viewpoint of values and ideals of another society howsoever superior that society may consider itself.

The most important point I want to make here (and this is clear from the examples that I have given of resistance) is that the undermining of the Western model did not come from the University because the University whether in the US, India or Africa is an invention of the model and intimately dependent on it for its system of rewards. This is primarily the reason for the complete irrelevance of the university institution based on the Western system of knowledge. It has been planned to act as a diffuser of ideas it receives from the centres of power in the West. As presently constituted, it cannot act as an independent progenitor of ideas. For this one has had to move to artists, writers, poets and thinkers like Gandhi and Mumford, and to more marginal groups like tribals and peasants.

### **Part III: Agendas for Research**

So what then is a possible agenda in the circumstances. While the tribals; and the peasants and the small fishermen will continue their direct fight against the Western way of organising nature and their lives - one world pitted against the other - some agendas have been suggested by a whole class of interesting actors to which I shall now turn.

Almost my best example is that of the African writer, Ngugi wa Thiong' o. He wrote his first novels in English and then formally stopped and switched to *Kikuyu* for all his subsequent literary works. This act of delinking at once freed his mind, enhanced his creativity and finally placed him outside the pale of European domination and interference since Europe no longer had direct access to his work. Ngugi wa Thiong' o has raised all the issues connected with an African writing in an African language in his book of essays, *Decolonizing the Mind*.

A group of Asian intellectuals recently met in Kuala Lumpur and decided to write a manifesto in which they would publicly declare their refusal to use any further any material or thinker or book or author from the West simply because they were convinced that the Western intellectual discourse was wholly unreliable, dishonest, racist and too closely identified with the economic and

political projects of Western economies. The group saw their declaration as an important effort to regain the creativity they had lost, and will continue to lose, as long as they remain linked to the Western academic system.

But this delinking must also lead to selective abrogation of allegiance to some of the 'normal' sciences as well. For instance, now that the assumptions of anthropology has been openly declared, it is important to consider whether anthropology may be allowed at all, a university system which has become aware of the implications might be well advised to shut down its anthropology department.

There is also another prospect which might be more attractive in the present circumstances: reverse anthropology. Keenly interesting are some fine examples of writing in this direction. The East has been studied, the South has been studied, and we feel as sore as mice in a laboratory. But 'orientalism' can be countered by an equally trenchant 'occidentalism', in which the West and its symbols can be used as a largely negative basis for reasserting one's own heritage. Despite persistent exposure to the so-called superiority of the West for several centuries, few in the rest of the world would consider themselves flattered if they were to be called Westerners. Examples of a critical Europology would include the works of J.P.S. Uberoi, Ashis Nandy and Susantha Goonatilake.

Recent efforts in the direction of such a reverse anthropology have upset the West which does not like being studied as the subject of a reverse anthropology. I refer to Nsekuye Bizimana, a veterinarian from Rwanda, who wrote, "*White Paradise.- Hell for Africa*, a steaming critique of life in Europe, particularly Germany. It thoroughly upset the Germans. Recently, an Indian researcher studying in Denmark, upset the Danes by writing a book, *The Danes Are Like That?* It provided some anthropological insights into Danish life which the Danes did not want broadcast or which they found unpleasant or disturbing. But for the 500 years that the rest of the world was heaped a barrel full of the worst possible pejoratives to be found in any thesaurus, no objection was expected since they were basically objects, like stones, dead, and dead men will not react even if they are kicked.

What I rudely suggest will be seen to have pernicious consequences for the unity of man, for it is bound to generate a schism between cultures. However, it

is pointless to pretend the schism does not exist and that, at the present moment, it appears reparable.

As the diversity of human beings is sought to be replaced by the homogeneity of Europe, we may pause to examine what this means. In Europe itself this drive had led to a profound dreadfulness - in the form of the pointless drive for productivity, efficiency and economic achievement which we in our part of the world resist because we find it culturally abhorrent, politically repulsive and humanly unacceptable.

After decades of the project called development we have come to the conclusion that the kind of organised life and living modern technology demands are inappropriate for human beings anywhere. This was Gandhi's truth. The reduction of human beings to abject consumers on the one hand and 'productive' and 'efficient' cogs in a mindless machine, both seem an affront to human history as we have known it for centuries.

Our true freedom can only come when we are permanently liberated from any further imposition of Europe's image of us on us and of its models on our ways of thinking. An African saying holds: 'When there is a head, you don't put a hat on the knee.' Till we get that freedom (and no freedom comes gift-wrapped, but must be fought for), we who today reject the invitation to be first-class, second-class or third-class Europeans or Americans, will reject the unity of man as well.

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## 2

# The Metamorphoses of Colonialism

Jeremy Seabrook

The creation of a working class in the early industrial era involved a breaking of the sensibility of an agricultural population, the reworking of the psyche of a people whose lives were articulated to the rhythms of the seasons, and the refashioning of that sensibility in the interests of organised manufacture. This inflicted great violence on the people, who were uprooted and disoriented by processes never known before. The number of lunatic asylums in England and Wales increased from around 40 at the end of the 18th century, to over 4000 in the 1840s; evidence of the coercive, driven changes to which they were exposed. The imposition of alien values and ways of life was experienced as dispossession; it was, in its way, a form of proto-colonialism.

That this occurred simultaneously with the expansion of empire is not fortuitous. The holding down of the indigenous populations of empire was similar to the containment by force of the restive peoples at home -the domestic penal code, with its large number of trivial capital offences, the Combination Acts, the readiness with which transportation was resorted to in Britain - suggest that there was little more tenderness for the domestic working class than there was for the inhabitants of those outlandish places to which Britain took the shining light of its civilisation. Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century, explicit connections were made between Darkest London, the unexplored life of the poor in the manufacturing districts, the strange half-wild inhabitants of the mining areas, and the occupants of those more distant lands usurped by Britain for its plans of perpetual expansion and growth. Both at home and abroad, the people were seen as violent, intractable, not amenable to forms of civility and culture which emanated only from the ruling castes and their subordinates.

The most urgent issue became the pacification of the refractory domestic population; not least because, over time, many came to feel their kinship with the oppressed, subjugated peoples of the empire. When Gandhi visited the East End of London in the twenties, he was greeted as a hero.

The application of some of the surplus gained from overseas served to attach the British working class, both to its betters and to acquiescence in the necessity of empire. The appearance among the poorer classes of small luxuries, consolations and addictions, most of them the fruits of colonial appropriation, were ideal for this purpose. From the earliest imperial excursions, the produce of those countries were significant in placating the people. For instance, so great had become the dependency upon tea, that poor families who couldn't afford it, poured boiling water on crumbs of blackened toast, to simulate the colour of tea. The presence of tobacco, snuff, pepper, rum, coffee, chocolate, rice for milk-puddings, and later, tinned tropical fruits, especially pineapple and peaches, the existence of nutmeg, cloves for toothache and apple pies, laudanum for calming children, and cheap canned meat and fish, corned beef - all contributed, however modestly, to a growing sense of well-being within an otherwise still impoverished working class life.

The forcible extraction of such commodities, along with many others from the empire, particularly what were seen as "raw materials" for industrial expansion, formed the rudiments of another form of colonisation of the people of the West themselves; what was to become the most comprehensive pacification of all, the culture of consumerism. The old working class sensibility - created with such severity and violence - was destined to be broken once more, and recreated in the image of the merchandising of commodities. That this appeared a less brutal breaking and reconstruction of the psyche is an illusion: its consequences may be read in the indices of unhappiness in the Western heartlands in the second half of the 20th century - crime statistics, addictions, the breakdown of relationships, the dissolution of family, fear of strangers, xenophobia, racism, assaults upon women and children, mental and emotional stress, streets deserted to the predations of robbers, muggers, vandals and molesters. These are not manifestations of "human nature", in the narrow, reductive version of this now invoked by capitalist ideology; they are the results of destructive and coercive social change.

In this way, domestic and foreign colonialism are far more connected than



has been hitherto thought. The resonances are more clear, the relationship closer, the echoes and correspondences startling.

What the West practised abroad to such effect faltered in the mid-twentieth century, as the subjugated lands fought for, and won their freedom. The experience acquired from this upheaval was, however, repatriated, and reapplied at home with great care and skill. This time, so successful has been the domestic achievement, that it is now being re-exported again, in a far more systematic and efficient way, to the once-free sovereign states of Africa, Asia and South America; this time, in the guise of economic reform packages, where the West appears now as bringer of enlightenment, charity and humanity, promising to share with its sometime captive subjects the secrets of its wealth-creation. This fresh mutation makes all earlier colonial experiments seem crude and archaic.

The classic version of imperialism, as practised by the Europeans in the 19th century involved the crushing and denial of the identity of the colonised. Indigenous values, culture, tradition were interiorised, diminished, forbidden expression. Attempts were made to substitute the values and beliefs of their masters, the better to gain acceptance for the imposition of their will. Movements for independence and liberation involved a popular recuperation and revalidation of this undermined sense of self.

The trophies of empire ornament the museums and national shrines of Britain, France, the Netherlands - the jewels, artefacts, works of craftsmanship, treasures and booty plundered from the occupied territories were the tangible emblems of their enrichment. But the Western imperium took other lessons from its piratical excursions across the world which have proved to be even more enduring treasures. It is these which have been applied AT HOME, within the past forty years or so; a process which more or less coincided with the dissolution of the old empires.

In the West, we have seen a colonising of the supposed beneficiaries of empire, the people of the West itself; those who once formed a dangerous and threatening working class, those whose destiny formerly appeared to be a continuous impoverishment that could be terminated only by their own seizure of the agency of their dispossession. The pacification of the people in the West has been accomplished with even greater thoroughness and systematic attention

to detail than anything which occurred in the sometime colonies.

For in the countries of the West, all cultural identity has been pared away; not crushed and denied, but reduced, interrupted, as it were, at source. Individuals (oh, cherished individual, beloved of the West!) have been cut down to their most irreducible characteristic - there is nothing more basic than being black or white, female or male, old or young, gay or straight. This process has been accompanied by a "freedom of choice", the more resonant because it means the freedom to reconstitute a cultural identity which has been removed from us; and that process of reassembling the fractured identity is through buying in all the precious, given, cultural features that ought to have been our birthright, the gift of all earlier generations to its children. These transmissions have been halted, interrupted. The identities which might have been constituted through them have been peeled away; the shared culture has melted down, and the individual, alone, naked, stripped of all attributes, is invited to "choose" whatever she or he wants in order to make whole the aching absences and voids, the spaces occupied by what has been taken for granted in all other societies, all other cultures. In this sense, the more obvious violence of the assault upon the identity of people in the former occupied territories has been avoided. Children have been the objects of a vast effort of deculturation, erasure, obliteration of the cultural attributes of region, locality and function, the better to be invaded by market culture, money-culture, the buy-in ethic.

Identity, mangled in this way, desegregated and dispersed, must then be reassembled in a kind of do-it-yourself socialisation, a sort of Lego of the spirit. Having been cut down (to the dimensions of individual), robbed of collective, solidaristic, shared features, we stand naked, shivering, wretched, before the array of commodities, services, adornments, experiences, sensations of the global marketplace; freedom indeed.

In the market we find, not only the displaced, objectified features of our own culture, but all the ornaments and plunder that have been taken from others all over the globe. This is another way in which western economic colonialism links our destiny with that of the poor of the earth: they must be dispossessed of their necessities that we might acquire ours; even though our necessities are filtered now through an elaborate, cumbersome mechanism of provision that makes them so much more difficult of attainment (and so much more expensive.) Socialisation in our culture means orgiastic merchandising. Children

- to whom our most valuable and priceless bequest should be the rootedness of who they are - are invited to be what they want, who they choose; but what they want and who they choose must be mediated through the markets. This is why so many parents have an obscure sense of their own deskilling; and find they are enabling agents, increasingly agitated at the periphery of their children's progression through time, desperately seeking to provide them with what they want; and what they want exists in the overwhelming inputs, to use a term from the economic system which supplies them, to their sensory apparatus. Since the abduction and murder of the toddler in Liverpool in February 1993, the shopping malls have been haunted by a poignant spectacle: parents attached to their children by reins, leashes, pieces of plastic tied to the wrist of the parent and the wrist of the child. This physical tying is metaphor; for the truth is that as the infants are walked around the shopping spaces, they are actually in the presence of the commodities which will be the means whereby they become separated from their parents; their appetites and expanding needs are fed there; the needs which have to be bought in, and which the parents in their love will strive desperately to provide, are also a form of estrangement, a kind of abduction of the spirit, of the heart.

Alien values are implanted into the lives of the people, precisely through the children; alien, not merely in the sense of foreign or exotic, but alien to humanity: a commerciogenic identity is formed. At first it was partly resisted, but with time, it became more and more acceptable, until it has now become a major determinant on the lives of the young, displacing all earlier forms of acculturation, other ways of answering need, other ways of being in the world. This process of forgetting, beyond recall, but perhaps not quite beyond reclamation, is a form of colonialism far more effective than that which held so much of the world in thrall in an earlier empire.

The colonised people of the West have been so deeply installed within its compulsions that they can no longer name it, or recognise it for what it is. They have been the minor beneficiaries of an imperial project upon which they have become so dependent, and by which they have been so depowered, that they are unable to identify with resistances and freedom struggles that occur elsewhere in the world. The serviceable distraction of racism acts as a further impermeable barrier to recognition, to perceiving the sameness of the processes which unroll globally, as they once unfolded domestically within any one of the

so-called metropolitan countries.

This colonialism, like any other, involves an abridgement of freedoms, an undermining of autonomy; but since these things do not acknowledge themselves, all the protests at it come out in deviant, symbolic and involuted ways - like crime, “mindless” or arbitrary violence, addiction, social and emotional dislocation. All these can be ascribed to defective or faulty individuals, and are not properly located in the economic and social processes which are no longer, within the colonised universe, biddable, or even, within this enclosed, fabricated cosmos, susceptible to human intervention.

This colonialism substitutes the distant, the remote, the centralised for all that is local, domestic and familiar. In the towns and cities of the Western world, the people haunt the shopping centres, because these are the bringers of answers, both surrogate and real, to need. Fewer and fewer basic necessities are provided locally. Almost nothing is any longer produced, created, or made where it is needed; but must be brought in; and because these have become the constituents of young identities, the children see their formation as coming from elsewhere. No wonder they say there is nothing to do in the places where they live; they say they are bored, uninterested; teenagers cannot wait to get away, to grow up, to leave home, to get away, to escape; above all “to find themselves”; selves dispersed and untraceable in the markets that have become the dominant agent of their dispossession.

In the reconstitution of the shattered identities of the people in the West, we acquire an increasingly oppressive clutter of experiences, sensations, commodities which weighs down the spirit, and burdens the individual with its freight of inert, borrowed, exogenous symbols; all is external. It is not surprising if so many people complain they feel empty inside.

For we have been the sites of battles that are not ours; we bear the scars of obliterations and uprootings that can be more or less healed only by trying to keep pace with, the buying back of our expropriated substance: that means through a kind of leaseback a buying in of needs that can now be answered only in one way, that is the market. This is truly, in spite of its sham and shadow diversity, a monoculture. Indeed, it also helps to explain the meaning of poverty, despite the excess of wealth in western society in the last half century: poor are those who, fashioned for a dynamic and ever more penetrating buy-in culture,

do not have the means even to begin to keep pace with the rate of their expropriation, of that which is being taken away from them.

The industrialised world has for 200 years subjected its own peoples to a long and persistent development that has taken a single direction: the extirpation of all previous ways of answering need and its supersession by the market. It is no wonder that we invest the market with a veneration bordering on idolatry, and see it as vehicle of salvation, arbiter of destiny and embodiment of morality. Not for the first time, human beings make a cult of that which is destroying them, even as the wealth accumulates around us, and the iconography of luxury and ease bid us assent to the endless expropriations to which our daily experience is witness.

For the development of this alien culture leads to a paradox: I which is that the process that robs and removes from our own grasp our capacity to do and make and answer need for ourselves and each other itself becomes a culture in the end; and what is more, one that now seeks to extend its imperium once more, in what it calls a single global economy. There is something infinitely malleable, mobile, inventive about this nimble colonialism, ripe for export once more; in the seductive guise of an iconography of luxury and ease which is now projected electronically across the world, and in which the depowering and dispossessing core is dissimulated in the exotic paraphernalia of consumption and enjoyment.

This is how the West is now ready for its next major assault on a backward, impoverished, helpless, depowered, dependent, corrupt, venal Third World. First time around, it was all a little too crude. Now, refinements of technique have been long practised at home. Expansion is on the agenda once more, this time into the almost limitless territories of heart and spirit and mind. What vistas beckon; what uncharted continents are ripe this time for the explorers and adventurers, the merchant princes, the colonisers and buccaneers. All earlier conquests look archaic and clumsy beside this newest Mutation of domination. The objects of this new phase of empire building welcome it with open arms; old freedom struggles melt away, old nationalisms are forgotten; ancient antagonisms laid to rest. This is the triumphal march of western wealth, the most powerful colonising agent of all, its promises, its worldwide iconography of liberation; for it promises emancipations undreamed of in all previous partial, discredited and fallen ideologies of deliverance.

The undermining of the reluctantly conceded political freedoms to the peoples of Africa and Asia makes them ready once more to accept new prescriptions emanating from the heart of the imperium.

Of course, the simplicity of the underlying dynamic is not expressed in this way. It must be embodied in far more mystifying and convoluted forms. And what more opaque and impenetrable than the dazzling mirrors of Western economic success, the light from which appears to have blinded a majority of the world's leaders to the impossibility, the non-replicability of the Western economic system.

It is no accident that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund became the agencies whereby Western mirages of wealth have been exported to the South; any more than that the GATT negotiations, with the new monster to which it is to give birth, the World Trade Organisation, should have been the means of institutionalising the global inequalities which the West has no real intention of changing. Alas, those who have power in the world, have rarely forborne to use it, and have seldom hesitated to assert their supremacy over those whose lives they control; and in this, Western magnanimity to the poor should not be taken at face value.

The euphoria in the West over the "successful outcome" of the Uruguay Round was well founded. For this represents perhaps the greatest triumph yet in five centuries of imperial conquest, and apparently without bloodshed. For the West, by the relentless projection of its affluence and wealth around the world, has now induced the countries of the south to AUTOCOLONISE in its interests.

The GATT agreement merely formalises what has long been an established reality: the governments of the South are ready to police their own people in the interests of the global possessing classes.

Do the governments of the South know what they are doing? Are they willing parties to these alien interests? Or are they acting in good faith, accepting at face value the blandishments of the West?

Of course, no government is going to admit to being coerced, bullied or blackmailed, because it is not in the nature of governing bodies, ruling elites or dominant cliques to admit error. But all over the South governments admit the truth, when they say "We have no choice but to be part of the global trading

system”. For to have no choice is to be unfree. But that they will never concede. Hence, they are compelled to rationalist.

Since their own interests are never at stake - foreign bank accounts in safe havens abroad see to that - governments have a powerful incentive to justify their choiceless policies. And after all, no evil in human history has ever been so monstrous that it was unable to summon supporters among the great and the good, who have rushed to demonstrate why it was both moral and necessary. The slave-owners, for instance, described slavery as morally superior to free labour, saying that the slave-owner had a direct interest in maintaining his slaves in a condition that rendered them fit to perform their daily tasks adequately, which no mere payer of wages was under any obligation to do.

And so it is with those who have led the people of Brazil, the Philippines, the Ivory Coast, Kenya, India, and all the others into new forms of bondage.

To autocolonise means to impose upon one's own country an economic model imported from elsewhere, a model that is not in the interests of a majority of the people. What the West once applied by force to the entire imperium under its rifle, the rulers of the South will now willingly practice against their own people.

The enormous advantage to the West of autocolonisation is obvious, because it can dissociate itself from the cruelties this in and especially from the inevitable violence that must follow. The governments themselves will now have to carry full responsibility for what will happen.

Autocolonisation is a far more subtle and palatable project than those special relationships with Western-friendly dictatorships in the 1970s: the TV images of popular uprisings against a Marcos, a Pinochet or a Viola were too disturbing. Whatever occurs now will take place under democratic regimes, so no one can accuse the West of installing its surrogates in foreign capitals.

The truth is, however, that the laws of India, of Thailand, of Malaysia, of Venezuela, of Peru, of Ghana, have now been superseded by the superior laws of the market, and they must incline themselves accordingly. Perhaps the most tragic recent example is South Africa, whose heroic liberation struggle has delivered the people to a freely elected government which has been obliged to, promise to conduct its affairs by “sound market principles”.

The market now has prior claim to the resources of India and elsewhere,

over and above the needs of the millions of people whose cry existence depends upon their access to those same resources. They will have to be dispossessed of what they had always considered their heritage. A recent World Bank report on poverty put it [ore tactfully, when it stated that growing numbers of the rural )or migrated to the cities. This means that industrialised agriculture will continue to deprive people of their traditional livelihoods; people who will then be expected meekly to uproot themselves and gone, to add, no doubt to the slum populations of such agreeable urban environments as Calcutta, Bogota or Nouakchott.

But because subsistence farmers, fishing communities and indigenous peoples can see no other future than in the ecological niches re they have worked for centuries, they will resist violent displacement by “economic forces.” The term is apt: economic forces an invisible army of occupation, forcibly evicting whole communities from settled ways of life, from their sole means of survival. When the people resist, the sophisticated weaponry of the modern state will be deployed against them. An obliging and craven media will call the people terrorists, unsocial elements, Naxalites, Communists, and will applaud the repression that follows.

Nor is this some remote future scenario. It already occurs routinely. Human rights are, in fact, the first casualty of this economic war, a war not made by the poor, but one for which they are universally blamed and criminalised. The abuse of human rights is built into the supremacy of the rights of the market. No amount of specious theorising about the market economy having some “ultimate” goal of plenty for all can conceal the reality that wealth is not created by miracles, but by exploitation, sweat, coercion and blood.

Of course, autocolonisation is accompanied by a seductive lexicon of big words borrowed from Western ideological creditors “liberalisation”, “efficiency”, “upgradation of technology.” These all have their shadow meanings - efficiency at disemploying people, the degradation of traditional and ecologically benign skills. As for “liberalisation”, can anyone looking at India or Thailand or the Philippines really believe that more insecurity, lower wages and unemployment for those already on the edge of survival is really what a needy, wanting population needs most?

The lessons of all this have not, however, been lost upon the peoples of the



unhappy countries now experiencing the rigours; of autocolonisation. In India, for example, the resistance is coming from where the pressure is greatest. The popular movements which are now placing the right to life at the forefront of their concerns are on the strongest ground: this is one of the fundamental issues raised by the Narmada Bachao Andolan; what is the point of the West preaching human rights to those whose right even to exist is snuffed out at source?

Those actively fighting to retain control over the resource-base upon which they depend are equally in the forefront of resistance. The Chilka Bachao Andolan (Save Chilika Movement) for example, comprises two hundred thousand people living around the magnificent brackish-water lake in Orissa, who are defending their way of life against export demand for industrially cultivated prawns.

Then there are those resisting the next phase of colonial penetration, like the farmers of North Karnataka. With their seed “satyagraha”, the farmers have affirmed their right to store, maintain and develop seeds, independently of the market and of Western-dictated intellectual property regimes.

All over India - and indeed in every country under this new tyranny disguised as benevolence - opposition to these developments is stirring: from the Chattisgarh liberation movement, with its noble endeavour of employment and sufficiency for all, to the innumerable local fights by women against liquor.

Indian leaders will set their face against all such movements. Indeed, it is within the logic of the system they have embraced that such struggles be suppressed. Several leaders of people's organisations have been beaten up, threatened with death, and in the case of Niyogi in Chattisgarh, and human rights lawyers in Andhra Pradesh, murdered.

This, then, is the battleground determined by the autocolonisers on behalf of their absent, unseen masters. The outcome of this new twist in the long history of domination remains to be seen. Nothing, however, is static in human affairs. Certainly, autocolonisation presents a difficult task to those who seek liberation, in both the West and the South; for whoever heard of liberation struggles against democratically elected governments?

Yet this is the paradox for many people in the world now. As the interests of leaders and people diverge more dramatically, dissent and resistance will

increase. The autocolonisers should understand that if things go wrong for them, the West, which has lured them into the present predicament, will not come to their aid. The Western countries will be too preoccupied maintaining such social peace as they can with their own fractious, rising, popular opposition at home.

# 3

## Post-modernism, Post-colonialism and the Social Construction of Beauty

John C. Raines

It is said, “beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” But what shapes the beholder’s eye? How is the space of seeing and being seen constructed?

We meet this morning in a place called “Southeast Asia.” What are we “east of”, “south of”? From the point of view of Tokyo, we would be better named “Southwest Asia.” From the point of view of Johannesburg, we should be called “Northeast Asia.” But we are called, and we call ourselves “Southeast” Asia.

We all know why. It is the continuing legacy of 300 years of European colonialism, a colonialism which placed itself at the centre of world reality, and then proceeded to map the rest of the world, both in terms of its geography and its time, from that Eurocentric perspective. At this very moment our watches are set to what is called “Greenwich Mean Time” - the International Date Line in the Pacific Ocean is set exactly twelve hours, in either direction, from Greenwich, *England*.

Post-modernism criticises this kind of unreflectively utilised language. Post-modernism seeks to unveil language that universalises, language that pretends to name reality from a neutral, objective perspective. Post-modernism is of help in the post-colonial task. It criticises those who speak, like the media in my own country and also the media here in Malaysia, of a “First World” and a “Third World” Post-modernism names this language, the language of colonialism, language which in our speaking and hearing of it constructs the world as a world of linear time and space, a mono-directional world.

I have been speaking of speaking. But this morning my intent is to problematise our way *of seeing and of being seen*, and thus our way of naming what is “beautiful.” I want to problematise this space of seeing and being seen not in general but in the specific way in which “feminine beauty” and “the look of success” are socially constructed today here in Malaysia. I shall argue that in the eye-of-advertising success and beauty remain largely a colonialisd space, a space in which the “first world” still remains first - still remains a space to be emulated, a space to be imitated, a space whose definition of beauty is to be everywhere impersonated. And I shall ask, what then is the task of post-colonialism?

### **Seeing is Political**

In our everyday way of speaking, the eye seems to hold a privileged position. We say, for example, “at last we see eye-to-eye” as if reaching a common seeing of something has brought an end to lack of clarity. In fact most of our seeing in the everyday world is a seeing of things **in common**. In conversation we make words together but we also make gestures together. Usually, we do this gesturing activity so unproblematically that we aren't conscious of seeing them. It is only when the other “surprises” us by an ill-timed or a poorly performed gesture that we suddenly “see” the other, over there, gesturing so awkwardly at us. At that moment our seeing comes into sight. What is it that we see in such moments?

Seeing is like speaking in that both are *interpretive* behaviour. Both are socially mediated. We do not see light waves; we see meanings. And the meanings we see are socially constructed. And now the crucial point, what is socially constructed always reflects how power is distributed and used in society. Which means that seeing is political.

But it is easier to see that in what we say than to see that in what we see, because modern critical theory has deconstructed language but has spent little effort deconstructing what we might call “the common gaze.” Today, I shall seek to problematise our way of seeing by analysing how seeing is socially constructed in terms of gender, and how this gendered gaze reflects how power is deployed and used in society. Next, I shall further problematise this now gendered gaze by analysing the practice of advertising here in Malaysia, and

how “feminine beauty” is constructed here in such a fashion as to reflect and also to reinforce a continuing Western cultural colonialism.

Let us think about seeing and being seen. Let us think about what we may call “the politics of the-body-as-seen.”

I both *am* my body, and also *have* my body. I am a determinate perspective upon the world. I stand at the front of the classroom and see students in front of me and behind them a white-painted wall. The students see me seeing them, and see behind me that symbol of authoritative knowledge - a wall-long blackboard. I have to turn around if I am to see what they see. I am a particular perspective upon the world around me. I *am* my body; it is my placement in and orientation towards the world.

But I also “have” my body. Usually, I don’t notice this. Usually, I move from my “insides” out into the world in an unproblematic way. I walk towards others as they walk towards me: each of us approaching the other unproblematic, comfortably at rest within our routinised walking. But suddenly I hit a slippery spot on the sidewalk. My arms fly up. My books pitch through the air. I catch the glance of those approaching - first surprise and worry, then the briefest hint of humour. I have been thrown back upon myself. I am caught, exposed. The body I am is the body I see others seeing me have, or better, seeing me *having to have*. And I have lost control.

We live our body from inside-out. But the *meaning* of my body - body as routine, body as unproblematic, or suddenly body as awkward and humiliating - this meaning is assigned to my body by the other who watches me. The French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre once said: “I keep getting stolen from myself by the other person’s eyes!”

Our bodies are public. We perform our body according to the cultural script. We dress ourselves in the morning as male or female-almost always according to how our culture defines the dress of male and female. The way we walk, the way we talk, the immediacy or distance that we take up in the expressivity of emotion, the amount of eye contact we give or do not give and how we give it (solid and steady or glancing and dancing), the amount of teeth we show or do not show in smiling, how our hands touch or do not touch our hair - this elaborate dance we do together in public space, a dance our glances record in minute detail - all of this is *gendered*, inscribed with how our culture

instructs us to perform our body, as male and female. And that instruction reflects how power operates in society.

Body-black, body-white, body-brown; body-old, body-young; body-fat, body-thin; body-beautiful, body-ugly - these are all *meanings* assigned to us by our culture. They are cultural interpretations projected upon our bodies. And we did not choose them -either our body or the meanings assigned to our- body! We find ourselves already in the midst of these meanings before we even became aware of ourselves. Astonishingly, our body seems to belong first to others, and not “just intimate others but to the “generalised other” of our culture.

Post-modernism teaches us to ask, how did I come to dress this way? To walk this way? To perform my eyes this way? Who has defined, who controls, who benefits from the choreography of our daily dance in which each of us monitors the other’ s body-performance in such constant and meticulous ways? Who owns, who controls, who manufactures and distributes the space of seeing and of being seen? I suggest we examine that question by considering the situation of battered women.

### **Women and the Panopticon of Power**

From Latin American liberation theology we have learned about the category of “invisibility.” To be invisible, we have learned, is to have no voice, to gain no recognition. To be forced into invisibility is to be dominated, to be oppressed and marginalised. And to be made *invisible* is the routine experience of powerless persons and powerless groups. It is how they learn about and often internalise who owns and controls the means of visibility.

But now comes a crucial interpretive move. What if it is not simply enforced invisibility, but also enforced visibility that dominates and subjugates, that causes one to doubt one’ s claim and competence? In my own country my colleague Ann Marie Hunter in an important paper has explored this question by examining the life situation of battered women.’ For the past several years Dr. Hunter has acted as legal advocate for battered women living near Boston. She began to observe patterns of recurrence in the stories she was hearing from these battered women of diverse class, ethnic and racial backgrounds. One pattern, striking in its pervasiveness, was the habit by batterers of subjecting the

women to continuous scrutiny. Hunter writes:

‘A woman’s use of the car, the telephone, or money may be monitored. Many women are not allowed to leave the house without their partner, not allowed to write checks, not allowed to talk to the neighbours. The batterer may monitor her phone conversations, her clothes, her housekeeping, her cooking, what she buys at the store, and the way she folds the laundry. Battered women are frequently followed around by the batterer, or sometimes by a private investigator that the batterer has hired. The minute, continuous surveillance seems to go on and on.’

Hunter points out that the usual literature on battered women focuses upon their enforced isolation, but not upon their enforced and continuous visibility. Then she begins to speculate about the relationship of visibility and control. She turns to the French postmodernist Michel Foucault and uses his analysis of the prison built by Jeremy Bentham, a prison called the Panopticon. Bentham designed this 19th century prison around a central guard tower shrouded in darkness and surrounded by back-lit, one-person cells. The system of control operated upon the prisoners by isolating them, and then subjecting each to pervasive surveillance by a guard they cannot see but know may be watching, a guard having power to reward or to punish. The ingenious part of all this, as Bentham and Foucault both recognised was, to quote Hunter:

when an individual is subjected to a gaze that could always be watching, but is not necessarily watching at any given moment, that individual internalises the power relation and [quoting Foucault] “becomes the principle of his own subjection.”

The one who is subjected to the ubiquitous gaze of another who has power to reward or to punish *internalises the power of that gaze*. Such a person then becomes the everywhere present self-monitor of how they look, of how they appear to this other, even when the other is not looking. The prison works almost automatically, not because of the presence of walls, but because of their absence.

At this point Hunter’s paper makes a brilliant move. She argues that the conditions of control used upon battered women, the continuous surveillance their batterers impose, is not an exception but is instead *the generalised life-condition of all women living inside patriarchal societies*. Hunter points

out that cultural rituals like beauty pageants train women to *be* as those-who-are-looked-at and are rewarded for how they look. She points out how advertising directed to women time and again play upon getting rewards for “how you look.” And how you look is -measured against models in mass media who are always tan, always tall, always young, always possessing perfect eyes and a perfect nose and perfect legs and perfect breasts. Individual women are isolated inside their particular bodies as measured against the normative male gaze - each in her cell looking out. As Hunter says: “Women have merely to look at those images to see themselves and their world through the eyes of guards.” She quotes Sandra Bartky:

The woman who checks her makeup half a dozen times a day to see if her foundation has caked or her mascara has run, who worries that the wind or the rain may spoil her hairdo, who looks frequently to see if her stockings have bagged at the ankle or who, feeling fat, monitors everything she eats, has become, just as surely as the inmate of the Panopticon, a self-policing subject, a self committed to a relentless self-surveillance.

When I drive to work at Temple University in Philadelphia I go down Belmont Avenue, a main commuter road into the city. There are several stop lights. I see women alone, in their cars, on their way to work, stop at the light and instantaneously puff down the mirror attached to the sun visor and examine their hair, examine their eye makeup, examine their lipstick. I am in the midst of a choreography being performed by hundreds of women, looking to see how they look. Who is it they see looking at them? I think about who has the power to reward and to punish at the places of their work. And I discover I am in a massive, invisible but everywhere imagined Panopticon and, as male, I am the guard. I watch, and the women see me watch, even when they do not rum their head from their mirror, or their eyes from the reflection of their own eyes. As male, I am there *inside their seeing of themselves*. Under patriarchy, Hunter concludes, not just battered women but all women live constantly off balance, constantly aware of how they are being watched, constantly on the look out for the approving or disapproving look.

Thus far I have argued that seeing is political and reflects how power operates in society. I have also argued that in patriarchal societies women are taught to perform their lives within the panopticon of the dominant male gaze. What better evidence can I find for this claim than the world of advertising?



### **The Truth and the Lie of Advertising**

Every advertisement is both the truth and a lie. Advertising is true in the sense that *the meaning of the ad* must be successfully located within the space of public meanings we all share, usually routinely and unproblematically. When we look at an advertisement, whether print or electronic, the ad depends upon all of us seeing the same story being told. Take the example of an ad for “the Marlboro Look” (example # 1). What we are meant to see when we see this ad is the look of toughness, the look of the macho man. Whether an ad for Marlboro cigarettes or for Marlboro clothing, the Marlboro man is always alone. Why? Because the definition of toughness, the definition of maleness which he performs says that to be strong and therefore male is to be “in charge,” *not needing others* but needed by others.

The advertisement is true in this sense. We all see the same story when we see the ad, the story that we are meant to see and believe. The ad works - we buy the clothes or the cigarette - because we accept the story, want the story to be our story, and so buy a product to secure that meaning as our very own meaning and reality. And not just men buy those products. Women too, seeking to secure for themselves a place within the world of power, dress Marlboro Western, dress “for success” because power in the end seems always to bear a male image.

#1

All advertisements are true in the sense that they must locate themselves accurately within the world of shared public meanings, and then manipulate those meanings to produce in the potential purchaser an emotional bonding with the offered product. But also, all advertising is a lie. All advertising, to be

successful, must open up a space of need. They must display not the real world - not the world I actually live in - but a world I do not have but want to get. I buy the Marlboro clothes or smoke the cigarette not because I have what the story displays - confidence in my autonomy and toughness - but because I don't have it. I am not a cowboy, working alone, mastering with my lasso the rough and tumble battle of life. I am an office worker with bosses to please. Or I am a woman with men to please. And so I buy the Marlboro clothes or cigarette.

Every advertisement is a lie because it depends upon the opposite reality from the one it displays. It must create through the image of the ad a felt need, a need to obtain the reality represented in the ad through the purchase of a product. We find in this not simply the commodification of reputation and success, but the commodification of reality itself. Yet, we want to buy "the look of success." But even more, we begin to think reality is something we can buy! To buy a bigger car is to be a bigger person. Reality is a commodity that can be purchased.

The deeper truth is just the opposite. Bigger cars don't make people bigger, but make people smaller. How is this so? Let us consider the logic of conspicuous consumption. By purchasing conspicuously we hope to display through the purchased commodity our social location and achievement. But others around us also hope to do the same thing. We each watch the other out of the corner of our eye as we individually race ahead. At ever higher levels of consumer accomplishment we still keep feeling insecure and driven on. A need that can never be satiated has opened up. Commodities define our worth and value to others, and so assign our worth and value to ourselves. We do not buy freely (as free market theory would have it). Instead, ostentation has become obligatory. This Fall's new jeans or new tee shirt become by next Fall disgracefully out of fashion. Big cars can never be big enough. There can always be a bigger car ("and my damned neighbour just got one!").

Advertising, then, is always true. Its truth is the truth we give to the ad by sharing in its story, by making its story our own story, or the story we forlornly want to have as our story. But even more, advertising is always a lie. Big cars make people small. The commodification of culture reduces humans to chronically anxious purchasers of products who live in a world where the "really real" is displayed as something that can be bought.

Now, let us put together these two lines of argument - one about gender and the other about advertising. Let us look at the image of “feminine beauty” as displayed in Malaysian print advertising in 1994. And let us, through such an examination, seek to unveil the systems of power and of interest operating in and through that public space of seeing and being seen - not only male power and interest but also the continuing power and interest of Western cultural colonialism.

### **Malaysian Advertising 1994 - “Beauty” and “the Look of Success”**

We are meant to look at an advertisement and, like a beautiful woman, to dwell upon its surface. We are not meant to look *through* the advertisement to see the cultural meanings that lie behind it and make it work. We are not meant to use our critical imagination to deconstruct the component parts of the ad. Instead, we are meant to let the ad socially construct our image of the real. Moreover, in *gazing together* upon the advertisement, in letting the ad shape our desire, mould our sense of the pleasurable, we let the ad draw its power from our own erotic power. And because we do this together, as a whole culture, what the ad defines as pleasurable becomes what we in fact seek from each other as satisfaction. Advertising becomes a kind of communal worship. There we can behold, in visible form, the gods who create us, in whom and through whom we seek to find security, love and blessedness.

Both in Christianity and in Islam there is a long tradition that criticises such idolatry, that debunks polytheism. But what is our culture today - yours and mine - but living and breathing polytheisms? There are many satisfactions we seek, many altars at which we bend our knee. One is youth - “young-looking hair,” “young-looking skin,” “young-looking legs and breasts and thighs” - which beckons to us in the promise of a thousand advertisements. Or there is the altar of power - “the power of success,” “the power suit for the power breakfast,” “the power of this or that gasoline for this or that more powerful car,” “the power of powerful cars that attract young legs and thighs to the drivers of such cars”. The gods of power and of pleasure smile down upon us from a thousand billboards.

But let us look more closely at just one altar of worship - the *altar of female beauty*, as this is defined in modern Malaysian print advertising. This is

a derivative altar, and the security it offers is a derivative security - the security of being approved and desired in the eyes not of oneself but of others. It is that always-but-of-your own-hands security of *being seen* and thus appropriated by others as “the beautiful one.”

A casual glance through any Malaysian newspaper or magazine shows how feminine beauty is socially constructed. It also shows, though not usually easy to see, who is doing the constructing -who has the power to define reality - namely, males of relative class privilege. Take this advertisement (example #2) as an example.

## #2

There are four human figures in this ad - an obviously young obviously thin, obviously tall woman and three males. Each male wears a bowler hat and ranges in age and weight from old and portly to young and thin. The male “watchers” - those who exercise the dominant gaze, can come in several ages and shapes without disturbing, but in fact completing, the story being told. But the woman in the story must be precisely the age and the shape she is. Her power - promised to her by the purchase of a certain watch - is derivative of the power of the male gaze. She can never grow old, never grow fat, never be short. Her neck must always be long and smooth, her chin and nose forever firm and chiselled. In the world of seeing and being seen she remains the one-who-is-seen. The result is that men, as it is said, get “distinguished” as they grow older; while women get “over the hill.”

In all of this the difference is power. Who owns it; *who* controls it; *who* uses it to shape and to define the space of seeing and being seen to their own advantage. The ad displays the answer. All we have to do is look. Men - those three Englishmen - of relative class privilege have the power, define the field of contention and determine the winners and losers in the politics of seeing and being seen.

Notice, I said not just men in general. I said Englishmen -Caucasian whites! And this is an advertisement from a Malaysian paper that appeared in the Fall of 1994. In my survey of such newspapers I was careful to look at advertisements in both English and Malay newspapers. Astonishingly, I found little difference. The image of female beauty and the look of success in both languages is a woman who is white, tall, young, slender, and Caucasian in chin line and shape of nose. She is a woman dressed to be seen - to have legs seen, arms seen, breasts seen, neck seen, hair seen. The “look of success” for females in all these advertisements is to be as “the-being-who-is-looked-at” and as a looked-at-being one who is approved by males and their dominant gaze (examples #3 & #4).

### #3

But note that the male gaze in these ads, even when those who are looking are Malaysian males, is not a Malaysian gaze. It is a way of seeing feminine beauty that privileges the Western European and American look. It is a way of seeing that lets us see that the power of the West did not withdraw on Independence Day, that the power of the West is only partially in its armies, in its multinational corporations and international banks.

These advertisements show us that the power of the West - its cultural power - has inserted itself into and become embedded within the very consciousness of Malaysians. This shaping of consciousness is the deepest, the most long-lasting and most pervasive power of the West. This power exhibits itself in the culture of conspicuous consumption, the culture of the shopping mall, the culture of the video drama or the Hollywood film, the culture of cosmetics and fashions and weight-reduction programmes and their search for beauty and success.

I have argued that seeing is political, that the space of seeing and of being seen displays how power operates in society. I have argued that women in that space live under the dominant male gaze. And I have argued that contemporary Malaysian print advertising reveals that Western definitions of female beauty pervade the Malaysian consciousness. I have said that this way of seeing lets us see, lets us glimpse a more pervasive cultural colonialism. This idea of the colonisation of consciousness brings me to my final set of reflections: namely, what is the post-colonial task?

### **The Post-colonial Task**

A major task of intellectuals today is the pursuit of a post-colonial discourse. In that pursuit, Western intellectuals like myself are deeply dependent upon intellectuals in the so-called Third World who struggle with the question of their own cultural identity and integrity. Post-modernism reminds us of the necessity of a pluralism of perspectives if truth is to be pursued. Post-modernism warns us, away from any “master narrative,” any mono-directional reading of history. Post-modernism reminds us that a post-colonial discourse depends upon the mutual recognition that there is not now and never has been an entity called an “undeveloped” or “underdeveloped” country.

It is an axiom of modern anthropology that any society that persists over time is necessarily laden with moral and aesthetic and religious sensibilities, with mores and institutions that shape everyday life into a sustained and sustaining

cultural environment. The issue before us, therefore, is never how an underdeveloped nation can become developed but how differently developed societies can continue to develop themselves as spaces that cultivate and sustain human well-being over time.

Language about a “first world and a “third world” distorts this more fundamental reality. It seeks to order international relations into a predetermined direction, a direction imposed by those who actually believe they are “first” and others “third.” Such thinking is inherently colonial and distorts consciousness. It distorts the consciousness of those who think they are “developed” by shutting down their ability to learn from other cultures, from other traditions, from other ways of living life and judging what we humans can and should aspire to be and become.

Language of “first world” and “third world” is also dangerous for elites in the so-called Third, World. It encourages those elites to emulate a culture that is not their own culture, to pursue a future for their culture that is not the future of their past but the future of another culture’s past. And in that moment, these indigenous elites open themselves morally to an abandonment of their own people and an entering into collusion with the structures of neo-colonialism in the exploitation of their people and land.

This brings before us a second task in the construction of a postcolonial discourse. That is *the problematising of the idea of development*. So often we speak as if everyone knows and everyone agrees upon what development is. But the idea of development engages us, or should engage us in the most profound religious and philosophical questions - questions concerning what it is we humans are or can become, what it is that makes for dwelling well together in society over time.

Why “over time”? Because as humans we are time-filled animals. We do not leave the past behind like the hand of a clock leaves time behind as it passes on. The past remains present to us in memory (even when we flee that memory or ignore that memory). The danger of rapid cultural change done in the name of development is that rapid change can leave us, literally, lost in time.” In the name of progress we can come to live in a present that has no presence in it, no depth of time-consciousness. As those who live without an acknowledged legacy, we begin to live without gratitude, without a sense of obligation. And

without a sense of inheritance, we build no heritage. In the name of development we prepare ourselves in our souls for a culture of immediacy, a culture of appearance, a culture of the shopping mall and conspicuous consumption. In the name of an unreflectively pursued “development” we begin to dedevelop our human moral depths.

What this says is that the possibility of a post-colonial discourse depends upon our recognizing the many respects in which the world we live in continues to be a colonised world. True, the nature of international capitalism means capital investments will continue to flow from high wage-rate, older industrialised countries like my own into low wage-rate newly industrialising countries like Malaysia. And this will mean another decade of an expanding Gross Domestic Product for countries like Malaysia. But this is not an unmixed blessing. Much of what is made in this country is made for export. That means that the shape of your domestic economic growth is not driven by the logic of local or regional markets, but is driven by the consumer demands of distant, so-called First World markets.

This kind of development is not indigenous development; it remains “dependent development.” And the danger is that development that remains dependent at the economic level will also become dependent in a deeper, cultural sense. We have seen in our analysis of the image of feminine beauty how indigenous “taste” can follow products, products made to sell abroad, how what we admire can be moulded by what we make and sell, and thus view as worthy of purchase and emulation. Our work shapes not just the flying “we make” but the living we do. Dependent economics can soon produce dependent cultures.

That is why, in construction post-colonial discourse, culture becomes the dominant field of struggle. Yes, international geopolitics and the constructions and reconstructions of international political economy remain crucial. But even more important for critical self-awareness is the domain of neo-colonial and post colonial cultural struggles. In such an analysis, Issues of authority and legitimacy become central. And this means that religion and/or ideology come to play a crucial role.

But a companion truth is that most interpreters of the modern international system do not know that religion has become a central player in the array of



historical forces. Or if they do recognize this, they do not know what to do with this (to them) surprising reality, a reality which (to them) is not only surprising but worryingly unpredictable. Post-colonial discourse - if it is to grasp this new world order accurately - must search out a third way between secularism (and its fear of religion) and what we may call "hegemonic religion (and its fear of modern pluralism).

Hegemonic religion seeks to remodel a complex and plural past into a unity and uniformity never in fact found in that past. Today, conservative fundamentalism in my country seeks to face the new cultural pluralism of the world from the security of a presumed "master narrative" - a point of view that understands itself not as a point of view but as the point of view. It seeks a universal perspective on all other points of view. In the name of Transcendence it flees from the challenge of Transcendence, the challenge that Transcendence poses to a parochialism and arrogance. On the other hand, post-modernism needs to shed its own suspicion - of religion, its secularist bias, if it is to be of genuine *help in* the task of constructing a post-colonial discourse, and the evident role religion is coming to play in the legitimisation struggles now engulfing culture after culture.

In this field of cultural struggle, interreligious dialogue can help bring clarity, but only if that dialogue is guided by a healthy sense of scepticism and humility. From post-modernism we learn the *inevitable situatedness* and, therefore, *the inevitable interestedness and bias* of all forms of social knowing. In the face of this, post-modernism asserts a *necessary pluralism* in the pursuit of truth. Admittedly, this vastly complicates the search for identity and integrity in both the political and religious domains. Nevertheless, this welcoming of the voice of "the other," the voice that is not an echo of our voice, the "strange voice" in whose voice our own voice is thrown back upon itself and has opportunity to shed its illusions of finality - it is this "voice of the other" that we need to hear. It is the only way - into that third way - beyond the arrogance of secularism and the ambitions of hegemonic religion. This discourse with "the voice of the other?" we need today, whether that discourse be international in orientation or between ethnic groups within a single nation.

And what is true about our speaking is true also about our seeing and being seen. So let me end where I began. "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." So saying, we need to learn that the image of beauty is as rich and diverse as the

world' s many cultures, the world' s many faces, the world' s many and diverse bodies. In this post-colonial task we must dare to let the eye of the beholder, our very own eye, become self-conscious and critical - a gaze that serves the special interest of neither gender, a gaze that refuses to reflect but instead unveils and critiques the continuing reality of cultural colonialism. Such an "eye of the beholder?" can claim its own ground without claiming that ground to be the only legitimate ground. Such an eye can dare to see and to admire the rich diversity of human reality

As is said, and truly said, in the Eye of God every human face is beautiful.... and beautiful beyond compare.

### **Endnote**

1. Anne Marie Hunter, "Numbering the Hairs of Our Heads: Male Social Control and the All-Seeing Male God" - a presentation at the annual meeting of The American Academy of Religion, November, 1991.

*The above paper was first delivered at a seminar at the Science University of Malaysia in Penang in the middle of 1994.*

## 4

# Western Domination: the Military Factor

K. R. Panikkar

*For nearly six centuries now Western Europe and its diaspora have been disturbing the peace of the world Enlightened through their Renaissance, by the learning of the ancient Mediterranean; armed with the gun, the making of whose powder they had learned from Chinese firecrackers; equipping their skips with lateen sails, astrolabes and nautical compasses, all invented by the Chinese and transmitted to them by Arabs; fortified in aggressive spirit by an arrogant, messianic Christianity of both the popish and Protestant varieties; and motivated by the lure of enriching plunder, white hordes have sallied forth from their western European homelands to explore, assault, loot, occupy, rule and exploit the rest of the world.<sup>1</sup>*

Here in a nutshell, in the opening paragraph of his account of the European assault on Africa, Chinweizu tells us how and why the West was able, over a period of five hundred years, to accomplish the feat of dominating the rest of the world. In the following pages an attempt will be made to focus on the factor of European superiority in weapons and military science which was the key element contributing to this success. I propose to do this by recalling some of the significant events and episodes from the long history of European colonisation.

The original motivation which set the enterprise in motion was the combination of the lure of spices, hatred and fear of Muslims and an evangelical zeal to spread Christianity. When the Muslim threat to Europe receded, the riches to be gained from plunder and trade became the main driving force. Christianisation involved destroying the existing civilisations of central and south America, wiping out most of their populations and settling the lands with Christians from Europe. The idea of subjugating and ruling Asia and Africa for

the exploitation of the resources of these lands sprung up much later.

In Europe there was great demand for spices, but this commodity came from India and Indonesia. The land routes between Europe and the East were, however, controlled by the dreaded Muslims. Huge profits could be made if direct access to the sources of spices was obtained. The solution to the problem lay in outflanking the Muslims by discovering an all- sea route to the East.

Portugal was the country best suited to pursue this objective. Its geographical situation was ideal for undertaking exploration of the seas around Africa. Many Genoese, the foremost seafarers in Europe had settled in Portugal (and Spain). And Portugal happened to have a prince, Dom Henry (1394-1460), who combined in him an intense interest in seafaring and exploration as well as a bitter hatred of Muslims. Henry devoted his entire life to the patronage of seafaring and the goal of smashing Muslim power. His efforts, spread over forty years, led to great improvements in cartography, navigation and shipbuilding (hence the name, Henry the Navigator).

Henry' s pioneering efforts made Portugal the leading sea power in Europe. Driven by the ambition to discover the sea route to the East, Portuguese captains undertook successive voyages to explore the coast of Africa. They established outposts along this coast as they went along and before the end of the fifteenth century succeeded in sailing across the Indian ocean to reach the west coast of India.

Meanwhile Spain too yielded to the temptation of riches to be gained by reaching the Orient by sea. Portugal's military strength and the authority of successive papal bulls which confirmed Portugal' s monopoly over its discoveries as far as India, however, dissuaded Spain from taking to the African route. Instead Columbus, a Genoese in the service of Spain set out for the East by venturing across the Atlantic. This took the Spaniards to central and south America. For the next hundred years Portugal and Spain maintained their monopoly on predatory activities by virtue of their sea power.<sup>2</sup>

Later, the decline of Portuguese power and the defeat of the Spanish Armada led to the Dutch, the British and the French entering the competition for spoils. Finally, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the United States too came to appreciate the rewards of colonisation and wrested Cuba and the Philippines from the decrepit Spanish empire.<sup>3</sup>

Vasco da Gama arrived with his four ships at Calicut on the Malabar coast of India on May 27, 1498. In K.M. Panikkar's words, this event "introduced a revolutionary factor .....that the ships were carrying cannon.... the armaments of the Portuguese ships was something totally unexpected and new in the Indian sea and gave an immediate and decisive advantage to the Portuguese over their Indian opponents."<sup>4</sup>

The Portuguese desired the capture of Calicut for two reasons. the place was the centre of the spice trade on the west coast of India, and, most of the traders engaged in the business were Muslim Arabs. The coastal navy of Zamorin, the Hindu sovereign of Calicut was no match for the Portuguese ships which kept on coming periodically to threaten Calicut. The Zamorin therefore sought the help of his friend, the King of Egypt whose ships too were equipped with cannon. In the sea battle which subsequently took place between the Indo-Egyptian and Portuguese ships off the island of Diu (1509), the Egyptian force had to withdraw because of the treachery of the Indian governor of Diu.<sup>5</sup> This left the Portuguese in command of the Indian ocean. Henceforth they were able to control the sea-borne trade of India for the next hundred years.

But when the Portuguese subsequently landed at Calicut in an effort to make it their base, they were driven back to the sea suffering heavy losses. All they could do on land in India was to capture a few minor islands such as Cochin, Bombay and Diu. Goa was acquired not through the might of their arms but by the support of the Hindu chief of the area who saw the Portuguese as his allies against his Mogul enemy.<sup>6</sup>

For two hundred and thirty years after the defeat of the Portuguese at the hands of Zamorin's forces, no European power attempted any military conquest in India.<sup>7</sup> But Portuguese supremacy at sea enabled them to capture Malacca and several posts in Indonesia. In the meantime Spanish sea power subjugated the Philipinos and converted them to Christianity.

In 1595 the Dutch came out to trade in the East and eventually displaced the Portuguese in Indonesia, Malacca, Ceylon and Cochin. They too could not prevail against land power in India.

The British came to India in 1612 to buy textiles and set up a trading centre at Surat. Over the next hundred years they acquired Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. They were not, however, conquests by arms: Bombay had been given

to the British King as dowry by the Portuguese; the other two places came as concessions from friendly local powers. On the one occasion the British showed their arrogance by ‘ declaring war’ on the Mogul empire, Aurangzeb taught them a lesson.<sup>8</sup>

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the British established their supremacy in the Indian ocean. But they were still unable to project their power on land. Soon, however, the power structure in India began to change with the rapid decline of Mugh authority. The local chiefs in the various regions of the Mogul empire began the struggle to establish themselves in their respective fiefdoms and to eliminate rival claimants. The British saw their opportunity in these struggles. Here their well-known capacity for intrigue and duplicity more than made up for their military inferiority.

The first British “victory”, at Plassey (1757), over Sirajud-Doula the governor of Bengal, was obtained by the treachery of his general who had been induced to commit treason by the false promises of the British.<sup>9</sup> Despite this success, the British were still not strong enough to challenge even lesser powers in India, let alone the Marathas, for several years to come.

Over the next fifty years, however, leaders like Warren Hastings and Cornwallis built up British strength in India and by the beginning of the nineteenth century they were ready to take on first the lesser powers and then the Marathas and the Sikhs. In those struggles they had the brilliant services of Arthur Wellesley and Dalhousie. Superior generalship, organisation and discipline rather than superiority of weapons decided the outcome. The elimination of French influence in India during the Napoleonic wars also helped the British.

By 1848 the British became masters of the whole subcontinent. It had taken them a hundred years of perfidy, intrigue and warfare to achieve this success.

Even before they had completed their conquest of India, the British used their strong position there and their command of the sea to wend their power to Burma, Malaya and beyond. The soldiers whom they recruited and trained in India helped in this extension of power. They were now ready to force the Chinese to open up their lands to Europeans.

In 1839 when Imperial Commissioner and High Admiral Lin Se-hsu of China demanded the surrender of the British sailors who had killed a Chinese,

he was on impeccable moral and legal grounds. But he had no idea of the might of Britain on the sea. He complacently believed that he could, with his war junks, enforce his authority on the gunboats, merchantmen and frigates of the British confronting the Chinese.<sup>10</sup>

For Lin's ignorance China was made to pay dearly. Without waiting for negotiations, the British opened fire on the Chinese junks and sank them and forced the first Opium War on China. Other wars, equally unprovoked, followed, ending in the humiliation of that country, the loss of Hong Kong, the burning of the Summer Palace in Peking and the exaction of unequal treaties.

As we have seen, the Portuguese had to skirt the continent of Africa to find the route to India. They did not leave Africa alone, but set up outposts along its coast to capture the trade in ivory, silver, gold and slaves. The profitability of this trade, particularly that in slaves, brought other European powers to Africa. But neither they nor the Portuguese ventured into the interior of the continent.

It was only in the nineteenth century when the Industrial Revolution in Europe gained momentum that Western powers began to venture into the interior of Africa in order to seize its mineral and agricultural resources to feed their industries back home. These incursions progressed from the sea along the continent's rivers mainly because gunboats were the means available for coercing the inhabitants of the land. Although Africans had acquired firearms by then, they did not know how to use them effectively.<sup>11</sup>

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the race for Africa became a scramble. So a conference was held in Berlin in 1885 to agree on European spheres of influence. It was around this period when the process of establishing control over their respective claims got going in earnest, that Europeans came up against the occasional local challenge. The clash at Omdurman was one such challenge.

On 2 September 1898 an Anglo-Egyptian army of 22,000 men led by Kitchner faced the Mahdi's Dervish army of 40,000 on the banks of the Nile at Omdurman. Between sunrise and 11.30 a.m. on that fateful day, the Dervish army was wiped out, having suffered 11,000 killed, 16,000 wounded and 4,000 taken prisoner. The victors suffered a mere 48 killed and 382 wounded. Why did this calamity befall the Dervishes despite their numerical superiority?

Undoubtedly the Dervishes were fearless soldiers but they were armed with

nothing better than spears and outmoded rifles. The British on the other hand had the support of gunboats on the Nile behind them and 5-inch howitzers capable of firing fifty-pounder shells up to 3,000 yards. They also had the newly invented Maxim Machinegun.

The Maxims were able to mow down the advancing soldiers of the Mahdist army, despite all their courage. The Maxim was supplemented by the Lee-Atford rifle, the British army's first repeating rifle.<sup>12</sup>

Omdurman was a typical example of the overwhelming superiority of Western weapons and tactics gaining the upperhand against the indigenous forces of Africa at very little cost. Thanks to this superiority the European powers were able to carve up the whole of Africa amongst them by the dawn of the twentieth century."<sup>13</sup>

But Ethiopia (then Abyssinia) managed to maintain its independence. In 1896 its army showed that given weapons of equal quality to those of Europeans and trained in their effective use, it could defeat a European power. Learning from their earlier defeat at the hands of the British, the Ethiopians under the able leadership of their new king Menelik had acquired a good number of European guns and sufficient ammunition and then trained his reorganised army along European lines to await the next incursion into their lands. The Italians came to add Ethiopia to their colonies, but they were defeated in the battle of Adowa which followed. From then on Ethiopia was left alone.<sup>14</sup>

The Spanish conquest of central and south America was much swifter than the subjugation of Asia and Africa. The savagery that the conquerors employed is probably without parallel in the history of humankind. It took the Spaniards (later joined by the Portuguese) only fifty years from the time of Columbus's arrival in the Bahamas in 1492 to complete their foul deed.

That a terrible fate awaited the inhabitants of the Americas was portended in Columbus's impressions of the first Indians he came across on the Caribbean islands. He observed they were "poor in everything, gentle people, ignorant of arms; easy to subjugate and carry to castle or make captives in their own land".<sup>15</sup>

The Spaniards eliminated the populations of the Caribbean islands because the inhabitants did not prove hardy enough to labour for them. African slaves



were then brought in to work on the sugarcane plantations established on these islands.

The Spaniards then ventured into the mainland in search of plunder. There they encountered hostility for the first time.

Here it must be pointed out that the Indians of the Americas -north, central and south - were ignorant of iron, brass and gunpowder. Although the Aztecs, the Mayas and the Incas had established glorious empires, they lived in the stone age as far as their weapons were concerned. They had never seen horses before the Spaniards appeared riding these animals. The superstitious Indians took them to be creatures of the nether world.

The first battle with the Indians took place when Hernando Cortes landed at Tabasco in 1519 on his way to Mexico. On one side were slings, javelins and arrows fashioned out of wood, and obsidian swords; on the other, swords, lances and crossbow bolts of steel, and musket and cannon. The Indians knew only one tactic: attack in mass which eminently suited the Spaniards equipped with cannon. The Indians inflicted some wounds on the Spaniards with their primitive weapons; the Spaniards killed the Indians in their hundreds. When the Spanish cavalry appeared from behind, the Indians were terror-stricken and dispersed. (They thought that the rider and horse were one creature.)<sup>16</sup>

At this, and subsequent encounters, Cortes observed that if the chief of the Indians fell or was captured, his army lost the will to continue fighting. This knowledge that the chief meant everything in the Indian societies of America (in military parlance, their 'centre of gravity') was the crucial factor which enabled incredibly small groups of Spanish freebooters to destroy the great empires of the Aztecs and the Incas, and implant Spanish communities in their place.

Montezuma, the emperor of the Aztecs, reigned in his island city of Tenochtitlan (Mexico city). Cortes and his band went to this city hired by the fabulous wealth of the place. He was cordially received by the emperor and quartered in a palace next to his own. Cortes resolved to take over the city and expropriate its enormous wealth in gold and precious stones.

But how could a band of 450 overwhelm a city of 400,000? His cannons and muskets could not possibly get the better of such numbers. But he had observed on the way to Mexico and then in the city itself, that Montezuma was

god to his people. Neutralise Montezuma and Mexico and the Aztec empire would be his. So he decided to do just that.

He boldly entered the emperor's palace and forced the surprised emperor to move across to his quarters. He then used the captive emperor to tell the Aztecs to obey the orders of Cortes. Thus Cortes got the Aztecs themselves to begin their destruction.

But the rogue could not sustain his position for long because the excesses and depravity committed by the Spaniards were such that even the Aztecs, long used to implicit obedience of their emperor were aroused to rebel against them. Realising that he was trapped as long as he remained in the city, he fled back to Vera Cruz.

He returned to Mexico in 1521 and destroyed it. His success came from a combination of superior strategy and superior weapons. He had 980 Spaniards with him; the number included some cavalry. He also had some cannons and muskets. There were also around 100,000 Tlaxcalan and other Indian allies.

Tenochtitlan was difficult to capture as it was situated on a lake. Access to the city was by causeways which could be blocked by removing the drawbridges on them. So he decided against an assault on the city. He would besiege it and starve its 300,000 inhabitants into submission.

For this purpose he had twelve brigantines built near the shore of the lake with materials brought overland from Vera Cruz. Each ship was fitted with a cannon and then the ships were launched on the lake. (These Herculean tasks were undertaken by the forced labour of thousands of Indians). The ships imposed a blockade on the city by destroying the canoes used by the Aztecs to communicate with the shores of the lake. Then the Spaniards and their Tlaxcalan allies pressed their attacks along the causeways. The aqueduct which brought fresh water to the city was destroyed. Earlier, smallpox had been introduced into the Aztec city by the Spaniards (This disease was unknown in the Americas before the arrival of the Spaniards). A good part of the besieged population died of this disease. Yet the Aztecs under their new emperor put up a heroic defence. After seventy-five days, the few emaciated survivors surrendered to the advancing besiegers. Cortes promptly went on to level the city and build the new city of Mexico on that site.<sup>17</sup> The Aztecs did not survive this disaster.

Eleven years later Francisco Pizarro, probably the vilest barbarian ever to take human form, entered Peru from the north to seek plunder. Peru was then the land of the Incas of whose society a Spaniard has left the following description:

“The Incas governed their subjects in such a fashion that among them there was neither a thief, nor a depraved man, nor an adulterous woman.... the resources were controlled and shared so that each knew and possessed his own, without anyone else being able to take it.... Matters of war, although numerous, did not hinder those of commerce. Order and harmony reigned in everything”.<sup>18</sup>

Pizarro led a party of 106 infantry, 62 horsemen, of whom twenty were crossbow men and three were musketeers. He had a few cannons as well.<sup>19</sup>

On 15 November 1532 Pizarro, entered the desert city of Cajamarca on the outskirts of which Atahualpa, the new emperor of the Incas, was camped with an army of 30,000 men. Realising that his little army could not take on too numerous a host, Pizarro decided to emulate what Cortes had done with Montezuma.

After quartering his force in the empty building surrounding a square, he sent an emissary to invite Atahualpa to his camp. Acceptance of the invitation was gained the next day. Atahualpa arrived at the square attended by 5000 unarmed men. At that moment, on a prearranged signal, Pizarro's men and cavalry came out of hiding and with cannons firing assaulted the visitors. The suddenness of the attack, the thunder of the cannons and the neighing of the horses put the bewildered Incas to flight. About 2000 of them were king. The Spaniards did not suffer any casualties. Atahualpa was dragged from his litter and taken captive. The Incas' centre of gravity was neutralised in just half an hour.

Just as Cortes used the captive Montezuma to plunder Mexico and begin the destruction of the Aztecs, Pizarro went on to use his hostage first to collect an enormous heap of gold and other precious items as ransom and then to obtain the submission of the Incas to his authority. Unlike the Aztecs, the Incas did not rebel against the usurper. Pizarro then killed Atahualpa and proceeded to destroy the Inca empire; its magnificent cities were wantonly destroyed without any provocation.

Thus it was the surprise effect of new weapons, gunpowder, horses and steel blades which won central and south America for Spain.

The Indian empires of central and south America invited their quick extinction because of the vast amounts of gold and precious stones which they possessed and which the marauding conquistadors coveted. Treasures of this kind were not found in the possessions of the Indians of north America, so the Europeans who entered these lands were not tempted to wipe out these people swiftly. But wiped out they were, slowly and surely, and their lands possessed in perpetuity.

In subjugating and dominating the rest of the world, the Europeans were acting in consonance with ancient Greek thinking of which they claim inheritance. This ancient thinking held that the strong would demand and the weak must yield. Moral and ethical considerations could not and would not be allowed to interfere with the operation of this dictum. In other words, 'might' even if it is not 'right' must and will have its way. A strong conviction to this effect governed the European attitude towards and treatment of weak peoples.

The process which began with the capture of Ceuta by Dom Henry in 1425 began to unravel in the Post-World War II period.

Or so it seemed. The subject peoples of Asia and Africa gained their independence'. The physical means of coercion were withdrawn from these lands.

Despite these outward changes, there has been no change in the basic attitude of Western powers towards the rest of us. As Chinweizu points out, "and even now the fury of their expansion assault upon the rest of us has not abated."<sup>20</sup>

In the days of colonisation, European nations considered themselves to be the only 'civilised' ones in the world, the rest of us being 'barbarians' to them. International law then operated in their mutual relations, but the rest of us were not entitled to its benefits.

Under the new imperialism championed by the United States, the 'international community' has come to comprise exclusively of Western powers; the rest of us do not count. In their relations with the rest of us, the West interprets and applies international law in ways which suit their interests best. They continue to have recourse to military power to coerce and dominate

when other methods are seen to have faded or even before employing such means. The invasion of Grenada, of Panama, the intervention in Nicaragua, the bombing of Libya, the destruction of Iraq in the Gulf War of 1990/1 are all cases in point.

As long as the Soviet Union existed and maintained an adversarial relationship with the West, the latter was somewhat restrained in exercising the policy of coercion and domination. Now that Soviet power has dissipated, the true colour of the Western attitude towards the rest of us is once again clearly visible. Even as these lines are being written, a U.S. carrier task force is steaming in the sea of Japan “to send a message to North Korea”, in the words of the commander-in-chief of U.S. forces in the Pacific.<sup>21</sup> What more evidence do we need of the return of gunboat diplomacy!

The West is able to continue with its old habit of coercion and domination because the rest of us are palpably weak in military power. And the West is determined to maintain its military supremacy.

The Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) has conferred the right to possess nuclear weapons on some states and denied that right to the rest of us. The West is now furiously campaigning to get the NPT extended for an indefinite period at the 1995 review conference. If they succeed, the nuclear weapon-states will gain permanent monopoly of these weapons. By means of the Missile Technology Control Regime, the West has halted the transfer of missile technology to the rest of us. There are several other restrictions imposed by the West to ensure that we will never be able to catch up with them in military technology.

The trade in arms is another means of bolstering Western military supremacy. It is a mistake to think that by purchasing arms from the West, the recipient country can hope to match the military power of the West. What happened to Iraq in the Gulf War clearly shows the error of such thinking.

On the contrary, the arms purchased from the West help to weaken the rest of us. The acquisition of arms tends to raise political tensions and hostility amongst us which encourages us to fight among ourselves. Moreover the purchase of arms depletes our scanty resources, while at the same time it helps to improve the economies of the suppliers. The funds raised through the sale of arms go to support the military industries and associated research of Western

countries, who are the main arms exporters. Consequently, military technology continues to progress in the West.

So the prospect of freeing ourselves from Western domination is really bleak. Six centuries ago the West took to the path of science, technology and innovation. This direction brought it mastery of the world. Having tasted the fruits of that success it is not about to give up that position.

### **Endnotes**

1. *Chinweizu, The West and the Rest of Us*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 3.
2. The development of sea power which sprouted on the Iberian peninsula later spread to the rest of Europe, but not to the rest of the world.
3. This summary is based on: K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance* (Collier Books, 1969).
4. *Ibid*, p. 29.
5. *Ibid*, p. 37.
6. *Ibid*, p. 39.
7. *Ibid*.
8. *Ibid*, pp. 50-1.
9. *Ibid*, pp. 78-9. For this reason Panikkar calls Plassey a 'transaction', not a battle. Sirajud-Doula had defeated the British the year before and captured Fort William in Calcutta
10. *Ibid*, pp. 99-100.
11. For details of the palpable inferiority of African arms and the decisive role of gunboats in the colonisation of Africa, see Chinweizu, op-cit., Chapter 3.
12. Richard Holmes, *The World Atlas of Warfare* (Mitchell Beazly, 1988), p. 120.
13. Chinweizu, op. cit., p. 211.
14. The Italians succeeded in colonising Ethiopia after World War I.
15. EA. Kirkpatrick, *The Spanish Conquistadors* (London: Adam & C. Black, 1946), p. 18.
16. *Ibid*, pp. 67-8.

17. Jean Descala, *The Conquistadors* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957), pp. 215-9.
18. *Ibid*, p. 229.
19. *Ibid*, p. 261.
20. Chinweizu, op. cit., p.3.
21. *The New Straits Times*, 23 September 1994.

## 5

# The United Nations: The End of an Era

Richard Gott

On the hour every hour on radio, most nights on television, and every morning in the newspapers, there is a shorthand reference to a strange entity with whose definition and meaning we are supposed to be instantly familiar. It is called “the international community”, How sonorous it sounds, how freighted with portentous meaning. For this is, we are led automatically to infer, a community to which we all somehow belong.

Since the end of the cold war, this “community” of ours has been astonishingly active on our behalf all over the globe. At one moment, it is present in Bosnia-Herzegovina; at another, it is sending troops to Cambodia or Somalia; at yet another, it is wondering what to do in Rwanda. Sometimes it utters dire threats against Kim Il-Sung or Saddam Hussein. Almost without our noticing, it has taken on a vastly inflated role, providing a permanent backcloth to our lives. Never sleeping, it seems to operate everywhere in our name. We may no longer understand much what it is up to, yet every commentator tacitly assumes that we have given it our unquestioned support.

So perhaps we have. But we need at some stage to wake ourselves up and reflect that this curious period we are living through is not going to last for ever. For we are also dimly aware that this strange “community” in which we find ourselves taking part is essentially an invented entity, an imaginary construct. Indeed at a time when conservative governments throughout the world (and particularly in Europe) are trying to downgrade the idea of “community” itself - as a vernacular entity with subversive local significance -their promotion of the idea of an “international” community seems sometimes to verge on the



perverse. For what has been created is a fabricated fiction. It does not exist. So this famous community, to which our allegiance is somehow assumed, turns out to be extremely fragile. Conjured from thin air, it could equally easily disappear in a puff of smoke. We need to prepare ourselves for its disintegration, for it seems now to be sustained more by faith than by reason.

In so far as it has corporeal being, the “international community” maintains residence in New York at the headquarters of the United Nations Organisation. This is a strange building with an old-fashioned, almost religious, atmosphere where representatives of many nations do indeed meet together on a regular basis. And because these representatives are diplomats, that strange masonry of emasculated bureaucrats, it is sometimes possible to imagine that they might give greater loyalty to their caste than to their nation. Some of them do indeed manage to persuade themselves that they are the international community of the future in embryonic form. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, if any late 20th century idealist were to wish to start again down the old internationalist road towards world government that so inspired previous generations, they certainly would not begin at the UN in New York.

For this now has the appearance of a moribund organisation, unlikely to survive much beyond the end of the millennium. Its days are numbered. Traditionally, of course, the UN has been perceived as an institution of the Left. Both in the West and in the old Soviet Union, the Left has always been among its more solid supporters. Yet this is no longer the case, and we should not mourn its passing. It was never what some people hoped or believed it would be. Far from being a democratic assembly of the peoples of the world, it has always served as a reserve weapon of the countries of the capitalist West. I spent some time recently in New York with the purpose of examining the activities of the UN at first hand. The New York headquarters is the political nerve centre of the institution, with powers of life and death over its myriad tentacular agencies that spread all over the world. While peacekeeping forces and the organisations that control aid and famine relief often secure the headlines, it is the tiny group of people who run the Security Council who call the tune. This means, in effect, the Americans and the British, one with the financial muscle, the other with the diplomatic skills. This is the alliance that has kept the organisation going for so long.

Anyone who seeks to make an independent assessment of the value of the

UN will find the going hard. Always an opaque institution, it is not easy to understand its workings or to follow the threads of its innumerable activities. Only four groups of people are familiar with the arcane ceremonies of this secular church, and most of them conspire together to sing its praises. Disinterested criticism is rare.

First are the diplomats. Not without influence, they have a certain capacity to manoeuvre. But they have no mandate to decide anything important on their own. They can always be overridden by their political masters at home. This of course, though frustrating to the individuals, is natural and as it should be. The politicians in national capitals are obliged to respond to local pressure groups and public opinion at home. This is democratic practice, but it has helped to give the UN its reputation as a powerless talking shop.

The second group with some intimate understanding of the UN are journalists. The best informed, those working for the New York Times or the World Service of the BBC, often operate as honorary diplomats. They are sometimes privy to the secrets of the great powers. They are an important conduit of information, and can usually be guaranteed to support the organisation's aims - while often remaining cynical about its activities.

The third group is made up of academics who write about the UN at one remove, the professors of international relations with a hundred years of research into international law behind them. They too constitute a powerful lobby in favour of the status quo.

Finally there are the members of the secretariat - the permanent civil servants - coupled with the employees and supporters of the non-governmental organisations, the famous NGOs, that subscribe to the internationalist faith. These often admirable people, like the members of the other three groups, tend to have such a vested interest in the UN - it is usually their life's work - that they are rarely able to question its existence.

To seek a greater understanding of what the UN now represents, and what its future trajectory may be, it is necessary to plunge back into history. Because of the preponderant attention given over the last thirty years to the debates and resolutions of the General Assembly, in which all nations are represented, the United Nations has often been perceived as an embryonic world government. Yet nothing could be further from the case. The UN began, with a distinguished

pedigree, as a congress of the great powers, a coalition of the already rich and powerful. Created in 1945 as the rightful heir to the legacy of the League of Nations - itself founded in the aftermath of the First World War according to the tenets of an internationalist ideology developed in Europe in the 19th century -its creators did not change the inherited pattern very dramatically.

The League, established in Geneva in the 1920s, was essentially a permanent conference of the European colonial powers of the day. Worried about the dangers inherent in the pre-war imperial “scramble” for Africa, and still shuddering from the breakdown of the international order represented by the First World War, these colonial powers had sought to codify international norms in their mutual interest, and to seek international assistance in controlling the nationalist excesses that had now begun to threaten their individual empires.

To begin with, in a war-weary world, the League secured considerable support - from progressive imperialists who perceived it as a useful mechanism for settling inter-imperial disputes, and from socialists who could portray it as a way, station on the road to world government. But it was a feeble affair from the start. In no country were the progressives in a majority, and it soon abandoned its ambition to be all-inclusive. The United States never took part; the Soviet Union was ostracised; and fascist Italy and Nazi Germany eventually withdrew.

When the League effectively collapsed in the 1930s, its failure was widely ascribed to two causes: the absence of the United States, and the organisations failure to establish a mechanism to cope with the breakdown of the international economic order. The League had proved powerless to cope with the Depression. So the United Nations, conceived during the Second World War, was designed to deal with both these failures - though the second was to prove yet more problematic than the first.

Joining the UN, for the Americans, was a belated entry into the colonialists’ club - just at the moment when they were replacing the Europeans as the world’ s most significant capitalist power. They were to have a curious love-hate relationship with the organisation from the start. Like Britain, its progenitor, the United States is by nature an isolationist country, an island-continent whose involvement with the outside world has never been accepted by the general population without immense internal challenge and

debate. But during the half century since the Second World War, in spite of much vocal opposition from their isolationist critics, successive US administrations have supported the UN and found it useful for their purposes. However much it may have grumbled, the US has always been the largest shareholder on the board, never paying less than a quarter of the entire budget of the organisation, a much larger share than any other country. It has served America's purposes well.

The UN was an American institution from the start. Founded in San Francisco and later established permanently in New York, the UN inherited its atmosphere of moral uplift and its aura of sanctimoniousness from its American godparents. The American ruling establishment of the 1940s claimed to believe in it. They endowed it with their own folksy populism. "We the people", the opening phrase of the UN Charter, comes straight from the wording of the American Constitution.

So in spite of the powerful isolationist sentiment that kept the Americans out of the League of Nations - still sustained strongly by many right wing Republicans today - the UN has remained a solid element in the formation and execution of United States, foreign policy for half a century. From the Korean War in the 1950s to the Gulf War in the 1990s,, there have always been occasions when American interests were best served by recourse to the UN. Even in the Reagan years, when the public rhetoric changed and the funds almost ceased to flow, the UN remained an important instrument of American foreign policy Reagan himself came every year to New York to address the General Assembly His advisers were well aware of its importance to their imperial project.

Yet while Washington still retains a strong public commitment to the UN, its enthusiasm has been reserved solely for the Security Council, a place where the great powers - the permanent five of the US, the old Soviet Union, China, France, and Britain - are able to work together, theoretically, to solve the political conflicts that affect their interests. The General Assembly (representing the interests of the vast majority of the countries of the world), the myriad committees, the proliferating agencies for aid and development -these have never been taken seriously by the United States. The economic role of the UN where it was to have succeeded where the League of Nations had failed - was abandoned almost at the outset. The economic regulation of the

world was placed in the hands of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the GATT - institutions where the countries of the capitalist West had an unambiguous majority

A tidy concert of nations to run the world, strictly limited in numbers, has always been the American ideal, and it is now realised in the informal club known as the G7. Here the world's richest countries - the US, Germany, Japan, Britain, France, Canada, and Italy - can draw up blueprints for the planet without interference. It is not a scheme without critics, for this new club is not a United Nations. It purposefully ignores the existence of more than 160 countries that live outside the magic circle of the rich and powerful. These countries have had to be satisfied with making speeches in the UN General Assembly; yet, this is now a sounding board that no one listens to.

The founders of the UN also liked the idea of an informal club. They never envisaged that the organisation would reach its present size. The UN buildings in New York were designed for an entirely different world, one in which two-thirds of today's independent countries were, destined to remain as colonial territories. Indeed the central meeting room inside the UN's complex of buildings is not that of the Security Council or the General Assembly, but the great hall of the Trusteeship Council. This was the place where, the United States and the rich colonial countries of Europe undertook to defend their record of tutelage - in looking after the interests of those not deemed ready for self-government. The early planners had no notion that these colonial territories might very soon become vote wielding states, capable of ganging up against the great powers grouped in the Security Council.

Yet that is what actually happened - for a while. After the conferences at Bandung (in 1955) and Belgrade (in 1961), something called the Third World began to emerge, a "non-aligned" grouping that sought to operate without linking itself politically to either the United States or the Soviet Union. For thirty years, the Third World (in its many guises and transmogrifications) was able to exercise an influence that was not negligible, not least in sustaining the myth that the UN could one day become a democratic and accountable organisation. It was the presence and organised strength of the Third World at the UN during the thirty year period from 1960 to 1990 that gave people the illusion that this kind of organisation was worth supporting.

Today, those dreams have gone. With the collapse of the cold war, the Third World is no more. It was the stand-off between East and West that enabled the countries of the non-aligned world to acquire their illusory sense of power and importance at the UN. They could seek support from both sides. But in the 1990s, the pack of cards erected on these foundations has collapsed. The countries of the old Third World have lost all sense of common purpose. Their interests are too disparate to even allow them to join together against a common enemy. Most governments of the old Third World, like those from the Second (or Communist world), are racing to try to join the First. They won't have much luck, but there is a sense, at UN headquarters, of the end of an era.

Overstretched and under-funded, bureaucratically and unimaginatively organised, the UN now straddles the world like a dinosaur, fed only by the pious hopes of those (now rather elderly) people who once dreamed that it could be used to forge a better world. From Sarajevo to Phnom. Penh, from Mogadishu to Luanda, from Nicosia to San Salvador, the UN's thin blue line of peacekeeping forces is uncertainly deployed, confused participants in a global strategy that has lost all validity and over which no one seems to have much control.

In 1995, the UN celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, but given the forces now building up against it, it seems likely that the organisation - like the League of Nations before it - will soon vanish into history, perhaps before the end of the century. It is not difficult to see why. Today's UN is an intrinsically conservative institution, operating almost entirely for the benefit of the capitalist world - for what used to be thought of as "the West". After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Third World, the UN is no longer capable of progressive reform.

The United States and its old Western allies have clearly found the UN useful in their efforts to maintain their global hegemony. It has helped them to spread the cost of dismantling the ramparts of the, Cold War, and they are happy to accept its support and financial help in policing the world in their interests. The West is now able to use its own gunboats, wearing UN colours, and to use the soldiers of other countries without paying for them, much as the imperial powers were able to deploy troops from their colonies in the colonial era - paid for by the, local government. A similar pattern is emerging today in Rwanda

Yet even with this hidden subsidy, the UN's operations in the field are now seriously over-extended. The continuing efforts to get rid of Saddam Hussein are by no means without cost. The expeditions to Cambodia and to the territories of the former Yugoslavia are huge multimillion dollar operations. Even the programmes in the Western Sahara and Angola involve huge expense, as do those in Central America. While the shared burden may make all this possible for a while, escalating costs will eventually call a halt to operations.

Many question marks now hang over the future of the Security Council. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the financial weakness of its successor states means that the United States has been able, in practice, to use Russia's vote on its own behalf. Yet this cannot last forever. Eventually Russia will once again vote at the UN in its own interest. American hegemony also depends on the cultivated disinterest of the Chinese, who traditionally take an almost non-participatory role. This too seems unlikely to last indefinitely. There is also the permanent exclusion of the Germans and the Japanese which will soon have to be addressed.

The Americans now perceive that there is a need for a reform of the Security Council, but there is no real pressure for change, and no agreement about how it should be achieved. Progressive reform is almost unimaginable because the old Third World has gone and support for the UN in the public opinion of Western countries is conspicuous by its absence. This lack of public support will, in the end, prove to be the cause of the Organisation's downfall. One has only to look at the difficulties involved in organising a United Europe to realise that a United World would be a wholly utopian venture. Public opinion in most Western countries is unprepared to accept the loss of its soldiers in foreign wars that it is in no way geared to comprehend. Far from appearing to be the solution to the world's problems, the UN now looks to be part of the problem.

Many well-meaning people, over the last hundred years, have given expression to their belief in internationalism by providing moral and intellectual support for an international organisation of this kind. I found myself returning from the UN's headquarters in New York unable any longer to share these beliefs and aspirations. The UN now looks like a dangerous anachronism. We shall have to look elsewhere for salvation.

# 6

## **Double Standards, Selectivity and Western Domination**

**T. Rajamoorthy**

A significant feature of the relations between the West and the Third World has been the prevalence of what can best be termed “double standards”. While professing adherence to a set of principles which it insists on applying most stringently on its adversaries in the Third World, the West has repeatedly jettisoned these same principles whenever its own political, economic and strategic interests or that of its client states, have been involved. SELECTIVITY is therefore the basic characteristic that defines such conduct. All this has to be seen in the context of the continuing attempt by the West to maintain its dominance over the Third World.

The issue of double standards has come to the fore in recent years as a consequence of the Gulf War and its aftermath. Iraq was punished by the UN by the infliction of a savage war for refusing to comply with Security Council Resolution 678 (which called upon it to withdraw from Kuwait) while the West’s ally, Israel, was let off the hook for defying Security Council Resolution 799 (which called upon it to take back the 413 Palestinians expelled by it to Lebanon). The fact that Israel had a long record of defying UN Resolutions only served to bring into sharper relief this blatant display of double standards.

More recently, the war in Bosnia has served to highlight this phenomenon. The refusal of the West to punish the Serbs for their defiance of UN resolutions has served to confirm, that so far as the West is concerned, different standards and principles are applicable to different parties. The West’s insistence at the same time, on maintaining the unjust arms embargo against Bosnia, a sovereign



state which is a member of the UN and the victim of Serb aggression, has served only to engender widespread outrage.

Although it is these recent examples of double standards that have made an impact on popular consciousness, it is important to appreciate that the phenomenon is not a new one. It can be traced back to the beginnings of the Western colonial expansion in the 16th century. K.M. Panikkar, in his classic study of Western colonial domination in Asia, informs that:

“VASCO DA GAMA and his associates, even before they reached the coast of India, began to enforce the claim of their sovereign to be the “Lord of Navigation” ... The Portuguese armada ran across some unarmed vessels returning from Mecca. Vasco da Gama captured them and, in the words of Lendas, “after making the ships empty of goods, prohibited anyone from taking out of it any Moor and then ordered them to set fire to i.e.’. The explanation for capturing the vessel is to be found in Portuguese historian Barros’ remark: ‘It is true that there does exist a common right to all to navigate the seas and in Europe we recognise the rights which others hold against us; but the right does not extend beyond Europe and therefore the Portuguese as Lords of the Sea are justified in confiscating the goods of all those who navigate the sea without their permission.’”<sup>1</sup>

Commenting on this, Panikkar remarks:

“Strange and comprehensive claim, yet basically, one which every European nation, in its turn, held firmly almost to the end of Western supremacy in Asia. It is true that no other nation put it forward so crudely or tried to enforce it so barbarously as the Portuguese in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, but the principle that the doctrines of international law did not apply outside Europe, that what would be barbarism in London or Paris is civilised conduct in Peking (e.g. the burning of the Summer Palace) and that European nations had no moral obligations in dealing with Asian peoples (as for example when the British insisted on the opium trade against the laws of China, though opium smoking was prohibited by law in England itself) was part of the accepted creed of Europe’s relations with Asia. In fact, except in Japan, this doctrine of different rights persisted to the very end...”<sup>2</sup>

The phenomenon can thus be traced back to the colonial era. But it did not end there, since the end of colonialism did not spell the end of Western

domination. In the post-War era, it has been translated into a vital component of Western policy towards the Third World. In particular, US policy towards the Third World has been epitomised by double standards, as the following four examples show:

(1) *Terrorism*: The fight against international terrorism has been a key plank in US foreign policy and no state in the world has denounced terrorism or carried out such an extensive campaign against it as has the US. As part of this campaign the US government annually releases a list of the names of states which it characterises as “terrorise’ states. Once so branded, affected states then become subject to a number of strictures, especially on the import of US ‘strategic’ goods into their countries.

Two observations can be made on the US government’s fight against terrorism. Firstly, the branding of states as terrorist is thoroughly selective. Thus Libya is branded as terrorist on the basis of flimsy evidence. In contrast, Israel which regularly carries out the bombing of Lebanese villages and Palestinian refugee camps and kidnaps those “suspected” of attacking Israel is not regarded as a terrorist state.

Secondly, despite its official posturing on this issue, there is probably no other state in history which has carried out, or sponsored terrorism on a scale or intensity as the US. The large-scale terror bombing, strafing and napalming of the civilian populations, villages, and towns during the US war in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos have few parallels. The isolated acts of terror committed by individuals, organisations and movements based in the Third World which the US regularly denounces as “terrorism” can hardly bear comparison to such acts of mass terror.

But apart from directly carrying out terrorist acts, the US also conducts terror through its client states and paramilitary groups sponsored and armed by it. In a word, the US maintains an international network of terror.<sup>3</sup>

Israel is only one of the client states in this international network of terror. Many of the regimes installed and/or propped up by the US in Latin America since the Second World War have also been members of this terror network. Such client regimes came to power in Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Columbia, Venezuela and Guatemala in the three decades after the War.

The military regime in Guatemala is the epitome of a terrorist state in Latin America. It came into power in 1954 in a CIA-backed coup which overthrew the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz. (The US had decided that Arbenz had to go because he had the temerity to institute a mild land reform which involved the taking of some 200,000 acres of idle land owned by a US corporation, the United Fruit Company).<sup>4</sup> The military has ruled the country since then, maintaining its rule by terror and violence, particularly against the indigenous Indian population. Testifying before a committee of the US Congress, Rene' de Leon Schlotter, the leader of Guatemala's Christian Democrats, sought to explain the political character of terror in a typical terrorist state:

“One of the characteristics of violence in my country is that it ...is political, carried out for political reasons: the establishment of terror for the general purpose of eliminating an adversary. The violence organised by these groups has a double purpose: first to sow terror and bring people to their knees in fear of their lives ... and second to eliminate opponents. ... In Guatemala, in order to avoid responsibility for unjust and arbitrary sentences, they don't bother with detention: the opponent is killed or ‘kidnapped’ in the streets and just disappears...”<sup>5</sup>

The human cost of this terror over the last 40 years has been staggering. Grahame Johnson documents the grim human toll:

“Since 1954, more than 150,000 people have been killed by the army and 45,000 “disappeared. 45,000 have sought refuge in southern Mexico; 200,000 have been left as war widows and orphans; at least 1,000,000 people are displaced inside the country; and 440 towns and villages have been destroyed. The majority of those victims were indigenous Mayan people”.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout these 40 years, and even as clandestine mass graves containing the bodies of victims of the army's death squads are being uncovered, the US and the West have continued to Support the Guatemalan regime politically, economically, financially and militarily. As Rene' de Leon Schlotter in his testimony before a committee of the US Congress charged:

“Allow me to reaffirm that the responsibility of the United. States, although indirect, is very real and serious. With its policy of supporting dictatorships, the United States has collaborated in the strengthening of these regimes and

burdened our people with debts, often for the most superfluous programs. With its policy of military and police assistance, the United States has collaborated in the acts of repression, and consequently in the violation of human rights...”<sup>7</sup>

While some of the military regimes in this network in Latin America have since been replaced by civilian regimes, this has not resulted, so far as the people are concerned, in the end of terrorism. For the apparatus of terror which the US-trained military installed still remains intact, notwithstanding the end of military rule. Thus death squads still stalk the continent slaughtering and terrorising civilians, even in countries which are avowedly under civilian rule.

So far as paramilitary groups are concerned, the case of the “Contras” in Nicaragua is probably one of the better known examples of US client groups. But other paramilitary groups such as the anti-Castro Cuban exiles in Miami have also been active at various times in spreading terror.

It is instructive to note that all these large-scale, state-directed acts of terror against the civilian population are not regarded by the US and the West as examples of terrorism. In the lexicon of the West, the term “terrorism” is defined to exclude such acts of “wholesale terrorism” and to limit its use only to acts of terror committed by individuals and organisations based in the countries of the Third World i.e. “retail terrorism”. The irony of it, as Noam Chomsky points out, is that in its original meaning, the term “terrorism” referred to violent *acts of governments* designed to ensure popular submission.<sup>8</sup> But it would be naive to dismiss all this as a mere abuse of semantics. For behind the use or misuse of words is the attempt to cover up the double standards applied by the West in its dealings with the Third World.

(2) *The Nuclear Threat*: The US has at all times possessed the largest arsenal of nuclear weapons in the world and is the only country which has used such weapons in war, e.g. the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. It is also the only country which has threatened its use in peace time. Further, the US has consistently refused to give any undertaking that it will not be the first to use nuclear weapons.

Despite this, in the perception of the West, the US has never been a source of any nuclear threat. Such a threat has always been held to emanate from some other source. During the Cold War, it was the USSR that was alleged to pose such a threat whilst in the post-Cold War era the threat is alleged to

emanate from a number of Third World countries which are said to aspire to become members of the 'nuclear club', for example Iraq, Pakistan and North Korea.

The recent North Korean crisis illustrates how the West applies double standards on this issue.

Firstly, there is no firm evidence that North Korea poses a nuclear threat. While officials from both the CIA and the US Defence Department believe that North Korea has the bomb, officials from the US State Department do not. Further, the South Korean President, who has been anything but dovish on this issue has flatly stated that there is no evidence that North Korea possesses a bomb as yet.<sup>9</sup>

While there is clearly uncertainty and a division of opinion even within official circles on a North Korean bomb, no such doubt remains on Israel's possession of a nuclear bomb. Seymour Hersh, in his *The Samson Option* (Faber & Faber) has documented how Israel has built up its nuclear arsenal with Western connivance. Despite this, the US and the West have remained completely silent on the threat posed by Israel's possession of the bomb, while whipping up a hysteria over the alleged North Korean threat.

It may be argued that while North Korea does not yet possess a bomb, it is a potential threat because it has enough plutonium to manufacture such bombs. Even in the application of such criteria, the US and the West are guilty of double standards. For if this criterion was applied rigorously and objectively, both South Korea and Japan pose a far more dangerous threat. As Eric Nadler, writing in the *Nation* has pointed out, both South Korea and Japan ... are quietly pursuing nuclear weapons capabilities abetted by successive US administrations and a consortium of multinational high-tech corporations. These ... standby nuclear operations, by some standards are years ahead of the one possibly stitched together by North Korea's nuclear establishment"... Further he observes that, in the case of South Korea,

"...The South Koreans have accumulated ten tons of unseparated plutonium-239, which, if reprocessed, can be used to construct nuclear weapons. By the year 2000, the South Korean stockpile of this material will have hit at least 24 tons - more than 20 times the amount of the North's projected plutonium reserves."

Similarly, the Japanese according to Eric Nadler, "...have begun to stockpile an enormous amount of plutonium - far more than they need for commercial purposes."<sup>10</sup>

In the final analysis, the US is guilty of double standards in the recent Korean crisis, not only because of its refusal to take into account the threat posed by the nuclear capability of its allies but also by its failure to take into account its own nuclear stockpile. As Daniel B. Schirmer put it:

"The Pentagon is today in possession of some 17,000 nuclear warheads. As of February 1993, it had targeted North Korea with the hydrogen bomb; it can, in addition, threaten North Korea with sea borne nukes. Before Washington presumes to admonish North Korea about nuclear weapons, it should withdraw its own nuclear threat to that country and start to drastically reduce its own stockpile. To do otherwise smacks of hypocrisy and arrogance."<sup>11</sup>

(3) *Non-interference in the internal affairs of states and respect for their sovereignty*: Throughout the Cold War, the main charge against the Communist bloc was that it was attempting to subvert the lawful governments of Third World states. When Soviet troops marched into Afghanistan in 1979, the accusation that the communist bloc was violating the sovereignty and integrity of Third World states reached a new pitch. Yet throughout this period, the US was subverting and toppling many Third World governments which it found politically unacceptable e.g. the Mossadegh government in Iran in 1953, the Arbenz government in Guatemala in 1964, the Goulart government in Brazil in 1964, the Allende government in Chile in 1973, just to name a few. US troops also openly invaded the Dominican Republic in 1965, Grenada in 1983 and Panama in 1989 and were engaged in open aggressive wars against countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The US sponsored anti-government, armed,- terrorist groups in Nicaragua, Angola and Mozambique. Apart from these covert and overt moves to topple governments, the US was involved in the murder and attempted assassination of heads of state and Prime Ministers e.g. Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, Chou Eu Lai of China and Fidel Castro of Cuba.<sup>12</sup>

(4) Human rights: The West has long professed concern for human rights in the Third World and the US has been particularly vociferous in this regard. Thus the human rights records of such Third World states as Libya, Iraq, North

Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia and Cuba have come under the most stringent scrutiny. However, ever since the Second World War, the US has maintained the most cordial relations with some of the most repressive regimes in the world and granted them massive financial assistance, conveniently ignoring their ghastly human rights records. These include many dictators in Latin America e.g. Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, Batista of Cuba, Pinochet of Chile, the Shah of Iran and repressive dictatorships in Asia such as those of Marcos of the Philippines, Ngo Din Diem of South Vietnam, Syngman Rhee and Park Chung Hee of South Korea, Phibun, Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn of Thailand.

It should be clear from the above that the application of double standards by the West in its relations with the Third World is neither new nor an aberration. What is new is the opportunity afforded to the West by the collapse of the Soviet Union and its allied regimes in Eastern Europe. This has enabled the West, in the absence of a countervailing power or bloc in the New World Order, to legitimise this practice in international relations e.g. by setting the seal of the UN to such a practice.

A classic illustration of this is provided by the move by the West to take up the cause of the Kurds in the United Nations. In an unprecedented move, after the Gulf War, the West, by means of a UN Security Council Resolution, created a 'safe haven' for the Kurds in Iraq. Leaving aside the issue of the threat posed to national sovereignty by resolutions of this sort, the point to note is that this was a blatant exercise in double standards. For just across the Iraqi border in Turkey, the same Kurds whose cause the West was espousing were being persecuted even more ruthlessly by the Turkish authorities. There was not even a murmur of protest or concern about the Kurds in Turkey. Turkey as a staunch Nato ally was, presumably, not expected to measure up to the same standards as Iraq in the treatment of its Kurds.

Now that the West exercises an almost unchallenged dominance in the New World Order, the phenomenon of double standards is bound to pervade almost every facet of the relations between the West and the Third World. More important, as noted above, the West will seek to embellish its practice of double standards with the imprimatur of the UN and other international bodies to give it an international legitimacy. The task therefore falls upon committed intellectuals, particularly those in the Third World, to expose each and every

instance of double standards. Such a task may seem tedious but it is a necessary one. For failure to do so would inevitably encourage the resigned acceptance of such a practice as the norm of international relations. From this, it would only be a short step to the acceptance of Western domination over the Third World as the 'natural order of things'.

### **Endnotes**

- 1 . K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1959), pp. 35-36.
- 2 *Ibid*
- 3 See Edward S. Herman, *The Real Terror Network* (Canada: Black & Rose Books, 1985)
- 4 Stephen Schlesinger & Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit - no Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (London: Sinclair Browne, 1982).
- 5 *Ibid* p. 250
- 6 Grahame Johnson, "A Truth Commission for Guatemalan Human Rights Victims," *Third World Resurgence*, No. 48, August 1994, p. 34.
- 7 Stephen Schlesinger & Stephen Kinzer - *Ibid*, p. 251.
- 8 Noam Chomsky, *Pirates & Emperors - International Terrorism in the Real World* (New York: Claremont research & Publications, 1986)
- 9 Daniel B.Schinner, North Korea: Issues of War & Peace in Asia," *Monthly Review*, July/August 1994, pp. 68 & 69
- 10 *The Nation*, July 4, 1994
- 11 Daniel B. Schirmer - op.cit, p. 69
- 12 See John Ranalegh, *The Agency. The Rise & Decline of CIA* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), Darell Garwood, *Under Cover. Thirty Five Years of CIA & Deception* (New York: Grove Press, 1985) & Rose & Wise, *The Invisible Government* (New York: Random House, 1964).



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# 7

## Human Rights and Hypocrisy in the International Order

Chandra Muzaffar

*Hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue*

- Duc de la Rochefoucauld

This paper is divided into 4 sections. The first section defines hypocrisy and looks at hypocrisy as a human phenomenon with implications for politics and inter-state relations. The second section examines the hypocrisy of the dominant global powers in the sphere of human rights. The third section discusses how the Muslim world should respond to this hypocrisy in the international arena. The fourth and final section reflects on the situation within the Muslim world itself and draws some general conclusions from the study.

### **What is Hypocrisy?**

Hypocrisy is defined as “the assuming of a false appearance of virtue or goodness”. It is often equated with pretence ‘or’ sham’. It has existed, in one form or another, in all societies since time immemorial. There is not a single culture or religion which condones hypocrisy. In fact, hypocrisy is one of those evils which every scripture condemns, not once or twice but a number of times.

In the holy Quran, for instance, there are at least 21 references to hypocrites and hypocrisy. There is an entire Sura entitled ‘Munafiqun’ or ‘the hypocrites’. The Quran presents numerous situations in which hypocrisy reveals itself. In one place it says,

*‘ They (the hypocrites) have made their oaths  
A Screen (for their misdeeds)  
Thus they obstruct (men)  
From the path of God  
Truly evil are their deeds*

(Sura Munafiqun : 2)

‘Their oaths’ could be interpreted in the context of contemporary international politics to mean the noble ideals of freedom and justice and equality which those who dominate the global system often espouse but never observe as the victims of their domination will readily testify. Their oaths could also mean their charters and constitutions and those international human rights declarations and conventions which eulogise rights and liberties - rights and liberties which are scorned and spurned when it suits the interests of the powerful who control the international system.

There is another line in the Quran which is even more pertinent to our analysis of hypocrisy in the present international order. It reads: -

*“When it is said to them:  
Make not mischief on the earth  
They say:” Why, we only  
Want to make peace*

(Sura Baqara : 11)

Peace, as we will soon-show, has often served as a mere smokescreen to conceal the wanton pursuit of pernicious goals which only reinforce the dominance of the dominant.

While our analysis will focus upon those who control and dominate the international system - namely the United States and its allies - it must be emphasised at this juncture that we are acutely conscious of the fact that hypocrisy also expresses itself in relations between and among those who do not control and dominate the international system. Among Muslim states, whether they are victims of dominance or not, and in the relations between Muslim elites and Muslim masses there is undoubtedly a great deal of hypocrisy. If we have chosen to highlight the hypocrisy of dominant global powers, it is only because of the nature of this inquiry.

### **Hypocrisy of the Dominant Powers**

To understand their hypocrisy, we shall analyse the post - 1945 period, or the period which is sometimes described as the neo-colonial period. The neo-colonial period in turn, will be divided into two phases - the Cold War phase which lasted from 1949 or so to 1989 and the post Cold War phase which is the current phase.

### **The Colonial Past**

Because we are starting with the neo-colonial period, we should not come to the erroneous conclusion that there was no hypocrisy in the human rights practices (or rather malpractices) of the colonial period. Let us not forget that it was in the name of a superior 'Christian faith' that Spanish and Portuguese conquerors wiped out no less than 90 million indigenous Indians in the Americas within a hundred years of Columbus voyage in 1492. Let us not forget that it was in the name of a higher civilisation that English and other European traders took away in chains some 40 million men and women from Africa, the slave-ancestors of today's African-American population.

And indeed, the entire Western colonial enterprise, begun by the Spanish and Portuguese, continued by the French, the British, the Dutch, the Germans, and the Italians and fortified in its last phase by the Americans, was one huge monumental rape of the rights of millions and millions of human beings in almost every nook and cranny of Asia, Africa and Latin America. It has been estimated that between 1815 and 1914, in Asia alone, some 50 million people died at the brutal, barbaric hands of Western colonialism. Millions and millions of others, all over the South were deprived of every conceivable right - the right to their land, to their resources, to education, to health, to employment, to use their own language, to practise their own religion, to preserve their own culture. The colonised people of the South, needless to say, had no freedom of speech, no freedom of assembly, no freedom of association. We have often argued that each and every one of the rights embodied in various UN declarations and conventions, each and every one of the rights which Western governments proclaim so loudly today were violated in one way or another, by Western colonialism during the long centuries of colonial subjugation. No Southern government, it should be added, has, in contemporary times, suppressed human

rights and oppressed human beings in the same manner or to the same extent. And yet colonialism we know was presented by the coloniser to the colonised as the path to ‘ progress’ and ‘ enlightenment, as an attempt ‘ to civilise primitive, backward peoples’ .

As an aside, Western hypocrisy, it is worth observing, was not confined to colonial rule. In its treatment of its own African population, US leaders for instance, displayed such blatant hypocrisy that it is hard to imagine that human beings could have been so utterly fraudulent. While their constitution proclaimed that ‘ all men are born equal’ and entitled to ‘ life, liberty and happiness’ , these leaders perpetuated a harsh slave-system which crushed mercilessly the most basic rights of its victims. In fact, many of the authors of the American constitution itself - like the much acclaimed Thomas Jefferson -were slave-owners with a reputation for abusing their poor slaves. In a sense, the hypocrisy of the framers of the American constitution and their successors was not surprising at all, given their treatment of the indigenous American Indian population. They confiscated their lands, usurped their resources, imprisoned them, tortured them, massacred them - while preaching the virtues of Jeffersonian democracy in ‘ the land of the free’ .

### **The Neocolonial Period**

Even if we put aside the colonial past and other transgressions of yesteryears - something that we in the South should never ever do - we will discover that Western hypocrisy vis-à-vis human rights in the neocolonial period has not diminished one bit. If anything, it has become more subtle, more sophisticated and therefore, more dangerous and more destructive.

Following the end of the Second World War in 1945 and the beginning of the process of decolonisation, the Western powers created a world body which they claimed would maintain world peace and promote justice, freedom and equality among all nations and peoples. Though the United Nations, judged on the basis of the goals of its Charter was a noble endeavour, there was no doubt that the major Western powers intended to use it as a vehicle to ensure their continued domination of the international system in the newly emerging era. This was why the United States, Britain, France, the Soviet Union (then a Western ally) and China (also a Western ally) were given permanent

membership in the UN Security Council, the UN's more powerful organ, and bestowed with the veto -that is, the right to repudiate any decision of the Security Council. Thus, an international institution was born dedicated to justice and equality among nations and yet its principal structure promised neither justice nor equality to the majority of the nations of the world.

The three main Western partners, the US, Britain and France, would have succeeded in manipulating the UN to perpetuate their dominance without any challenge, while pretending that they were committed to justice and peace if it had not been for certain important developments. The uneasy war alliance between the West and the Soviet Union came asunder as their conflicting interests rooted in fundamentally incompatible economic ideologies and political systems clashed over Germany and Europe. It set the stage for what came to be called the Cold War between the capitalist West and the communist East. At about the same time, a communist revolution took place in China in 1949. Beijing was no longer willing to acquiesce with Western dominance. (Of course, the US and its Western allies made sure that the new Chinese government would not be able to keep its permanent seat on the Security Council. In a ludicrous move, the Chinese seat was given instead to the regime that was overthrown in the Revolution and exiled to Taiwan). Finally, as more and more countries in Asia and Africa achieved formal independence, some of these former Western colonies began to assert their sovereignty and authority, much to the chagrin of the dominant Western powers.

### **Neocolonialism: The Cold War Phase**

But these changes, significant as they were, could not prevent the continued dominance of the international system by the US and its Western allies. In order to curb whatever little influence the Soviet Union wielded in world affairs, the US embarked upon a global mission to ensure the triumph of democracy, the victory of the 'free world' in the face of 'the communist threat. The real purpose was, of course, to secure unhindered, unhampered US dominance of the planet - dominance which would facilitate easy access to natural resources, navigational routes and strategic locations. This neocolonial role in world politics and economics had become vital to the US since it now consumed something like 35 per cent of the earth's non-renewable resources. A predatory power, it

had reached a point where it could sustain its might only by controlling other lives and other lands.

And, of the various regions of the world, it was control over West Asia, with its enormous oil resources, which was most crucial to the US and indeed to the other industrial economies of the North. The creation of the entity called Israel in 1948 was an integral aspect of that control. Essentially a project of international Zionism, Israel, an idea which germinated in Europe (not Palestine or West Asia), had the full backing of the US and other Western powers. But in order to create Israel, the West committed the gravest human rights violation of the post-1945 period. It colluded and conspired with Zionism to force Palestinians out of their land so that Jews from Europe would have a home. The great champions of human rights from Europe and the US had no qualms about abetting the eviction from their home and hearth of a people with a 3000 year link to the land. Since 1948, more than 3 million Palestinians have become refugees, tens of thousands of them have been killed or tortured, thousands of others have been imprisoned by the Israeli authorities. Occasional whimpers of protest aside, Western governments by and large have remained supportive of, and sympathetic to, Israel. The blood of the Palestinian martyrs and the tears of their children will always remain an eloquent, if tragic, testimony to the utter hypocrisy of Western human rights.

While the anguish and agony of the Palestinian people stands out as the ugliest stain on the West's human rights record in their Cold War period, its attempt to stifle and suffocate the cry for freedom and dignity of a valiant people in Southeast Asia will be remembered as yet another proof of its shameful hypocrisy. Though France and later the US failed to stop the Vietnamese people from regaining their independence and sovereignty, their long war against these two Western powers robbed them of at least 3 million of their finest sons and daughters.

In Africa, as in Asia, there are equally disgraceful examples of how Western powers had not hesitated to assist some of the most retrogressive forces on earth in suppressing the rights of the people. The example that comes readily to mind is South Africa. Without the covert and overt support of the United States and British governments and their business and military elites, the white racist regime in Pretoria would not have been able to sustain for so long one of the most inhuman social systems in human history, the system of

apartheid. No other system denied and denigrated human rights and human dignity the way apartheid did. For it stripped the victim, the indigenous African, of every iota of self-respect by virtue of the colour of his skin alone. And yet the dominant Western powers, passionate defenders of human rights, were prepared to tolerate apartheid for so many decades.

That is South Africa. And how about Congo (now Zaire)? In 1960, the Congo obtained independence from Belgium and its leadership began to show a determination to assert sovereign control over its own natural resources without being at the beck and call of its former colonial master and other Western powers. Belgium, the US and other Western nations hit back immediately. They exploited internal divisions within the Congolese elite stratum and through a series of intricate manoeuvres managed to destroy the nascent Congolese nationalist movement. Its leader, Patrice Lumumba, was murdered by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). For nations which profess to respect the people's sovereignty - an important principle of democratic governance - the West's diabolical conduct in the Congo proved yet again their blatant hypocrisy.

In Latin America, the US committed one of its most shameful deeds in the continent in Chile in 1973. The US through the CIA and certain US based Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) played a central role in bringing down Chile's popularly-elected President, Salvador Allende. Allende, a Marxist, had decided to nationalise the country's copper mines and to gradually free the economy from US control. His patriotism cost him his life. But the US and its Chilean cronies camouflaged their evil by trying to convince the people that the coup they had organised was necessary to restore law and order.

A few years later the US began plotting the overthrow of yet another popular government in Latin America. The left-oriented Sandinistas had come to power in Nicaragua in 1979 through a revolution. They upheld democratic norms, introduced significant economic and social reforms and attempted to pursue a non-aligned foreign policy which meant, in effect, reducing US dominance. They irked the US administration. An active, aggressive programme to de-stabilise the Nicaraguan government was set into operation. The US armed and aided a rebel group, the Contras, bombarded one of Nicaragua's ports, and squeezed its economy through a series of covert and overt measures. As a result of all this, the Sandinistas' popularity declined and they were defeated in a general election in 1990. A pro-US government came



to power and the US was happy.

The examples we have given from Asia, Africa and Latin America constitute a mere fraction of a long, sordid catalogue of Western crimes against human rights and democracy. At the height of the Cold War, creating chaos, fomenting unrest, destabilising governments, assassinating leaders were all weapons in the arsenal of the dominant powers, especially the US, as they sought to perpetuate their dominance. Each and everyone of these weapons had an adverse impact upon a multitude of human rights - civil, political, economic, social and cultural.

Besides, the US propped up a variety of authoritarian leaders all over the South. The only criterion was their readiness to be servile, supine servants of the US. Whether it was Marcos of the Philippines or Reza Pahlavi of Iran or Bourguiba of Tunisia or Mobutu of Zaire or Pinochet of Chile or Samozza of Nicaragua, all these dictators relied directly or indirectly, at some point or other, upon US power to suppress their own people.

But the US and its Western allies, to be fair, were not the only hypocrites in the international arena during the Cold War. The Soviet Union's rhetoric about liberation and revolution was also a lot of sham. When it invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, it claimed that it had liberated the country from reactionary forces. This was also the Soviet line when it committed aggression against Afghanistan in 1979. But the advance of human rights and democracy was never a Soviet cause. There was, therefore, no pretence.

### **Neocolonialism: The Post-Cold War Phase**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War; some commentators had expected US and Western hypocrisy on human rights to also decrease. After all, there was no enemy around; the US could afford to be more honest with itself.

That hypocrisy has not decreased, it should not surprise anyone. For the US drive to dominate, and to camouflage that dominance in pious platitudes about human rights, had - as we have shown - less to do with the Soviet Union and more to do with its own economic and political imperatives. This explains why in the postSoviet Union, post Cold War phase, dominance, and its corollary, hypocrisy, have not diminished.

In fact, the US and its allies heralded the end of the Cold War with a new war - the Gulf War - which revealed once more all the hypocrisy about human rights. Though Western leaders were frothing at their mouth, berating the immorality of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, it was obvious from the outset that their primary objective was to restore Western, specifically US, control over the oil-taps of Kuwait and of the Gulf region as a whole. It has been said that he who controls the oil-taps of the Gulf controls the world.

But the Gulf War was not just about oil. The US and its allies seized the opportunity afforded by Iraq's ill-conceived invasion of Kuwait, to smash Iraq's military, industrial and even civilian infrastructure so painstakingly developed by the Iraqi leadership. For Iraq was perhaps the only Arab country with the potential to challenge the existing power structure in West Asia and North Africa which allows the US and Israel to dominate the entire region. This was why Iraq - from the point of view of the US and its close ally, Israel - had to be destroyed at all costs. The harsh, punitive economic sanctions imposed upon Iraq by the US and its allies, in the name of the UN, and the continuing harassment of Iraq by the US in particular, should be seen as a concerted endeavour to eliminate once and for all any threat to US-Israeli dominance of West Asia and North Africa.

It is a matter of great sorrow - and shame - that in order to secure their dominance, the US and Israel, supported by Britain and France, are prepared to allow thousands and thousands of Iraqis to die. It has been estimated that since economic sanctions were imposed in August 1990, at least 300,000 men, women and children have died as a result of malnutrition, inadequate health care and poor sanitary conditions. How can the US and its allies preach the gospel of human rights when its own Machiavellian policy on Iraq is responsible for such a colossal slaughter of human lives?

Of course, the Western powers will argue that Iraq is the problem, that sanctions will be lifted the moment Iraq complies with UN Security Council resolutions. This is yet another example of Western sham. The sanctions were first imposed because of Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait. The understanding was that as soon as Iraq quits Kuwait, the sanctions would be lifted. After Iraq was forced out of Kuwait in February 1991, the US and its allies decided to impose new conditions for the lifting of sanctions. Each time Iraq complies with these conditions, the Western allies come up with new

demands. In mid- 1991, the issue was Iraq's biological and chemical weapons. After that, it became Iraq's nuclear weapons. Then, for a while, the spotlight turned to the delineation of Iraq's borders with Kuwait. This was followed by another major issue: Iraq's alleged ill-treatment of the Shiites of southern Iraq. It does not matter what Iraq does or does not do. The US and its allies are determined to keep sanctions going - because the real motive, as we have analysed, is something else.

The Iraqis are not the only ones who are suffering the dire consequences of Western hypocrisy. The Libyans are also the victims of limited sanctions. The scope of these sanctions has recently been expanded. Here again, the US, Britain and France have assumed the role of moral custodians of the world - upholding right and avenging wrong. They want to punish Libya for alleged air terrorism. Though the evidence against Libya is flimsy, the three Western partners are determined to press ahead through the agency of the Western controlled UN Security Council. Their real motive is something else: Libya is one of a handful of Arab states which refuses to surrender totally to US and Western dominance. So she has to be taught a lesson.

Terrorism - apart from gross human rights violations - is the charge levelled at yet another state in the African continent, namely Sudan. The US has not been able to furnish any proof of Sudan's involvement in any form of terrorism. Even allegations of flagrant human rights violations have been refuted by the authorities in Khartoum and by some independent analysts and commentators. But the allegations persist nonetheless. Why? Because the US is piqued by Sudan's unwillingness to submit meekly to US power. Sudan, it appears, is determined to pursue domestic policies which will enhance its self-reliance, and a foreign policy which will strengthen its independence and sovereignty. Besides, since 1989, Sudan has been moving steadily towards an Islamic polity. The US government, and most Western governments, it is only too apparent, are uneasy about Islam, especially Islam as the foundation of Politics and society

It is this uneasiness about Islam, which often translates into antagonism, that is primarily responsible for the US's hostility towards Iran. Ever since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran has been the constant target of US and Western political propaganda. It has been depicted as the world's number one terrorist state, as a terrible violator of human rights. The West has not been able

to provide any concrete evidence of Iran's so-called 'terrorist activities abroad'. Even if there are human rights violations, there is no doubt at all that both the Western media and Western human rights groups have grossly exaggerated the score.

That it is fear of Islam, rather than concern for human rights violations, which is the real reason for targeting Iran, Sudan and certain other Muslim countries and Islamic movements will be obvious if we examined three recent episodes in the West Asia/North Africa region. One, when the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria was on the verge of an absolute victory in the January 1992 election, the Algerian ruling elite, backed by the military; cancelled the second round of voting in the election, banned the FIS, detained thousands of FIS activists and established a dictatorship which has, to all intents and purposes, destroyed the fledgling democratic experiment in that North African state. Western governments, notably the US, France and Britain, have, in very oblique ways, condoned this outright rape of electoral democracy. Certain mainstream Western newspapers have even come out in support of the suppression of the FIS and of the democratic process since it was the only way "of dealing with Islamic fundamentalism". This exposes - if anything does - the hollowness of the West's so-called commitment to democratic principles such as electoral competition and the sanctity of the ballot. It also proves that mainstream Western elites and the Western media will do anything - support any dictator; smash any democratic effort - to curb the influence of Islam as a political and social force.

Two, in the last two or three years, Islamic movements fighting for freedom and justice have become stronger and stronger in both Egypt and Saudi Arabia. They are not only protesting against the growing gap between the rich and poor (in Egypt) or the corruption and decadence of the ruling elite (in Saudi Arabia) but are also demanding greater accountability on the part of government, more scope for political participation, tolerance of dissent and so on. These are the type of issues which are often articulated in societies yearning for genuine democratic precepts and practices. The authoritarian ruling elites in both Cairo and Riyadh have reacted to these popular aspirations with extraordinary harshness and arrogance. Dozens of dissidents in Egypt have been killed; hundreds of others have been jailed and tortured. In Saudi Arabia, a number of critics have been imprisoned and subjected to severe abuse. Though some

Western human rights groups have spoken up on behalf of these victims of human rights violations, most Western governments and the mainstream Western media have maintained a studied silence. Their attitude is not difficult to fathom. Since the dissident movements are Islamic, and since the Cairo and Riyadh regimes are close allies of the US and the West, the latter should be allowed to suppress the former. What does it matter if democratic principles are sacrificed in the process? Haven't national interests always been more important than human rights for the West? It is worth noting in this regard, that the stance adopted by the West towards the increasingly volatile situation in Egypt and Saudi Arabia is very similar to the position taken by the US and its allies vis-a-vis the brutal suppression of dissent in Iran during the last years of the Shah's rule.

Three, on 13 September 1993, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Israeli regime signed an accord granting the Palestinians limited self-rule in the Gaza strip and the West Bank town of Jericho as a first step towards a permanent peace settlement which would be negotiated by the two sides over the next five years.

Western governments have been euphoric about the Accord. They hail it as a great historic agreement paving the way for eternal peace in West Asia. The ecstasy of the Western media was even more overwhelming. The Accord, they swooned, was one of the most momentous events of the century.

And yet the truth was something else. Weighed against the standards of democracy, the principles of human rights, which the West cherishes so much, the Accord was a complete letdown. As it stood, it gave the Palestinians limited, essentially Municipal-type authority over about 2 per cent of the original Palestine. Even if the actual implementation of self-rule eventually bestows the Palestinians with more power, there is nothing in the Accord which promises them independence. An independent, sovereign Palestinian state covering both Gaza and the West Bank with Jerusalem as its capital would have been the least that the Accord could have done for a people who had already been robbed of 80 per cent of their original land.

An unjust deal, which violates the fundamental right to independent, sovereign national status, which ignores the principle of self-determination, has

been received with great enthusiasm by the democratic West mainly because it guarantees the perpetuation of US and Israeli dominance of the region. More than that the West, Israel and even the PLO and many Arab governments wanted an accord at all costs because of their common fear of the growing Islamic movement in Palestine. The Accord, they hope, will check what they call 'Islamic fundamentalism, which derives tremendous strength from the injustice of direct Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. Since the PLO will now police Gaza under the Accord, Israel will be able to use the PLO to cripple the Islamic movement.

Why is there so much fear of, and antagonism towards, Islamic movements which are growing rapidly in different parts of the Muslim world? There is a simple, straightforward answer. Genuine Islam will not submit to Western dominance. The Muslim submits only to Allah. This is why Islamic movements will continue to resist any attempt by anyone to dictate the destiny of the Muslim people. It is this resistance to its dominant power which the West is determined to destroy. To achieve its wicked purpose, the West - for that is what hypocrisy is all about - is going all out to distort and misrepresent Muslim resistance by describing it as 'Islamic militancy, 'Islamic radicalism', 'Islamic extremism' and of course Islamic fundamentalism' .

Indeed, 'Islamic fundamentalism' has become such an obsession with certain policy-makers in Washington and other Western capitals that even in Somalia, it was one of the many factors which prompted US intervention in December 1992. The US was afraid that with an Islamic government in Khartoum, the embryonic Islamic movement in Somalia would slowly gain ground. However, this was not one of the primary reasons for intervention. The strategic significance of the Horn of Africa, the petroleum potential of Somalia, the desire within sections of the US Establishment to denigrate the doctrine of national sovereignty, and the Pentagon's thinly veiled goal of convincing the American taxpayer that he must continue to support a huge military budget were some of the more compelling reasons. One could even argue that Somalia is perhaps the US's curtain-raiser for eventual military intervention in Sudan. Whatever the reasons, providing humanitarian assistance and protecting human rights were not the main motivating factors behind US intervention. If anything Somalia is yet another piece of evidence of the US drive to control and dominate the world.

The examples we have provided so far of countries which have fallen foul of US and Western dominance in the post Cold War phase are all Muslim if one goes on the basis of their populations. But Muslim states are not the only ones who are targeted. Cuba which has resisted US dominance and control for more than 3 decades, continues to suffer the effects of a US imposed economic embargo. In fact, the situation of the Cuban people has become much worse in the post Cold War phase, as a consequence of the disintegration of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union - communist comrades who once gave a lot of economic assistance to Cuba. The suffering of the Cuban people today - inadequate health care, poor nutrition, declining education standards - is a human rights issue. And the US is the principal culprit.

North Korea is another country which has incurred the wrath the US. Like Cuba, its communist ideology and its human rights ones have provided the US with ammunition to attack her. The US also alleges that North Korea has developed a clandestine weapons programme. Whether there is any truth in the allegation or not, it reveals yet again the blatant hypocrisy of the US government. The superpower which is making so much noise about nuclear weapons of not just North Korea, but also Iran, India and Pakistan, possesses the most extensive nuclear arsenal in the world. It is the only state which has actually used the atomic bomb - not once but twice. The US has since then threatened to use its nuclear option on at least three occasions. And yet, this is the country which wants to make sure that others do not manufacture nuclear weapons, that others who possess nuclear weapons act responsibly! The 'others', incidentally are only those outside the US orbit. US allies - like Israel or Britain - are free to develop their nuclear weapons programme.

The US' s hypocrisy and double standards on the nuclear issue are an indication of its determination to perpetuate its dominant power in world politics. The US and its allies will not brook any challenge to the system of ' nuclear apartheid' which they have established for some time now. The determination, even obduracy that the West displays when it come to preserving and enhancing its global dominance far surpasses its concern for human rights. There is perhaps no better proof of this than the West' s lack of genuine commitment to the protection of human rights and human lives in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Bosnia-Herzegovina is that little country where the most flagrant human

rights violations that have occurred in the West since the Second World War, are taking place every day. Since the Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina, supported militarily and materially by the state of Serbia, launched their war of aggression against Bosnian Muslims and Croats in April 1992, more than 150,000 people have died, tens of thousands have been tortured and raped, two million others have been rendered refugees. The only crime of the Muslims, the Croats and even a small segment of the Serb community was their desire to be an independent, sovereign nation. The UN had recognised their independence. But neither the UN, nor the European Community nor the US is prepared to help the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina defend their independence. All that the militarily ill-equipped Bosnians are asking for is either armed intervention on their behalf or an abrogation of the arms embargo imposed upon them (and other states in the former Yugoslavia but the Serbs are not affected since Serbia is militarily strong) by the UN.

But the UN will not allow a defenceless people to exercise their right of self-defence provided for by the UN Charter. It will not intervene militarily either. The UN will not move because the US will not move. The US will not move because Bosnia has neither economic nor strategic value for the US. Besides, the US does not want to antagonise its new found friend, Russia, which is sympathetic to, and supportive of, the Serbs. Ensuring that Russia remains on the side of the United States is a primary objective of US foreign policy in the post Cold War era. At the same time, the US does not want to create any 'bad blood' with one of its closest allies, Britain, which is opposed to both the lifting of the arms embargo and Western or UN military intervention. Britain will not defend Bosnia-Herzegovina because it wants Serbia to remain a powerful force in the region so that it can counter balance the growing strength and influence of Germany in Europe. If Britain does not move the European Community will not move since the latter does not want to alienate the former. For Britain, for the European Community, for Russia, for the US, and indeed for the West as a whole, there is an additional consideration. They are reluctant to come to the aid of what is after all a state in which the Muslim component is the biggest. It is, in other words, the age-old Western prejudice against Islam and the Muslims expressing itself in a more subtle form in the last decade of the twentieth century.

Bosnia-Herzegovina demonstrates yet again the sham, the hollowness, the



emptiness of Western human rights posturing. If western governments were sincere about human rights how could they allow Bosnia-Herzegovina to happen right in the heart of Europe? After Bosnia-Herzegovina, the West - which in the eyes of those who know never had any moral authority to chastise others for their human rights violations - should never ever open its mouth again about human rights. How can Western governments and a section of the mainstream Western media preach human rights to the rest of the world, when it cannot protect the most basic of human rights -the right not to be raped, the right not to be tortured, nay, the right not to be killed - of the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina?

Bosnia-Herzegovina, like all the other episodes we have analysed, shows that the West has always been hypocritical about human rights. It is only too eager to sacrifice human rights values and principles at the altar of interest and expedience. Maintaining their dominant position and power in the world is more- important than anything else for the elites of the West.

But they have to camouflage and conceal their dominance. It is not in their interest to allow the rest of humanity to realise that global politics, global security, global economics, global culture, global media, and indeed every aspect of global life is in their control. Every time the elites of the West act to protect or perpetuate their control and dominance, they disguise their nefarious goal by invoking some lofty, moral principle or ideal. As we have seen, ‘human rights’ and ‘democracy’ serve that purpose in the contemporary world. To give credibility to their camouflage however, these elites have to convince people both in the Western and the non-Western worlds that those grand moral principles are under threat from some dangerous, aggressive power. In the past, communism fitted the bill. Today, Islam appears to be the ‘new threat. It is in the creation of a mythical threat, in the construction of a fraudulent moral principle that the dominant West reveals its hypocrisy. The West, to put it differently, just has to be hypocritical if it wants to maintain its dominance and control. There- is no other way.

### **How Should Muslims Respond?**

How should the Muslim world respond to this hypocrisy in the international order? To start with, the Muslim world, in particular its intellectuals should do

much more to expose the hypocrisy of the dominant West vis-a-vis human rights. They should talk about it, write about it not only within the Muslim world but also among non-Muslims in both the West and the East.

However, exposing Western hypocrisy alone is not enough. Muslims are duty bound to present an alternative vision of human rights to the world which is more just, more compassionate than what the dominant West preaches today. In at least three respects, Islam is capable of articulating such a vision of human rights.

### **Human Rights**

One, the Quran embodies a concept of human rights which is at once holistic and integrated. What this means is that human rights in the Quran are inter-related and inter-dependent. The inter-relatedness of rights reflects the fundamental philosophical principle of the Quran - the principle of Tawhid (the oneness/unity of God). It is this principle which encourages us to think of human rights as an indivisible whole.

It would be wrong, therefore, from a Quranic viewpoint, to compartmentalise rights, and worse, to emphasise one set of rights at the expense of another. Within the dominant stratum of Western society, civil and political rights, for instance, are given much more prominence than economic, social and cultural rights. Indeed, civil and political rights are often regarded as the sum total of human rights. This has distorted the very meaning of human rights. It has led to the downgrading and depreciation of all other rights so much so that a country which may have succeeded in securing certain economic rights for its people while limiting certain political rights is contemptuously dismissed as a country which has failed to uphold human rights. This partial, compartmentalised approach to human rights serves the interests of the dominant West in two ways. It helps to project its own tradition of civil and political rights as the only legitimate embodiment of the entire human rights struggle. It is also an effective way of targeting those countries in the South *which* may be much weaker on civil and political rights than on economic and social rights.

### **The 4Rs**

Two, while human rights are important in the Quran (in fact rights in the Quran are far more wide-ranging than what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the other major UN covenants and conventions contain) the Quran, nonetheless, goes beyond rights. It is also concerned about human responsibilities, relationships and roles.

The Quran lays out, in different places and in different ways, our responsibility to self, family, relatives, the community, the state and even the natural environment. Similarly, the Quran makes us aware of our relationship to the universe, to nature, to plants, to animals, to the community, to family, to self. It also seeks to instil in us a profound consciousness of our role as male or female, husband or wife, father or mother, child or adult.

Rights, responsibilities, relationships and roles in the Quran are closely intertwined. For instance, if one values one's role as a parent one would also become aware of the rights one enjoys, the responsibilities one bears, the relationships one sustains. As a parent one has certain rights over one's child; at the same time one has to fulfil certain responsibilities. In order to exercise one's rights and responsibilities, one has to actively maintain a loving relationship with one's child. It is this relationship which, in turn, defines one's role, that endows one's role with meaning and purpose.

Mainstream Western society has, by and large, moved away from this integrated view of rights, responsibilities, relationships and roles. This does not mean that Americans and Europeans are not conscious of their responsibilities or are not keen on certain relationships within the family or are not playing certain roles within society. What it does suggest is that the intricate balance between rights and responsibilities, rights and relationships, rights and roles has been eroded by an obsession with rights. IR (rights) has become overwhelmingly dominant to the detriment of the other 3Rs (responsibilities, relationships and roles). Harmony is being faithful to all the 4Rs which is what the Quran tries to achieve.

It is because of the preponderance of IR that a pervasive 'rights culture' has emerged in the West with disastrous consequences for humanity. One can argue that the inability to understand that responsibility must sometimes precede right was one of the underlying causes of the environmental crisis in the West. For most of the twentieth century, the Western concept of development was

based on the premise that man, armed with science and technology, had the right to exploit unhindered nature and the environment for the gratification of his desires. Though this rapacious attitude towards the natural environment has begun to change, Western man is still not fully conscious of the profound nexus between rights and responsibilities.

The inability to comprehend this nexus explains, in part, the misapplication of freedom in the political and social spheres. Freedom of expression in Western society, for instance, is often perceived and pursued as an absolute right - with very little regard for the principle of responsibility that is inherent in the exercise of that right. That freedom is both a right and a responsibility is an idea that is deeply embedded in Islamic philosophy and indeed in most other religious philosophies. In fact, in the Quran, it is the responsibility of the human being - and not just his right - to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. What is a right in Western political thought becomes a responsibility in Islamic political thought because of its moral content and character. When a right is exercised as a responsibility, the moral implications for the well-being of society are enormous.

The importance of maintaining this intimate, intricate link between right and responsibility is underscored by the grim tragedies unfolding in yet another sphere of social and human relationships. The AIDS phenomenon is tangible evidence of what can happen when the insistence on the exercise of one's sexual rights is not accompanied by a deep sense of sexual responsibility. It reveals the extent to which relationships between the sexes, and within each sex, have been debased and defiled. Indeed, the crisis within the Western family - a crisis which has reached frightening proportions in recent decades - is a manifestation of the decline of certain norms which for so long had sustained gender roles and relationships and maintained the cohesiveness of the family. In more concrete terms, when husband and wife, child and parent are preoccupied with their own individual rights, intra-family relationships which have always depended upon mutual understanding and compromise become problematic.

### **Who is the Human Being?**

Three, in developing the human being's awareness of his rights, his responsibilities, his relationships, his roles, the Quran also raises what are

undoubtedly the most essential questions about the human being: Who is the human being? Why is the human being here? What happens to the human being after this, after his life on earth?

The Quran (and this is true of religion as a whole) provides lucid, unambiguous answers to each of these questions. The human being is the vicegerent of God (Khalifah Allah). He is here on earth to serve God, to do God's Will. After this life, he returns to God, to be judged for his deeds on earth.

Once the human being is perceived as the vicegerent of God, his rights, his responsibilities, his relationships, his roles acquire a more significant meaning. His fundamental rights - from the right to life to the freedom of expression - are bestowed upon him by God. His ultimate responsibility - transcending all other responsibilities - is to God. His most precious relationship - surpassing all other relationships - is with God. His most sacred, most significant role - defining all other roles - is his role as the vicegerent, as the deputy, of God on earth.

The significance of the human being's role as Khalifah Allah is something that humanity as a whole has yet to grasp in the fullest sense. It places the human being in the loftiest plane conceivable -higher, in a sense, than the angels. It endows him with life, with intelligence, with creativity, with freedom, with power, with love, with compassion, with mercy. It makes him the conduit of truth. It transforms him into the agent of justice.

Indeed, it is through this relationship between man, the vicegerent of God, and God, his Creator, that the whole basis of human existence is established. The basis of life is spiritual; the purpose of all human endeavour is, in the ultimate analysis, spiritual. The human being, as the vicegerent of God, strives to transform life and society guided by all those spiritual values - truth, justice, compassion - which God had revealed to him through the ages. What this means, from the Quranic standpoint, is that God's eternal spiritual values find expression in the material world through the avenue of God's vicegerent.

Equally significant, the human being's position as the vicegerent of God, the spiritual values which should guide his life, and the spiritual meaning and purpose of his existence on earth, provide the *raison d'être* for establishing a bond of brotherhood with the rest of the human family. This, and this alone, constitutes the essence of unity in Islam. It is unity founded upon faith - faith in

God, the one God of the entire human family, of all the universes.

The oneness of God (Tauhid) is what encourages the Muslim to strive for the oneness of humankind. There can be no greater motivation, no greater inspiration for struggling against all the barriers that divide man from man. This is why the Quran reminds us that we are one people. In forthright language, it tells us that all our differences of colour and creed, of class and community are secondary. What is primary is righteous conduct guided by God-consciousness. This is what makes the Quranic message so universal- this is the ultimate significance of Tauhid, as an idea and an ideal for the whole of humanity as it enters the twenty-first century

If we compared the Quranic vision of the human being and of the unity of humankind with the dominant Western view of who the human being is, and what the global community is, we would realise how puerile and pathetic the latter's philosophy is. One may even get the impression, going on the basis of human rights declarations and covenants, that contemporary Western human rights doctrine does not bother with metaphysical issues such as 'Who is the human being?' and 'Why is the human being here?'. In fact, some Western human rights thinkers even boast that the strength of contemporary secular human rights documents is their avoidance of metaphysical/spiritual controversies about the purpose of man and the meaning of life.

If it is true that contemporary human rights doctrine is not interested in metaphysical questions then it only confirms its moral and intellectual bankruptcy. How can one talk of the rights of the human being without asking what the human being is, who the human being is? How can we propagate human rights without some understanding of the human being?

The truth of the matter however is that Western human rights doctrine does embody a certain notion of the human being even if it is not explicit. Underlying the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is a concept of the individual human being as the only true bearer of rights. Rights are due to the individual qua individual. It is the individual who, in the ultimate analysis, is the measure of all things. Rights must serve the individual if they are to have any legitimacy at all.

This concept of the individual as “the measure of all things” has major weaknesses. If man is the measure of all things then he does not have to submit to a higher authority, to a transcendental force beyond himself. He decides what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. This results invariably in the erosion of absolute spiritual and moral values.

Erosion of absolute spiritual and moral values arising from the illusory liberation of man from a higher spiritual authority, is one of the causes of chaos and confusion in the moral domain in contemporary Western society. The individual's self-interest, the individual's pleasure, has become the main criterion for determining ethical standards.

By making rights serve the individual, by placing the individual at the centre of the universe, Western human rights doctrine has reinforced man's ego. There is no doubt that the selfishness and greed which have become pervasive in many Western and even non-Western societies are linked, even if indirectly, to the growth of this egocentric concept of the individual. It is also responsible, to some extent, for the spread of a hedonistic, sensate, materialistic culture.

When the human ego is given unfettered freedom, when the human ego is not subjected to a higher moral authority, it sometimes seeks expression through destructive forms. Tribe, community, nation, race even religion can all be perverted by the ego to create antagonisms and animosities which tear asunder the human family. This is yet another reason why the individual should never be placed at the centre of the universe, why he should never be glorified as the measure of all things.

This also explains why Western human rights doctrine, centred as it is around the individual, will never be able to furnish the basis for the unity of humankind. To reiterate, it feeds the ego which leads to inter-group, inter-class, inter-state, inter-religious conflicts. Of course, no one is suggesting that the unfettered human ego is the only or even the main cause of social conflicts. But taming the ego through total surrender to a Transcendental Reality, to God, would at least create the psychological attitude conducive for harmony and unity within the human family.

### **Conveying the Message**

Our analysis of the Quranic vision of human rights and human dignity,

contrasted with the mainstream Western view of human rights, shows that Islam has a message to convey and a mission to fulfil - for the good of the whole of humanity. But how will the Muslim community (Ummah) convey its message? How will Muslims communicate not only the Islamic alternative but also the hypocrisy of the present international order to the world when the global media is in the hands of the dominant West?

Muslims, more specifically those segments of the Ummah who are acutely conscious of the injustices of the existing situation and the need for a just world, should work together to establish their own media. A mass circulating journal or newspaper would help. But something else is urgently required. Muslims, in concert with individuals and groups from other religious communities who share some of their concerns, should be bold enough to think in terms of setting up a television network. It has to be a global network, if it is going to serve the twin goals of exposing Western hypocrisy and expounding a new vision of a just future.

It goes without saying that it will not be easy to establish such a network especially since it will be challenging the dominant media. The powerful forces behind the dominant media will almost certainly sabotage any such endeavour. Nonetheless, we have an obligation to try.

A global television network is, of course, a long-term idea. As far as the immediate situation is concerned, Muslim groups and other organisations should plan some form of concrete action which will demonstrate the solidarity of the forces opposed to Western domination of the planet. Could we, for instance, launch a massive global campaign directed at the abolition of the veto in the UN Security Council? After all, the veto, as we have shown, is one of those weapons in the Western arsenal which perpetuates the hypocrisy of the present world order.

It should be a campaign initiated by citizens' groups, both Muslim and non-Muslim, from the South and the North. Governments, supportive of the anti-veto campaign, can always join in. Wouldn't it be a good idea if the campaign was 'flagged off' at this conference itself)

### **The Situation Within the Muslim World**

What is sad is that even a campaign of this sort - which is by no means



earth-shaking - may not materialise. It is not just because of the dominant Western media or major Western governments who have every reason to oppose such a campaign. There are mammoth problems within the Muslim world itself.

To start with, even when it comes to getting things organised we are often at a loss. Muslim citizens' groups appear to have done very little networking, campaigning, mobilising. We haven't developed vital skills in these areas.

Most of the time we indulge in rhetoric. We seldom get beyond big conferences and high-sounding resolutions. There is very little on-going action - though many of us realise that without concrete programmes we won't achieve anything.

Even if we start moving, it is doubtful whether we will be able to sustain the momentum. For the Muslim world is hopelessly divided. There are serious differences among Muslim governments. Sometimes they involve personalities; at other times they involve ideologies. These differences have led to bloody conflicts. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps a few million people have died in wars between Muslim states and sometimes between Muslim groups in the last 40 odd years.

It is of course true that on a number of occasions dominant Western powers have manipulated these conflicts for their own interests. Indeed, Western powers have even instigated conflicts between Muslim entities. Be that as it may, one cannot - and should not - exonerate Muslim leaders from their diabolical role. Invariably, it is the presence of some Muslim leader who is prepared to be a tool, an agent of some Western power or other which enables that power to manipulate or even instigate a conflict.

To put it simply, Western domination of Muslim lands would not have been possible without the collusion and collaboration of Muslims themselves. In every conflict involving Muslim societies since the Second World War, Muslim complicity and duplicity had facilitated Western domination.

And yet it has become a habit for Muslim agents of the West to proclaim their fidelity to Islam. They parade the world's stage as 'defenders of the faithful' - while mortgaging their people's wealth to foreign merchants. Every act of betrayal is camouflaged as a deed of valour aimed at securing the people's welfare. In a sense, the hypocrisy of these traitors excels the pretence

of the dominant Western powers.

The hypocrisy of Muslim elites manifests itself in many other ways. There are Muslim leaders who pretend to be working towards the unity of the Ummah when actually they are actively undermining it through all sorts of sinister, subversive plots. Planning the assassination of another leader, inciting people in a neighbouring country to revolt against its government, aiding secessionist movements and so on have become part and parcel of the politics of the Muslim world.

Elite hypocrisy also evinces itself in human rights issues. In the name of defending national sovereignty and national integrity, dissidents are killed, critics are tortured and imprisoned. Very often, the real aim is to perpetuate elite power. In certain Muslim countries, in spite of their professed commitment to Islamic principles, ruling elites have no qualms about persecuting religious minorities. There are also many instances of blatant discrimination against women - contrary to all the values and ideals enshrined in the Quran about the rights of women. Often, those responsible for the unjust treatment of women are also the ones who are loudest in proclaiming the dignity of women in Islam.

How can Muslim elites combat hypocrisy in the international order when they themselves are guilty of gross hypocrisy? What credibility would they have? How can they convince anyone that they are sincere about a just world order when they are responsible for so much injustice in their own countries?

Not only do many Muslim elites lack credibility when it comes to fighting hypocrisy in international politics, they are also not inclined to articulating the Quranic vision of human rights and human dignity. Whenever Muslim groups have had the opportunity to establish an Islamic state, what emerges is an overly legalistic, dogmatic structure - a sort of 'penal code' approach to Islam which emphasises modes of punishment as if they constitute the crux and the core of the religion. At the other end of the continuum, we have Muslim groups who, in their eagerness to adjust to the global market-place are trying to seek Islamic legitimacy for the ruthless acquisition of wealth and the unbridled accumulation of riches. Neither 'gold-centred' Islam nor 'penal-code' Islam reflects the justice and compassion embodied in the eternal message of the Prophets of Allah whose quintessence is the Quran.

This is why the most urgent task facing Muslims today as they confront

the hypocrisy of the dominant Western powers is their own reformation and transformation. Muslims should - as the Quran advises - look at themselves critically as one of the greatest sons of Islam, the fourth righteous Caliph, Sayyidina Ali ibn-Talib put it,

“Your medicine is in you and you do not observe it. Your ailment is from yourself, and you do not register it’ .

*The above paper was first delivered as a speech at an international Islamic conference in Khartoum, Sudan in December 1993.*

## 8

# The Development Hoax

**Helena Norberg-Hodge**

*If Ladakh is evergoing to be developed  
we have to figure out how to make these people more greedy.  
You just can't motivate them otherwise*

Development Commissioner in Ladakh, 1981.

When I first arrived in Ladakh the absence of greed was striking. As the Development Commissioner observed, people were not particularly interested in sacrificing their leisure or pleasure simply for material gain. In those early years, tourists were perplexed when people refused to sell them things, no matter how much money they offered. Now, after several years of development, making money has become a major preoccupation. New needs have been created.

The messengers of development - tourists, advertisements, and film images - have implicitly been telling the Ladakhis that their traditional practices are backward and that modern science will help them stretch natural resources to

produce ever more. Development is stimulating dissatisfaction and greed; in so doing, it is destroying an economy that had served people's needs for more than a thousand years. Traditionally the Ladakhis had used the resources in their immediate vicinity with remarkable ingenuity and skill, and worked out how to live in relative comfort and enviable security. They were satisfied with what they had. But now, whatever they have is not enough.

In the sixteen or so years since development first came to Ladakh, I have watched the gap between rich and poor widen; I have watched women lose their self-confidence and power; I have watched the appearance of unemployment and inflation and a dramatic rise in crime; I have watched population levels soar, fuelled by a variety of economic and psychological pressures; I have watched the disintegration of families and communities; and I have watched people become separated from the land, as self-sufficiency is gradually replaced by economic dependence on the outside world.

When I saw a brass pot replaced by a pink plastic bucket, or yakhair shoes thrown out in favour of cheap modern ones, my initial reaction was one of horror. But I would soon find myself thinking that I had no right to impose my aesthetic preferences or tell People what was good for them. The intrusions of the modern world might seem ugly and inappropriate, but surely they brought material benefits. It was only after several years that I began to piece these individual instances together and see them as aspects of a single process: the systematic dismantling of Ladakhi culture. I began to see the minor incremental changes in everyday life - a new pair of shoes, a new concrete house - as part of the bigger picture of economic dependence, cultural rejection, and environmental degradation.

As these connections became clearer to me, I grew suspicious of what is known as "development." This process of planned change, which was supposed to raise the standard of living through technological advance and economic growth, seemed to be doing more harm than good. I realised that the creation of greed was part and parcel of much broader changes. The development of Ladakh, as everywhere else in the world, required a massive and systematic restructuring of society that presupposed enormous and continual investments in "infrastructure": paved roads, a Western-style hospital, schools, a radio station, an airport, and, most importantly, power installations. All this involved not only the expenditure of exorbitant sums of money but also

massive inputs of labour and administration. At no stage was it even questioned whether or not the result of these tremendous efforts constituted an improvement on what had existed before. It was like starting from zero, as if there had been no infrastructure in Ladakh before development. It was as if there had been no medical care, no education, no communication, no transport or trade. The intricate web of roads, paths, and trade routes, the vast and sophisticated network of irrigation canals maintained over centuries: all these signs of a living, functioning culture and economic system were treated as though they simply did not exist. Ladakh was being rebuilt according to Western guidelines - in tarmac, concrete, and steel.

As one of the last subsistence economics to survive virtually intact to the present day, Ladakh has been a unique vantage point from which to observe the whole process of development. Its collision with the modern world has been particularly sudden and dramatic. Yet the transformation it is now experiencing is anything but unique; essentially the same process is affecting every corner of the world.

As I begin to relate the changes in Ladakh to similar patterns of change elsewhere, I will inevitably be making some broad generalisations. I make no apology for this, because the process of modernisation that I am describing is itself one enormous generalisation - substituting a single monoculture and economic system for regional diversity and self-reliance.

Development works on the assumption that the introduction of cash is invariably an improvement. The more money, the better. But while this may be true for those dependent on the mainstream economy, it is certainly not true for the millions of people living within, or benefiting from, a subsistence economy - that is, a nonmonetised economy based on a direct relationship with local resources. For these people, who are able to produce their own food, clothing, and shelter, there is a significant reduction in the quality of life once they relinquish their own culture and independence for an unstable monetary income.

The situation in Ladakh and the neighbouring Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan vividly illustrates the shortcomings of defining human welfare only in terms of money. In each case, the standard of living is actually quite high when compared with most of the Third World. People provide their own basic needs, and still have beautified art and music, and significantly more time for family,

friends, and leisure activities than people in the West. Yet the World Bank describes Bhutan as one of the poorest countries in the world. Because its gross national product (GNP) is virtually zero, the country is ranked at the bottom of the international economic order. In effect this means that no distinction is made between the homeless on the streets of New York and Bhutanese or Ladakhi farmers. In both cases there may be no income, but the reality behind the statistics is as different as night from day.

Whether in remote subsistence economics or in the heart of the industrialised world, there is clearly something wrong with a system of national accounting that sees GNP as the prime indicator of social welfare. As things stand, the system is such that every time money changes hands - whether from the sale of tomatoes or a car accident - we add it to the GNP and count ourselves richer. Policies that cause GNP to rise are thus often pursued despite their negative impact on the environment or society. A nation's balance sheet looks better, for instance, if all its forests have just been cut to the ground, since felling trees makes money. And if crime is on the increase and people buy more stereos or video recorders to replace those stolen, if we put the sick and elderly into costly care institutions, if we seek help for emotional and stress-related problems, if we buy bottled water because drinking water has become so polluted, all these contribute to the GNP and are measured as economic growth.

The situation has become quite absurd: rather than eating a potato grown in your own garden, it is better for the economy if you buy a potato grown on the other side of the country, which has been pulverised, freeze-dried, and reconstituted into brightly coloured potato balls. Consuming in this way, of course, means more transportation, more use of fossil fuels, more pollution, more chemical additives and preservatives, and more separation between producer and consumer. But it also means an incremental increase in GNP, and is therefore encouraged.

This one-dimensional view of progress, widely favoured by economists and development experts, has helped to mask the negative impact of economic growth. Moreover, it has blinded us to the value of locally based subsistence economics. This has led to a grave misunderstanding of the situation of the majority of people on earth today - the millions in the rural sector of the Third World - and has disguised the fact that development programmes, far from benefiting these people, have in many cases served only to lower their standard

of living.

Farmers who had previously grown a variety of crops and kept a few animals to provide for themselves - either directly or through the local economy - are now encouraged to grow a single cash crop for distant markets. In this way they become dependent on forces beyond their control - huge transportation networks, oil prices, and the fluctuations of international finance. Over the course of time, inflation obliges them to produce more and more, so as to secure the income that they now need in order to buy what they used to grow themselves.

Since even the most meagre 'salary or payment in the cash economy is regarded as an improvement, cash cropping and the consequent increase in trade and transport appear unequivocally beneficial. In fact conventional development often results in the creation of poverty, as rural populations are lured away from the land into urban slums. Increasingly, people are locked into an economic system that pumps resources out of the periphery into the centre - from the non-industrialised to the industrialised parts of the world, from the countryside to the city from the poor to the rich. Often, these resources end up back where they came from as commercial products, packaged and processed, at prices that the poor can no longer afford.

As a function of the same process, development money flows freely into large-scale projects aimed at increasing market transactions. Silently, without public debate, billions of dollars are poured into building roads, dams, and fertiliser plants, all of which serve to reinforce the dependence on centralised systems and increased energy consumption. Yet when it comes to small-scale projects that truly promote self-reliance, such as village-scale hydroelectric installations or solar ovens and water heaters for the household, the question is immediately asked: "Can the people pay?" Nuclear reactors and big dams are heavily subsidised, while small-scale technologies based on renewable energy receive no significant support from any of the major aid agencies. One of the greatest scandals of development is that despite tremendous potential, not a single country in the developing world has managed to promote small-scale decentralised applications of solar energy on anything more than a token basis.

Throughout the world, the process of development has displaced and marginalised self-reliant local economies in general, and small farmers in

particular. In the industrialised world, more than 90 percent of the population has been pulled away from agriculture. Now, the same process is occurring in the Third World, only much more rapidly, as rural subsistence is steadily eroded.

The same forces that push farmers off the land seek to replace them with the ever more capital-and-energy -intensive methods of industrial agriculture. It is assumed that this shift from agriculture to agribusiness is necessary in order to increase yields, and that increased yields are in turn necessary to feed the growing global population. Industrial agriculture, however, has proved to be unsustainable. Its fertilisers and pesticides pollute the water and destroy the soil, and after an initial increase, yields tend to decline. In addition, monoculture makes the crop very vulnerable to destruction by a single pest, while chemical pesticides have tended to disrupt natural systems of pest control. Farmers in Ladakh who have been persuaded to use pesticides tell of a noticeable increase in pests!

Industrial agriculture is now eliminating the diverse range of seeds indigenous to specific environments and replacing them with standardised strains. Multinational corporations and large petrochemical companies are expropriating seeds, particularly from the Third World, and using the genetic information - which represents millennia of adaptation to local conditions - to create hybrids. These are then sold back to Third World farmers along with the chemical fertilisers and pesticides that they require. These hybrids often lack the ability to regenerate themselves, and farmers are forced into a cycle of dependence, buying new seeds and chemical inputs from the corporations that own and control them

As the logic of industrial agriculture unfolds, it looks increasingly sinister. With the biotechnology revolution - the transplanting of “desirable” genetic traits from one organism to another - we are seeing scientific manipulation on a grand scale. As nature is adapted to meet the needs of industry the result is greater standardisation and uniformity, and thus increased vulnerability.

The emphasis is not on human welfare but commercial gain. Despite the fact that much of the research was done with public funds, control of this technology is firmly in the hands of transnational corporations, which are now able to engineer plant, animal, and even human genes, to turn them into products that can be patented and sold.



Of course, people have been developing hybrids in one way or another since the beginning of agriculture. The *dzo* in Ladakh is an example of a crossbreed that is well suited to its environment. What is different about today's genetic engineering is that the hybrids it develops have no connection with living local ecosystems. Moreover, the genetic base of life is being manipulated without any clear idea of the long-term consequences. What we do already know is that these technologies erode diversity and unravel the web of biological interdependence

The products of biotechnology promise to be better than nature: pest-resistant, drought-resistant, and high-yielding. But for how many years will the patented corn come up bigger and brighter yellow? And for how long will the tired soil sustain it? For people with unlimited faith in science and technology these are not matters of concern. A few years ago, when I expressed dismay about soil erosion in conversation with an executive from a major oil company, he responded: "Don't worry! We are working on new hybrids now. We won't need soil in the future."

With such devout faith in scientific advance, our vision has grown more and more specialised and narrow while our manipulations of the natural world have an ever more massive impact. Even the most capable scientists cannot predict the consequences of these manipulations as they spread through the web of life. Yet instead of becoming more cautious, we have allowed the time span between scientific discovery and market application to shrink to almost nothing.

It is not that scientific inquiry has no place or that technology cannot be useful, but the fact is that both have become linked to narrow goals of short-term profit and expediency and have been accorded an unwarranted influence in shaping our society. We are in danger of altogether losing sight of ethics and values.

So far I have used the terms "development," "modernisation," "Westernisation," and industrialised' ore or less synonymously, to refer to the same phenomenon - the interaction of a narrow economic paradigm with continual scientific and technological innovation. This process has grown out of the past centuries of European colonialism and industrial expansion, through which our diverse world has been shaped into an increasingly uniform economic system - one that is dominated by the powerful interests of the industrialised

countries, the multinational corporations, and the Third World elite.

The promise of conventional development is that by following in the footsteps of the “developed” countries of the world, the “underdeveloped” countries can become rich and comfortable too. Poverty will be eliminated, and the problems of overpopulation and environmental degradation will be solved.

This argument, reasonable as it may seem at first glance, in fact contains an inherent flaw, even deception. The fact is that the developed nations are consuming essential industrial resources in such a way and at such a rate that it is impossible for underdeveloped areas of the world to follow in their footsteps. When one-third of the world's population consumes two-thirds of the world's resources, and then in effect turns around and tells the others to do as they do, it is little short of a hoax. Development is all too often a euphemism for exploitation, a new colonialism. The forces of development and modernisation have pulled most people away from a sure subsistence and got them to chase after an illusion, only to fall flat on their faces, materially impoverished and psychologically disoriented. A majority are turned into slum dwellers - having left the land and their local economy to end up in the shadow of an urban dream that can never be realised.

How is it that this hoax is still being perpetuated, It is easy enough to understand why conventional development seems attractive to people like the Ladakhis, since it appears to offer enormous benefits at no apparent cost. They have no way of knowing, for instance, that their relationship with their grandparents is going to change because they have more money or a car. But why is it that the rest of us, who have seen the effects of development around the world, continue to perpetuate the myth that everyone is going to live the American Dream? To some extent, at least, the answer is to be found in vested interests. Members of the Third World elite routinely “cream off” development money, and a primary goal of industrialised countries is to create a market for their own expertise and products.

But there is more to it than that. After all, development is not exclusively in the hands of people with narrow, selfish motives; plenty of development professionals would genuinely like to see a more equitable and ecological kind of development. And yet the drift of development today remains essentially the same as it always has been. While *self-help*, *self-reliance*, and *sustainability*

have become quite fashionable terms, the level of dependence and debt is escalating, and money continues to be directed primarily to large-scale projects that are socially and environmentally destructive.

Development planners can pretend that everyone will be able to live like a New Yorker as long as they ignore the fact that natural resources are limited. There has been a long-standing debate on this point between economists and environmentalists. Economists and technical optimists assume that we will be able to invent our way out of any resource shortage, that science will somehow stretch the earth's bounty *ad infinitum*. Such a view is a denial of the fact that the natural world has limits that are beyond our power to change and conveniently circumvents the need for a redistribution of wealth. A change in the global economy is not necessary if you believe there will always be more and more to go around. The peoples of the Third World have only to get "educated" and step into the global market to one day live exactly as their big brothers in the industrialised countries.

According to this way of thinking, poverty and overpopulation are the major problems in the world today, and economic development is held up as the solution. The truth is, however, that while these problems are fundamental and serious, they are to a great extent the products of conventional development. The urbanisation and industrialisation that development promotes, together with the consequent neglect of agriculture and the rural economy, have created destitution on a massive and unprecedented scale. My experience in Ladakh suggests that a variety of economic and psychological pressures have a bearing on population growth, but that the disruption of people's direct relationship to local resources is the principal cause. In fact, demographers recognise that it is *after* contact with the modern world that population levels shoot up.

The escalating environmental problems and increasing levels of Third World debt and hunger should be seen as indications that something is wrong with the present development model. However, while there has been intense debate on the subject in recent years, it does not go far enough. At almost every level, from multilateral agencies to small grass-roots organisations, there is talk of a major policy shift toward support for more ecological and sustainable projects. But perhaps because development is not understood as the broad systemic process that it is, many of its destructive consequences continue to be dismissed as "side effects" or somehow attributed to the natural state of affairs. Most of

the literature on sustainable development does not directly tackle the underlying causes behind social and ecological destruction.

Even small, idealistic organisations tend to ignore the root problems, often pulling more and more people into dependence on the macroeconomy rather than supporting local diversification and real self-reliance. Just as importantly, by not questioning the present educational model, these organisations show that they do not understand the need for a fundamental change in the direction of development. The majority still actively supports an education that trains people to become westernised urban consumers.

Similarly, even those groups that work with small-scale technologies based on renewable energy tend to imply that this option is for the rural poor alone and that the “real,” heavily subsidised development has to go on side by side. Most of the appropriate technology literature, which typically shows people crouching next to some bits of rusty metal, is an indication of this attitude. Furthermore, the great majority of appropriate-technology projects promote technology in isolation, without considering the broader economic and cultural context. Under these conditions, appropriate technology is doomed to fail. Yet until it is properly resurrected, there is no hope of sustaining ecological and cultural diversity. Instead, the never-ending cycle of debt and dependence will continue, as developing countries compete for foreign exchange to acquire high-tech “efficient?” technologies.

Born of a Eurocentric science and implemented by Westerners and Westernised elites, development is in the process of reducing all the diverse cultures of the world to a single monoculture. It is based on the assumption that needs are everywhere the same, that everyone needs to eat the same food, to live in the same type- of house, to wear the same clothes. The same cement buildings, the same toys, the same movies and television programmes find their way to the most remote corners of the world. Even language is becoming homogenised, since it is necessary to learn English to be part of the modern community

The same yardsticks, originally developed for Europeans, are used everywhere. For instance, the indicators that determine how much a baby should weigh at a certain age, what the minimum room temperature should be, and what a healthy diet is, are applied universally. Western experts refer to both

the people and animals of Ladakh as “stunted” because they are smaller than the global standard! The accepted levels for exposure to radiation, which were established for young European white males, are applied to all people regardless of age, sex, or size. The narrow and specialised outlook of some experts prevents them from seeing the broad implications of their work and the cultural insensitivity of their universal answers. When asked, at a recent symposium, about the vegetables they used to eat in Africa before we started exporting our seeds to them, a Swedish agricultural specialist answered, “They didn’t have any. They used to eat weeds.” To him the plants they ate did not have the same status as the plants that he was used to calling “vegetables.”

Over the years in Ladakh, I have come to realise that the growing problems I have witnessed there have much more to do with modern industrial culture than with some sudden change in the Ladakhis themselves. I now see that it is not human nature that is to blame when Ladakhi friends become greedy and selfish or start to throw rubbish into hitherto unpolluted streams; the roots of these change lie more with the technological and economic pressures that are dividing people from one another and from the land.

This realisation has helped me to see more clearly the pressures that conventional development is exerting in other parts of the world. All the disastrous trends that I have seen emerging in Leh as Ladakh modernises have direct parallels with those taking place on a large scale in urban centres throughout India. The beautified lakeside city of Srinagar is now overrun by rampant commercialism, and beset by air and water pollution, social unrest, and insecurity in the last couple of years it has literally become a battlefield in a separatist war against Indian authority. Meanwhile, Delhi is becoming noticeably more polluted every year. Traffic is growing exponentially, and so hacking coughs. Concrete suburban housing developments and grimy industrial estates are swelling the sprawl of what used to be a walled city. The water is no longer drinkable, the streets are no longer safe, the increasing level of violence and frustration is almost tangible. There is an alarming growth of domestic violence against women; crime and ethnic or religious conflict are chronic afflictions.

In the forty years since independence, India has been implementing a concerted program of industrial development. During this relatively brief period, population has more than doubled and poverty has escalated. The

pressure of numbers and the abuse of natural systems have precipitated environmental breakdown. Development has benefited at most fifteen or twenty percent of Indians, while the majority have been impoverished and marginalised.

Returning each year to the West, I have become increasingly aware that the pressures of economic and technological change are bearing down even on our culture in a similar way; we too are being “developed.” Today, even though only 2 or 3 percent of the population is left on the land, small farmers are still being squeezed out of existence; and even though industrialisation has pared the family down to a small nuclear unit, our economy is still chipping away at it. Technological advance is continuing to speed life up, while robbing people of time. Increased trade and ever-greater mobility are furthering anonymity and a breakdown of community. In the West these trends are labelled “progress,” rather than “development,” but they emanate from the same process of industrialisation that inevitably leads to centralisation, social degradation, and the wasteful use of resources.

‘Progress’ has reached an advanced stage in many parts of the world. Wherever we look, we can see its inexorable logic at work -replacing people with machines, substituting global markets for local interdependence, replacing country lanes with freeways in Wales, and the corner shop with a supermarket in Germany. In this light, even the differences between communism and capitalism seem almost irrelevant. Both have grown out of the same scientific worldview, which places human beings apart from and above the rest of creation; both assume that it is possible to go on stretching natural resources indefinitely - the only significant point of difference being how to divide them up.

Regardless of their political orientation, governments are locked into an economic system that thrives on increasing international trade. This trade receives heavy subsidies - in particular, to maintain and expand networks of communication and transportation. Swedish biscuits or New Zealand apples can only compete with local products in America or France because of an energy-intensive system laden with hidden subsidies and ignored pollution costs. The globalisation of the economy marches under the banner of “free trade,” and is almost universally considered beneficial. The people of Sweden hear only of the potential benefits of joining the European Community, while in Mexico

the advantages of liberalising trade with the United States go unchallenged. Publicity about the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) talks of the positive effects it will have on oiling the wheels of international commerce. Its anti-democratic and unjust effects -the delivery of massive and unprecedented economic control into the hands of powerful multinational companies, and the further reduction of the status of Third World countries within the world economy - remain hidden.

It is not strange that there is so little opposition to a unified global economy and so little publicity about its social and environmental disadvantages. The concept of unity has tremendous symbolic appeal; the ideals of universal harmony and coming together have been embraced by all major religious and spiritual traditions and have come to represent the highest goal of humanity. "One marquee" implies community and co-operation and the "Global Village" sounds like a place of tolerance and mutual exchange. There is almost no recognition that economic unification and technological uniformity are actually causing environmental destruction and the disintegration of communities. Rather than bringing people together, today's economy is increasing divisiveness and widening the gap between rich and poor. We are moving toward a massive centralisation of economic and political power. National governments are handing over more and more control and abdicating responsibility in favour of supranational institutions like the European Community and the World Bank. Such organisations are ever further removed from the people they are supposed to represent, and incapable of responding to their diverse interests.

These political changes are in fact a reflection of an economic centralisation that threatens to allow multinational corporations to outstrip governments in their influence and power. Such trends are extremely disturbing since these corporations lie outside the realm of democratic control. Organised labour and environmental pressure groups are no match for the mobility of giant corporations: they may struggle for years to help enact legislation that protects workers' rights or bans a certain toxic chemical, only to find that companies can relocate their operations to a part of the world with less stringent controls. This is the meaning of the free market for transnationals - freedom from constraint in their search for new profits.

Today, the global economy is powered by the relentless drive toward more exploitation of resources, more technological innovation, more markets, more

profits. Monetary and psychological pressures are pushing people in the developing and developed parts of the world alike toward a blind consumerism. The motto is “economic growth for the betterment of mankind.” Advertising and the media are telling people what to do - in fact, telling them what to be: modern civilised, and rich.

The rural peoples of the “Third World” gain a particularly distorted impression of modern life - one of ease and glamour, where everyone is beautiful, everyone is clean. They see the fast cars, the microwave ovens, and the video machines. They see people with vast amounts of money and hear figures about their fantastic salaries. Development around the world is now on “automatic pilot.” Even where there are no planned programmes in operation, development is kept going by one-dimensional images of modern life: images that do not include the side effects, the pollution, the psychological stress, the drug addiction, the homelessness. People who have been presented with only one side of the development coin are left vulnerable and eager for modernisation.

*This paper is extracted from the author's book entitled Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh (USA: Sierra Club Books, 1991).*



## 9

# Rolling Back the South Rolling Back the State

U.S. Corporate Interests and Structural  
Adjustment in the Third World

Walden Bello

### Celebration and Misery

1994 marks the 50th year of the founding of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, during an Anglo-American-managed conference attended by, among others, Lord Keynes.

For people in the more than 70 countries which have been subjected to 566 IMF and World Bank stabilisation and “structural adjustment” programmes (SAPs) in the last 14 years, there is hardly any reason to celebrate this anniversary. Indeed, from Nigeria to Jamaica, “SAP” has entered popular discourse as a synonym for economic misery.

And far from being the promoters of global economic growth and stability envisioned by Keynes, the World Bank and the IMF are a central cause of the stagnation and instability that plague the world economy.

At the onset of the global debt crisis in the early 1980's, Third World countries were told that the “structural reforms” promoted by these programmes were essential to sustained growth and economic stability. Faced with the threat of a cut-off of external funds needed to service the mounting debts they had incurred from the Western private banks that had gone on a lending binge in the 1970s, these countries had no choice but to implement the painful measures demanded by the Bank and Fund. These usually included:

- ? cutbacks in government expenditures, especially in social spending;
- ? rollback or containment of wages;

- ? privatisation of state enterprises and deregulation of the economy;
- ? elimination or reduction of protection for the domestic market and less restrictions on the operations of foreign investors.
- ? successive devaluations of the local currency in the name of achieving export competitiveness.

### **Adjustment: Rationale and Reality**

Nearly 15 years after the World Bank issued its first structural adjustment loan, most countries are still waiting for the market to work its magic, to borrow a phrase from Ronald Reagan.

In, an effort to counter a rising crescendo of criticism, the Bank has released a report claiming the African countries that faithfully follow SAP prescriptions have better economic growth rates than those that do not.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the report has come across as a classic methodological exercise of how to manipulate marginal statistical differences for ideological ends. The real world provided a harsh counterpoint shortly after the report appeared earlier this year: Mali is one of the World Bank and IMF's model African pupils, having fully implemented, over the last 12 years, all key elements of the SAP programme, including massive salary cutbacks, devaluation of the currency, and liquidation of state enterprises. But with their purchasing power declining by over 117 per cent since the start of adjustment, people finally rebelled "against SAP" this February, barricading streets and ransacking buildings.<sup>2</sup>

A similar unmasking of another model SAP occurred more than a month earlier, in early January. The indigenous Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico drew global attention not only to popular opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) but also to the staggering consequences of 13 years of structural adjustment: some 20 per cent of the work force unemployed, another 40 per cent underemployed, over half the population below the poverty line, and massive discontent all around.

In fact, structural adjustment has failed - miserably - to accomplish what World Bank and IMF technocrats said it would do: promote growth, stabilise the external accounts, and reduce poverty.

*Institutionalising Economic Stagnation.* In contrast to the positive evaluation of the recent World Bank report on structural adjustment in Africa,

an earlier global survey of the impact of adjustment over a 15 year period by the IMF reported the uncomfortable finding that “the growth rate is significantly reduced in programme countries relative to the change in non-programme countries.”<sup>3</sup> For non-doctrinaire economists, in fact, this was not surprising, for structural adjustment had brought about in Third World countries the same conundrum that stymied the mature industrial economies during the Great Depression, and for which Keynesian demand-side economics was designed as the solution. That is, economies under adjustment are stuck in a low-level trap, in which low investment, increased unemployment, reduced social spending, reduced consumption, and low output interact to create a vicious cycle of stagnation and decline, rather than a virtuous circle of growth, rising employment, and rising investment, as originally envisaged in World Bank theory. In the words of Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor Rudiger Dornbusch, “[E]ven with major adjustment efforts in place, countries do not fall back on their feet running; they fall into a hole.”<sup>4</sup>

*Guaranteeing Debt Repayments.* Despite global adjustment, the Third World’s debt burden rose from \$785 billion at the beginning of the debt crisis to nearly \$1.5 trillion in 1993. Thirty six of Africa’s 47 countries have been subjected to structural adjustment by the Fund and Bank, yet the total external debt of the continent is now 110 per cent of its gross national product.<sup>5</sup>

Structural adjustment loans from the World Bank and the IMF were given to indebted countries to enable the latter to make their immediate interest payments to the Western commercial banks. Having done this, the Bank and the Fund then went on to apply draconian adjustment policies that would assure a steady supply of repayments in the medium and long term. By having Third World economies focus on production for export, foreign exchange would be gained which could be channelled into servicing dollar-denominated foreign debt.

The policy was immensely successful, effecting as it did an astounding net transfer of financial resources from the Third World to the commercial banks that amounted to \$178 billion between 1984 and 1990. So massive was the decapitalisation of the South that a former executive director of the World Bank exclaimed: ‘Not since the conquistadors plundered Latin America has the world experienced a flow in the direction we see today.’<sup>6</sup>

*Intensifying Poverty.* If structural adjustment has brought neither growth nor debt relief, it has certainly intensified poverty. In Latin America, according to Inter-American Development Bank president Enrique Iglesias, adjustment programmes had the effect of largely cancelling out the progress of the 1960's and 1970's."<sup>7</sup> The numbers of people living in poverty rose from 130 million in 1980 to 180 million at the beginning of the 1990's. Structural adjustment also worsened what was already a very skewed distribution of income, with the result that today, the top 20 per cent of the continent's population earn 20 times that earned by the poorest 20 per cent.<sup>8</sup>

In Africa adjustment has been a central link in a vicious circle whose other elements are civil war, drought, and the steep decline in the international price of the region's agricultural and raw material exports. The number of people living below the poverty line now stands at 200 million of the region's 690 million people, and even the least pessimistic projection of the World Bank sees the number of poor rising by 50 per cent to reach 300 million by the year 2000.<sup>9</sup> So devastated is Africa that Lester Thurow has commented, with cynical humour tinged with racism: "If God gave it [Africa] to you and made you its economic dictator, the only smart move would be to give it back to him."<sup>10</sup> And so evident is the role of structural adjustment programmes in the creation of this blighted landscape that the World Bank chief economist for Africa has admitted: "We did not think that the human costs of these programs could be so great, and the economic gains so slow in coming."<sup>11</sup>

*Adjusting the Environment.* IMF and Bank-supported adjustment policies have been among the major contributors to environmental destruction in the Third World. By pushing countries to increase their foreign exchange to service their foreign debt, structural adjustment programmes have forced them to super-exploit their exportable resources. In Ghana, regarded as a "star pupil" by the Fund and the Bank, the government has moved to intensify commercial forestry, with World Bank support. Timber production more than doubled between 1984 and 1987, accelerating the destruction of the country's already much-reduced forest cover, which is now 25 per cent of its original size.<sup>12</sup> The country is expected to soon make the transition from being a net exporter to being a net importer of wood.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, economist Fantu Cheru predicts that Ghana could well be stripped of trees by the year 2000.<sup>14</sup>

Impoverishment, claims the World Bank, is one of the prime causes of

environmental degradation because land hungry farmers resort to cultivating erosion-prone hillsides and moving into tropical forest areas where crop yields on cleared fields usually drop after just a few years.”<sup>15</sup> What the World Bank fails to acknowledge is that its structural adjustment programmes have been among the prime causes of impoverishment, and thus a central cause of ecological degradation. In the Philippines, for instance, a World Resources Institute study claims that the sharp economic contraction triggered by Bank-imposed adjustment in the 1980’ s forced poor rural people to move into and super exploit open access forests, watersheds, and artisanal fisheries.<sup>16</sup>

### **Rollback: The Strategic Objective**

But if structural adjustment programmes have had such a poor record, why do the World Bank and the Fund continue to impose them on much of the South?

This question is valid, only if one assumes that the *Bank and Fund’s intention is to assist Third World economics*. Then, the failure of structural adjustment programmes can be laid to such things as bad conceptualisation or poor implementation. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that, whatever may be the subjective intentions of the doctrinaire technocrats that are tasked to implement them, structural adjustment programmes were never meant to succeed. Instead, they have functioned as key instruments in the North’ s effort to roll back the gains that had been made by the South from the 1950’ s to 1980’ s - a period that some Third World economists now look back to as *les trente glorieuses*.

These decades were marked by high rates of economic growth in the Third World. They also witnessed successful struggles of national liberation, and the coming together of southern states at the global level to demand a “New International Economic Order” (NIEO) that would entail a more equitable distribution of global economic power.

Central to the economic achievements of the South was an activist state or public sector. In some countries, the state sector was the engine of the development process. In others, state support was critical to the success of domestic businesses wishing to compete against foreign capital. While private ownership of land, resources, and enterprises was the rule in most of the newly

independent societies of the South, and economic exchange was largely mediated by the market, government intervention in economic life was pervasive, and the state had a strategic role in economic transformation.

Contrary to doctrinaire conservative interpretations, the prominence of the state in post-colonial economic development did not stem from a usurpation of the role of private enterprise; rather it was a response to the weakness of private industrial interests. “[T]he state,” observes one analyst, “became a surrogate for private enterprise that could drive modernisation without challenging... entrenched interests - indeed would continue to protect them - and without turning the country completely over to foreign interests.”<sup>17</sup>

In this connection, Third World political and economic elites were Janus-faced. Fearful of insurgent lower-class movements, they co-operated with Washington’s anti-communist campaigns. But partly from a desire to gain popular legitimacy and outmanoeuvre the left, some Southern elites took increasingly bold moves to gain more control over their economics and a greater share of the surplus being extracted from them in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Led by the US’s most strategic allies in the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) seized control of the pricing of oil via the oil embargo of 1973 and a massive price rise in 1979. Meanwhile, US businesses were alarmed by developments in two key markets. In Brazil, where foreign-owned firms accounted for half of total manufacturing sales, the military technocrat regime, invoking national security considerations, moved in the late 1970’s to reserve the strategic information sector to local industries, provoking bitter denunciation by the then massively dominant IBM (International Business Machines). In Mexico, where foreign firms accounted for nearly 30 per cent of manufacturing output, government moves to give local drug manufacturers greater control of the market via non-patent policies provoked threats of disinvestment by the power US pharmaceutical industry.

This sense of a rising threat from the South, underlined by the image of a “helpless America” during the Iran hostage crisis in 1979/80, probably contributed more to Ronald Reagan’s victory over Jimmy Carter in the 1980 presidential elections than did the familiar anti-communist threat.

It was not surprising then that when the Reaganites came to power, they saw as one of their central missions the resubordination of the Third World.

State-assisted capitalism was the key target, and here the anti-South agenda coincided with the free market ideological mindset of the new regime. After a brief period of debate, the mechanism chosen for the dismantling of the economic apparatus of the Third World state was the structural adjustment programme of the IMF and the World Bank.

Not surprisingly, few Southern governments were willing to accept structural adjustment loans when they were first offered. The onset of the debt crisis in 1982, however, provided the golden opportunity for Washington to simultaneously protect US financial interests and roll back the threat from the South by radically adjusting Third World economies. The US, notes Latin America specialist John Sheahan, took advantage of “this period of financial strain to insist that debtor countries remove the government from the economy as the price of getting credit.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, a survey of structural adjustment programmes in Africa carried out by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa concluded that the essence of these programmes was the “reduction/removal of direct state intervention in the productive and distributive sectors of the economy.”<sup>19</sup>

### **The New South**

By the end of the 12-year-long Reagan-Bush era in 1992, the South had been transformed: from Argentina to Ghana, state participation in the economy had been drastically curtailed; government enterprises were passing into private hands in the name of efficiency, protectionist barriers to Northern imports were being eliminated wholesale; restrictions on foreign investment have been radically reduced; and, through export-first policies, the internal economy was more tightly integrated into the capitalist world market.

To be sure, it was not the South alone that suffered from adjustment policies. With the ostensible objective of reducing its trade deficit with the Asian “tiger economies,” the US has launched a multipronged offensive designed strategically to radically reduce the leading role of the state in these economies, which even the World Bank in a recent study has grudgingly conceded as a key element in their success.<sup>20</sup> And in the US itself, adjustment came in the form of Reaganomics - deregulation, radical reductions in tax rates for the rich, gutting of the New Deal safety nets, and the end of the compromise between big

capital and big labour mediated by big government. The elimination of state supports for production in rival economies - including Japan and Europe - and state restraints on corporate activity in the home economy: this was the key thrust of a global adjustment programme designed to reassert US corporate hegemony globally. But the main brunt of adjustment fell on the South.

The coming to power of a new Democratic administration has not altered Washington's economic policy toward the South. On structural adjustment and trade policies, the Clinton administration has emphasised continuity with the Bush administration. Indeed, the coupling of free market and free trade rhetoric with threats of the unilateral display of US power vis-a-vis all corners - the South, the Newly Industrialising Countries, Europe, and Japan - has, if anything, become more aggressive under Clinton.

The erosion of Third World economies has translated at the international level to the weakening of the formations which the South had traditionally used to attain its collective goal of bringing about a change in the global power equation: the Non-Aligned Movement, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the Group of 77. The decomposition of the Third World was felt at the United Nations, where the US was emboldened to once again use that body to front the interests of the North, including providing legitimacy for the US - led invasion of Iraq in 1991.

Rollback via structural adjustment had succeeded.

At the time of independence in the 1950's and 1960's, the peoples of the South were optimistic that the future belonged to them, the 80 per cent of the world's population that colonialism had long treated as second or third class citizens of the world. The illusions were gone by the beginning of the 1990's. As the South stood on the threshold of the 21st century, the South Commission captured the essence of its contemporary condition: 'It may not be an exaggeration to say that the establishment of a system of international economic relations in which the South's second-class status would be institutionalised is an immediate danger.'<sup>21</sup>

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# 10

## **The World Bank- The Next Fifty Years**

A Civil Society Perspective

**M. Iqbal Asaria**

The 50th birthday of the Bretton Woods twin's - the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank - finds both institutions performing markedly different roles from those envisaged by their founders. Having played a key role in the establishment of a market economy, primarily amongst the industrialised countries, in the aftermath of the Second World War, both the institutions have moved on to address the problems of developing economies. However, the growth of capital mobility across national borders, the collapse of Soviet-style communism and the pre-eminent role dogmatically assigned to the 'marquee' mean that these institutions have to adapt and find a meaningful role for themselves. This soul-searching, taking place in a climate of paucity of development finance and mounting criticism of some of the activities of the Bretton Woods institutions, needs to be carefully handled to salvage and enhance the vital core role performed by these embattled giants.

The re-emergence of war-ravaged Japanese and German economies meant that the IMF had its come uppance with the collapse of the fixed exchange system in the early 1970s. Freer capital flows had made the fixed-exchange rate system unworkable. "Since then the Fund has increasingly become the macroeconomic policeman of the more fallible developing countries, encouraging them to change economic policy when in balance of payments difficulties. Under three entrepreneurial managing directors, it also found a wider role in co-ordinating international responses to the oil crisis of the 1970s, the debt crisis of the 1980s and Soviet communism's collapse." (*Martin Wolf, The Financial Times, 7/10/1994*).

Cynics might say that the IMF in its “new” role has essentially helped irresponsible commercial banks avoid collapse by propping up cash flows and thus debt-service by “bankrupt” sovereign clients. Debt-service rather than development has informed its stabilisation programmes. Many a time this has been forcefully achieved by unsustainable extraction. However, the resulting scenario is not pleasant and large arrears are accumulating despite this firm-fisted policing. Even the World Bank, ardent critics have suggested, is now engaged in financing the servicing of the resulting debt taken on by the IMF.

In a parallel development, the World Bank has undergone major transformations. The Bank was created to finance post-war reconstruction and development, because the private capital flows that had financed growth in the late 19th century, would - or it was believed by some - should not return. Having financed post-war reconstruction, the Bank devoted a large proportion of its resources to extending project finance to developing economics. This is designed to build infrastructure and manpower to allow market forces to operate. Private capital flows started in earnest in the late sixties and early seventies. The OPEC surpluses of the 1970s boosted these flows further and the need to deploy liquidity led to lending by commercial banks on a set of wishful criteria. The debt crisis of the 1980s was the result. Default on debt service on a global scale became a real possibility and there emerged a systemic risk to the global financial system. The World Bank was quickly drafted in to commence ‘Programme Lending to prop up these economics and avoid wholesale default.

This exercise in “recapitalisation” of economics teetering on the brink of bankruptcy has altered the functioning of the Bank in many ways. Firstly, accumulated commercial bank lending - which had formed such a large part of the financial flows of the 1970s - has now been mostly worked through. The secondary debt markets in developing country debt have brought a semblance of order and commercial banks are still smarting from the deep discounts. However, this has been at the expense of much expenditure of funds -including concessional lending - by the World Bank and also increased arrears on multilateral loans to developing countries. This attempt at “recapitalisation” and imparting “market-worthiness” to several developing economics has also given birth to the infamous Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs).

A major market failure, in the form of wanton and irresponsible lending by commercial banks eager to recycle OPEC surpluses, has in large part forced the Bank to turn into a task master to try and resolve the inevitable aftermath. The irony is that the Bank is said to be performing this service to enable market forces to operate once more! Given the present euphoria, commercial banks may yet jump into the fray at an opportune moment.

The 80s also saw the growth in environmental awareness and the difficult trade-offs between development and environment formed the basis of the discussion at UNCED and are embodied in the resulting 'Agenda 21'. A major underlying theme of the whole development/environment debate has been the failure of the price mechanism to incorporate "full" resource costing in the product price. The implication being that, left to itself, the market would not be able to address the issue of sustainable development. State intervention at national level and regulation by international fora to mediate interstate conflicts of interest would be required to "force" the market to take cognisance of "full" resource costing. In this effort the Bank has seen its role as becoming the 'core' operator for the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). With most of the GEF lending being tied to Bank projects, it can be argued that it is essentially addressing a market failure by utilising funds which would otherwise not be allocated to those projects.

Having cast itself in the mode of acting as a repository for featherbedding the operations of the market, the Bank finds itself in a difficult dilemma. For a variety of reasons, and many of them being unexpected and unforeseen by the Bank, private capital flows have restarted with a vengeance. In 1993, the net external financing of developing countries was \$215bn. But the net disbursements of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the commercial arm of the World Bank, were a mere \$4.2bn in the financial year ending June 1993. Even soft-lending from the International Development Association (IDA) was only \$4.1 bn (net) in financial year 1993 and \$5.5bn the next year. The Bank has clearly become a marginal provider of development finance.

As Baroness Chalker, Britain's Minister for Overseas Development says, "The non-governmental organisations' campaign slogan, '50 Years is Enough', is catchy but wrong-headed. Nevertheless, the ultimate test of success will be how quickly the Bank - and indeed, all aid agencies - work themselves out of a

job. The renewed surge of private capital flows to developing countries is a welcome indication of success. Policy reforms are paying off. The Bank should be ready to disengage and move on when its advice and resources are no longer needed.” (*The Guardian*)

The 50th anniversary has seen the arguments come to a head. Proponents of the absolute efficacy and supremacy of the market have begun a clamour to limit the Bank’s role to help countries achieve market-worthiness and leave the role of global financial intermediation to private capital flows. According to these arguments, apart from the exception of the poorest countries, anything which is not ‘financeable’ by market flows is not worth undertaking! The Bank, having promoted “marketisation” as the be-all and end-all of its development philosophy, is unable to argue otherwise.

Sections of the NGO movement, on the other hand have come up with pungent criticisms of the Bank’s operations. Failures like the Narmada Dam fiasco, lack of environmental considerations in project design until the last few years, the accumulation of unsustainable debt by many countries, the lack of participation by the people in project/programme design and the gross inequities resulting from the enforced implementation of SAPs have formed the core of their concerns. To cap it all iniquitous distribution of resources is increasing on the global level : one fifth of the world population produces - and enjoys - 85 percent of the world’s income. As to poverty, despite improvements in indicators like infant mortality and life expectancy, more than a billion people, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia subsist on less than a dollar a day. The situation of women, who have always made up a majority of the poor, and who have disproportionately experienced the negative effects of structural adjustment, is particularly grim.

With World Bank figures showing that income per head in Latin America is significantly lower than it was in 1975, and that of subSaharan Africa is back where it was in 1960, the improvements in incomes per head in East Asia offer little consolation. This sordid picture is compounded by environmental considerations resulting from the inability and/or unwillingness of the developed economies to operate at a lower level of resource utilisation and the greater need for resources by the developing economies. The resulting pressure on governments of the Bank’s major shareholders has meant that this concern has had to be incorporated into the Bank’s operations. However, this has only led

the Bank to lay itself open to criticisms for ‘environmental’ failures and effectively shoulder the blame for the ‘sins’ of its major shareholders.

The Bank has taken many steps to redress this bleak scenario. The rapid expansion of the environmental division, the institutionalisation of concerns for sustainable development, the improvements in information policy); the reiteration of ‘poverty reduction as its overarching objective, the instigation of primacy of ‘ownership’ in project/programme development and the recognition of ‘good governance’ as key to sound development are but a few areas which the management is presently working on. However, for many NGOs this is too little and too late. They have deemed the Bank beyond reform to meet the challenges of poverty and sustainability and thus opted for the “50 Years is Enough” campaign.

The “50 Years is Enough” proponents have not addressed the crucial issue of global financial intermediation. Alternatives to multilateral and private finance proposed by them are mostly small-scale pilot programmes of some NGOs and bilateral agencies. This leaves the field open to private capital flows by implication.

Thus, the 50th anniversary finds the Bank being urged by both extreme ‘free marketeers’ and sections of the NGO movement to wind itself down and leave the field to private capital flows, for the former by design and for the latter by default!

This scenario may sound attractive at a time when private capital flows are overwhelming other debt-creating flows and also when ideological considerations do not lead the major shareholders of the Bank to fund non-bankable propositions in ‘strategic’ countries.

However, the scenario ignores many factors and if these are not addressed head-on, will certainly compound the agony of the impoverished majority of the global populace.

Firstly, most of the private capital flows go to a handful of countries. Some twelve countries account for over 80% of these flows. The vast majority of the poor developing countries have not seen market-induced flows into their economies. If the Bank’s operations are circumscribed in the way envisaged by the ‘free marketeers’, it will end up lending to only very desperate cases and hence impair its portfolio quality significantly. This, in turn, will compromise its

ability to borrow from the market at the present advantageous rates. It may thus not even be able to achieve its 'aim of creating market worthiness in most of its target economics. Proponents of free markets may thus end up killing off market-worthiness creating programmes because these cannot by definition be marketable in the narrow banking sense of the term!

Secondly, whilst private capital flows are positive at present, the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) component will turn negative as the stream of profit and/or capital repatriation begins in earnest. The other part, which is mainly portfolio investments, is very volatile and cannot be relied upon to withstand any unforeseen setbacks. Private capital flows cannot be seen as a panacea for all global financial intermediation, and suffer from attributes which cannot promote key objectives like human resource development, which require a much longer investment horizon than the typical pay-back periods demanded by the market. Ironically, without these nonmarket flows the stability of the market mechanism is compromised.

More importantly, it is becoming increasingly apparent that there are significant areas in which the market mechanism is inherently deficient. In particular, as far as equitable distribution and sustainable growth is concerned market failures abound. It is not uncommon to witness economic growth with increased poverty and environmental degradation. Whilst, the poverty impacts of SAPs are beginning to be understood, there is still a reluctance to admit that economic growth of the market variety will not redress these inequities. There is still a belief that if only excluded groups, like women, could be more fully incorporated into the market, their economic problems would be solved. This approach not only ignores the structural factors that have excluded women and other groups from the market, but it also assumes that once in the market these same factors will not continue to systematically discriminate against market participants with relatively little economic or political power.

This grim reality of the limits of market solutions can be deduced vividly from studies like the one recently released by the Washington-based development NGO Bread for the World. It shows that, even in the most advanced market economy, the United States, poverty is increasing and within the ranks of the disadvantaged sections women figure prominently. Only a non-market based positive intervention can achieve the objective of poverty reduction - 'trickle down' is a cruel joke on the poor.



Similarly, marketisation has been unable to address the question of environmental degradation even in the ‘miracle’ economies of south Asia. Massive non-market flows will be required to redress the coming environmental impasse in these economics. However, ironically these non-market flows are critical for the long-term efficacy of the market. They would enhance the market's operations by enabling sustainable poverty reduction and growth.

The NGOs have always argued that poverty reduction and sustainability of economic growth require non-market intervention. The Bank has recognised this in its many publications but has been unable to formulate it explicitly due to the demands from the deafening chorus of the ‘market enthusiasts amongst its major shareholders. However, as the Bank begins to institutionalise its overarching objective of poverty reduction, it needs to address this question head on. Indeed, as it moves towards increasing ownership’ of projects/programmes by its stakeholders and finding ways of demanding good governance, it is increasingly going to have to face the stark reality that the beneficiaries will only support the programmes if they see mileage for themselves from the lending. The poor will not be content with shouldering the burden of market failures and pre-emptive capture by vested interests. Unless the Bank finds ways of ensuring more equitable distribution of the fruits of its lending, the ‘Wapenhans Effect’ of increasing number of unviable projects will take its toll on its operations primarily due to lack of ownership of the projects/programmes. Furthermore, given that the Bank’s market operations and lending are underpinned by sovereign guarantees, it should be a primary requirement of its operations that any benefits resulting are equitably shared.

For the proponents of the free market, the Bank needs to argue that its role cannot be bearing the burden of market failures without cost to them. This simply amounts to a massive subsidy from the poor to the elites who are the primary beneficiaries of ‘marketisation’. Pre-emptive capture by vested interests is the primary driving force of the market and the Bank is acutely aware of this scrooge of development. Even on a more altruistic level, studies have shown that countries with more equal income distribution tend to grow faster. More importantly, the old 1980s idea that rising inequality is necessary for economic prosperity is being refuted by studies trying to understand the growth of the east Asian economies. (See, for example, Prof D Rodrik: *King Kong meets Godzilla. The World Bank and the east Asian Miracle*, Centre

*for Economic Policy Research working paper.*) Indeed, human resource development is the key to sustained growth. On the other hand, there is now growing evidence that the market mechanism does not necessarily address the persistence of poverty nor, left to itself, play a central role in human resource development.

It would thus appear that the logic of the internal soul-searching being undertaken by the World Bank and constructive criticism from the NGO community is pointing to the same conclusion for the future role of the Bank. The objective of Poverty reduction/eradication has to be operationalised by addressing stark market failures in the developmental process. For this to be successful, distributional equity considerations will have to form the core of programme/ project design instead of being treated as an awkward afterthought. This will inevitably lead to the incorporation of participation, human resource development and sustainability considerations into the Bank's operations. The Bank would be operating in an area where the market is unable to operate and yet its operations would contribute to the creation of market-enhancing environments.

Within this framework, the right time for the Bank to write itself off would not be when private capital flows have taken over the role of development finance, but rather when distributional inequities and environmental unsustainability resulting from unregulated market operations have been reversed by purposeful interventions. This would be a fitting role for the Bank, in that it would be a key player in creating sustainable market-worthiness rather than lopsided market 'triumphs' of the variety we are presently witnessing. This is a tall agenda and should see the Bank coming to grips with it at its 100th Anniversary!

However, if the major shareholders of the World Bank continue to insist that its role is to create market worthiness regardless of equity and sustainability considerations, and periodically bear the burden of market abuse, like in the case of the debt overhang created by wanton commercial bank lending, then this job is better left to private capital flows. The poor should no longer be prepared to bear the burden of a market which benefits the few. Campaigns for the rights of the poor in an era of market dominance need to grasp this vital dimension firmly and tailor their positions accordingly.

# 11

## The Dynamics of the Global Gulag

The Top 200 Mega Corporations

**Frederic F. Clairmont and John H. Cavanagh**

### **Introduction**

As an unaccountable totalitarian monster, Big Capital and their political extensions have always sought - not altogether successfully - to dissimulate the stratagems of accumulation, and other crooked symptoms of the inner workings of the capitalist engine.

Reagan's asinine 'magic of the market place', and the World Bank's partially more sophisticated posturings on the rectitude of 'restructuring' and 'privatisation', are merely some of the vulgar crudities of ideological engineering; but one which, with the gathering amplitude of capitalism's crisis, is itself forcibly subject to the law of diminishing returns.

In his massive promotional trumpeting for GATT (the same multimillion dollar political deals and logic went into NAFTA marketing), Mickey Kantor, multimillionaire, Hollywood super-lawyer extraordinary, current US trade impresario, brandished the sales pitch that the successful outcome of the Uruguay Round would induce a \$250bn boost to world trade. Never mind that these deliberately mendacious concoctions, and other numerical reveries, more or less of the same magnitude, were shovelled up by the- GAIT Secretariat, OECD, the World Bank/IMF, and pumped into the bigtime money media.

Kantor knew the name of the game; the GMT Secretariat understood the marketing logic of the fraud. There was no need to keep up the sordid palaverings about morality. It was a number, one amongst other numbers, that had served its purpose. In the months ahead the magic numbers, like much of the impoverished GMT discourse, will be shoved into Clio's dustbin. Nonetheless the fable will have served its purpose.

That's of course not quite the end of the story, for that number and others of its genre will have contributed to illuminate something far more primordial - the roots and ramifications of the hegemonic Corporate Gulag and its insatiable money-machine, encrusted in a socio-economic universe of heightened fragility, angst and impoverishment.

Even on the spindly assumption that the Himalayan gains in trade, springing from the triumph of the Uruguay Round, were consummated there still remains the devastating query: who will be the authentic beneficiaries of this projected manna that flourishes under the alibi of the 'liberalisation of international trade'? Absent from the hallelujahs in both the GATT and NAFTA homilies (the Chiapas Indians are now smashing NAFTA's mythology) is the unstoppable transnationalisation and internationalisation of Big Capital; and the lethal impact of its workings on the lives of hundreds of millions of working peoples emanating from its uninhibited concentration, its parasitical modus operandi and their corollaries: the trampling of public liberties.

## **PART 1**

### **The Conspectus of Power**

The quintessential goal of our analysis is to contribute to an understanding of the complexities of international economic relations within the specific configuration of the transnationalisation of the world's paramount 200 corporations. At the onset of the 1990s, there were 37,000 TNCs whose tentacles straddled the international economy through 170,000 overseas affiliates.

According to our findings, seen in the accompanying table, merely five advanced capitalist countries (the USA, Japan, France, Germany, and the UK) engulfed 172 (86 per cent) of these megacorporations, indicative of the high incidence of inequality within the international economy. Although there was a contraction of global growth in the eighties, this was not reflected in the Top 200s growth performance.

The pathology of aggrandisement is discernible in their doubling of combined revenues in just over one decade: from \$3 trillion in 1982 to \$5.9 trillion in 1992. These Behemoths span the entire spectrum of corporate capitalism: from manufacturing to banking, from every conceivable service orifice to agriculture and mass merchandising. In but a single decade,

1982-1992, they enhanced their share of global Gross Domestic Product from 24.2 per cent to 26.8 in 1992. Given the still manic ruling class euphoria for Economic Liberalism it appears - at least momentarily - that there are no social and political countervailing forces to brake its further advance.

As we earlier demonstrated in our analyses over the last decade these corporate bonanzas originated, in good measure, from the pillaging of the public patrimony abetted by indiscriminate mass privatisation, ideologically galvanised under the innocuous logo of 'market reforms'. One more sordid euphemism that marks the celebration of the Corporate Gulag.

In their capital structures, size and strategies the 200 are neither homogeneous nor are the individual rankings immutable. Over the last two decades there has been a sharp differentiation within the Top 200 and hence their respective rankings have shifted; several have been pushed to the wall, gobbled up in the massive leverage buyout orgies of the 1980s, thus speeding up the tempo of capitalist concentration: a tragic trajectory that continues to soar.

Over the decade there has also been a palpable realignment of corporate and national power dramatising the mechanics of global imperialism: US firms slipped drastically from 80 to 60, whereas those of Japan leaped from 35 to 54, imputable to the annexationist appetites of Japanese corporate capital, and the tumultuous growth of its financial sector, notwithstanding the bubble's bursting.

A parallel movement was the fall in the number of UK corporations, and the rise in the number of French and German firms. Striking, also, is that even such a dwarf country as Switzerland, whose level of capital concentration is one of die worlds highest, equal to or even greater than South Africa's, corn rises 8 of the Top 200 - a four fold increase. This mirrors the iron grip of Swiss mega-capital on international markets, spectacularly so in ascendant Asia.

Among Third World economies, only South Korea (and its dubious if it can be categorised as Third World) and Brazil have penetrated the ranks of the top 200; but these embrace barely one per cent of their aggregate revenues.

For complex statistical reasons, we have omitted China from our calculations, although indubitably the Bank of China would find its place in the top 200. To be sure, China is the world's third largest economy measured by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), but thus far its dynamism flows from its small and medium-sized enterprises. The capital structures, and the dimensions of its

firms, are undergoing a meteoric metamorphosis. Over the next 5-10 years, however, China should figure markedly in the morphology of corporate capitalism.

What our findings reveal is the huge (and growing) differentials among the top 200. Measured by corporate profitability, the 10 most profitable corporations each amassed yearly over \$2bn in profits. What this signifies is that out of aggregate profits of \$73.4bn, the big 10 (i.e. 5 per cent) grabbed \$34.8bn - a towering 47 per cent of the 200s profits.

A caveat is called for: our rankings of the Top 200 slightly understates the muscle-mass of some of the hegemonic protagonists of corporate capitalism. Six giants, which are privately owned (hence not quoted on the NYSE and thus do not file reports with the Security and Exchange Commission), have revenues that could propel them to the 200. They comprise: Cargill (\$47.1bn in 1992 sales), Koch (\$20.1bn), UPS (\$16.5bn), Continental Grain (\$15.4bn), Mars (\$12.5bn) and Goldman Sachs (\$12.5bn).

## PART II

### The Strategies of Aggrandisement

As the two hundred gear up for the economic wars of the third millennium one perceives that they have anchored their annexationist ambitions on three interrelated elements:

With the crumbling of the socialist economies of Eastern Europe, as well as the rapid strides to full-blown capitalism in China, Cuba and Vietnam the top 200 have, for the first time, access to the entire international market. China, for example, has lured over 16,000 INC affiliates. In so doing, it has surpassed the USA and Germany as the leading pole of attraction of INC capital.

#### The Top 200:

*The Shape - of Global Gulagism*

| Country <sup>a/</sup> | 1982         |             |                     | 1992         |             |                     |
|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------------|
|                       | No. of Firms | Sales \$ bn | Per cent of top 200 | No. of firms | Sales \$ bn | Per cent of top 200 |
| United States         | 80           | 1,302.5     | 42.8                | 60           | 1,720.1     | 29.3                |
| Japan                 | 35           | 657.3       | 21.5                | 54           | 2,095.4     | 35.7                |
| France                | 16           | 182.6       | 6.0                 | 23           | 530.2       | 9.0                 |

|                     |            |                |              |            |                |              |
|---------------------|------------|----------------|--------------|------------|----------------|--------------|
| Germany             | 17         | 207.5          | 6.8          | 21         | 563.0          | 9.6          |
| UK                  | 18         | 264.7          | 8.7          | 14         | 310.0          | 5.3          |
| Switzerland         | 2          | 20.4           | 0.7          | 8          | 152.4          | 2.6          |
| Netherlands         | 4          | 86.4           | 2.8          | 5          | 214.1          | 3.6          |
| Italy               | 5          | 84.5           | 2.8          | 5          | 126.8          | 2.2          |
| S. Korea            | 1          | 8.0            | 0.3          | 3          | 44.3           | 0.8          |
| Brazil              | 2          | 27.4           | 0.9          | 2          | 29.8           | 0.5          |
| Sweden              | 1          | 12.0           | 0.4          | 2          | 28.1           | 0.5          |
| Spain               | 2          | 21.6           | 0.7          | 1          | 18.6           | 0.3          |
| Canada              | 7          | 55.1           | 1.8          | 1          | 17.2           | 0.3          |
| Belgium             | 1          | 9.2            | 0.3          | 1          | 12.2           | 0.2          |
| Others              | 8          | 106.4          | 3.5          | -          | -              | -            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>        | <b>200</b> | <b>3,045.7</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>200</b> | <b>5,862.2</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| World GDP           |            | 12,600.0       |              |            | 21,900.0       |              |
| Top 200 as % of GDP |            | 24.2           |              |            | 26.8           |              |

<sup>a/</sup> Ranked by number of firms in 1992.

Source: Calculated by the authors from business sources, company reports and national accounts.

Another vital force reshaping the TNCs mode of penetration has been the precipitous dismantling of most financial and other controls, erected in response to the upheavals spawned by the Great Depression of the thirties. This thrust is being matched by sweeping privatisation that have traditionally been the bulwarks of the public sectors: electricity and utilities, railways and mines, airlines and telecommunications, banking and insurance etc. The assault on public sectors is also being partnered by the unrelenting hammer blows against the labour movement and one of its proudest achievements, the Welfare State.

One of the most vital catalysts of the Top 200s 'integration' into the world market has been the dazzling diffusion of information technologies that permit billions of dollars to zoom across frontiers with the tap of a computer key. Growth in this Las Vegas Parasitical Order is nothing short of mind-boggling: in 1986, some \$290bn were transacted on foreign exchange markets daily; by 1990, it topped \$700bn; in 1994, these wholly unaccountable financial floods are expected to exceed \$1.3 trillion dollars. Only an infinitesimally small fraction of these flows are destined to finance job creating ventures in goods and services. The name of the game is Skulduggery Inc i.e. the corporate financial Gulag making very big money in split seconds, gambling on the tiniest of margins, with the commodity money.

Intensification of global competition has generated an extravagant plethora

of cost-cutting marketing strategies. In most Japanese TNCs, competition, coupled to the yen's appreciation, has led to frenzied drives (NEC and Fujitsu are some of the spearheads) to slash production costs by shifting sizeable chunks of their operations to lower wage Asian economies. Thereby sustaining and enhancing market share.

Opening up of new markets, the frenzied pace of deregulation and new information technologies have immensely quickened concentration of all in the Top 200; but strikingly so in the Top 50 since they are ideally positioned to exploit the economies of scale and benefit from the still fabulous central government subsidies and handouts of which the Big Three US auto corporations are illustrative. Five firms account for over half of the worldwide market in a number of sectors that include software and electronic components, aerospace and electrical equipment etc. Widening the global market has augmented the collusive powers of these oligopolies; it is superfluous even to evoke the pervasiveness of transfer pricing practices in such a propitious context. Well could a Wall Street lawyer claim that transfer pricing, like AIDS, has attained endemic proportions.

One of the most belligerent strategies for worldwide expansion by the Top 200 has been foreign direct investment: between 1983 and 1992, MI grew more than four times faster than world output, and three times faster than world trade. Sustained growth of the Top 200 is, however, jeopardised by a complex of forces.

## **PART III**

### **The Inhibitors of Expansion**

The central inhibitor confronting the INC in the waning years of the 20th century is one of their own systemic creations: the compulsion to produce more and more goods with less and less workers. Lees briefly look at the record. At the inception of 1994, the pharmaceutical giant, Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. (Sales 1993: \$12bn) announced the second wave of liquidation of 10 per cent of its labour force; the first wave (1992) had earlier junked 10 per cent. Obviously, this isn't the end of the road.

These agonising labour liquidations represent the banality of evil; an evil



that has become a daily occurrence in the capitalist universe. The world's largest 500 firms have shed over 400,000 workers yearly over the past decade notwithstanding the upsurge of their combined revenues; a sizeable chunk of these have come from the Top 200. These anti-working class liquidations are called for not because profits are threatened, - they are not - but because of the rapacious imperatives of making bigger and bigger profits for their shareholders. There is nothing incongruous that whereas the incomes of blue and white collar workers are being chiselled away each partner of Goldman Sachs was 'awarded' a \$5 million dollar bonus.

What is tragedy for workers with little or no prospects of getting their jobs back is, however, a source of jubilation for Wall Street.

The shares of Xerox jumped 9 per cent when it proclaimed the liquidation of 10,000 workers designed to boost 'the bottom line'. But what about the workers 'bottom line'? Even in such a capitalist newspaper as The Washington Post one sensitive analyst had the courage to note:

'Wall Street does not worry much about the long run. It's the price of the stock tomorrow that concerns it, and its values are now adopted by Corporate America. Tough is venerated. It has become a word to mask greed ... but the stench of greed not only goes unremarked and uncriticised in Washington, where Democrats have joined Republicans in fealty to those who pay their campaign bills, but it is applauded'.

Not only in Washington; but by the entire international political caste in the service of Big Capital- Unlike the Great Depression, the Economic Gulag has now entered a phase of jobless growth. Illustrative is that two of capitalism's most dynamic sectors, software and biotechnology require very few workers.

Another inhibitor facing the Top 200 in their global annexationism is what several of their spokesmen label 'political instability'. The El Dorado profits anticipated with the 1989 mutations in East Europe have not germinated. To the contrary, thanks in good part to the World Bank's structural adjustment medicine, along with Big Capital's shaky collaborationist regimes that arose from the ashes of 1989, the depression is entrenched.

What we are witnessing is therefore the inexorable dinosaur-like gobbling up, sector by sector, of the neo-satellite economics of Eastern Europe by the

Top 200. In Poland, for example, Nestle at the start of January grabbed effective control of Poland's second largest chocolate producer. This follows PepsiCo's Food Internationals grab of Wedel, the country's biggest chocolate manufacturer, in 1991. To be sure, these are not random acquisitions but part of much more sedulously coherent acts of aggrandisement. The denationalisation of almost all the major enterprises and sectors of the neo-satellite economies in East Europe are well underway. This operation, aside from unforeseen circumstances, could well be wrapped up in less than five years. But on this score a violent political backlash could well be in the offing.

Another deterrent to the Top 200s expansion is international debt, now running at \$1.4 trillion, growing at 6-8 per cent yearly. This will continue to inhibit growth over vast stretches of the world economy and not merely in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Another dramatic development that has slowed the corporate juggernaut is that after decades of sustained growth the Japanese bubble has imploded, and there are no sanguine prospects of any return to a pre-Bubble normality.

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

### **Towards a Quick-fix?**

As the capitalist world economy slides deeper and deeper into stagnation a cry is heard that the still expanding capitalisms of China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, etc. can become the new generators of global demand. This perspective, in our view, is wholly misplaced given the wobbly foundations on which their growth is predicated. All are heavily export oriented, mainly to the depression-plagued economics of North America, Europe and Japan. Replicating the years of the export-led boom of the sixties', seventies' and early eighties' is no longer feasible. It is the sheer inability of capitalism as presently structured and exemplified in the Top 200 to beat back the crisis that is glaring. Indeed, the very stratagems of the Economic Gulag and the compulsions of its money engines that drive the Top 200 will inflate the crisis and the misery inherent in global capitalism.

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*of-Power (Penang. Southbound Press & Third World Network)*

# 12

## **Economic Development and Environmental Destruction**

**Edward Goldsmith**

The terrible environmental problems that confront us today and that threaten the very survival of our species on this planet are the inevitable consequence of economic development which we have ironically been taught to identify with progress and that is the overriding goal of almost every government throughout the world today.

If this is not generally realised, it is, partly at least, because neither the nature nor the implications of this fatal process are clearly understood. To do so requires that we first realise that economic development has only become the overriding goal of governments throughout the world in the last fifty years. President Truman is supposed to have first suggested that it should become so. Previously, economic development was the priority in but a very small area of our planet, mainly in parts of Western Europe and North America and for a period that is insignificant in terms of man's total experience on this planet.

Economic development consists in the continuous year-to-year increase in the production, distribution, sale and consumption (throughout) of food, artefacts and services - which is taken to be the only means of increasing wealth and thereby human welfare.

This notion would have been totally incomprehensible to traditional man for whom material goods were not seen as desirable in themselves, but only in so far as their acquisition served his social interests that for him were paramount. Wealth, for him, was basically social wealth and also ecological wealth. He saw his welfare as being predominantly determined by his ability to maintain the integrity and stability of the social and ecological systems of which he was part.

For it was only by doing so that they could be counted upon to dispense their inestimable benefits which he was not willing to forgo merely in order to acquire material goods that played little part in the strategy of his life. The economic system of traditional society, as the economic historian, Karl Polanyi put it “was submerged in social relations” - as for that matter were his science and technology - which is another way of saying that they were under social and ecological control.

The goal of continuously increasing the throughput of goods and services is incompatible with the survival of social and ecological systems which have an optimum structure whose preservation requires an optimum amount of these commodities - for which reason alone economic development (whether it be “appropriate development”, “ecodevelopment” or the now fashionable “sustainable development”) can only lead to social and ecological disruption.

Why, we might ask, is economic activity out of control in this way? The answer is that instead of being conducted at the level of the family and the community - the original units of economic activity - which were at once the units of all other activities such as education, the care of the old and the infirm, the fulfilment of religious duties and government itself, it is now fulfilled instead by specialised, purely economic, surrogate social groupings: i.e. corporations (whether private or government-owned) that by their very nature can have no social, ecological, religious or moral preoccupations of any kind.

Unfortunately, in terms of the worldview of modernism which, in a corporation-based society, necessarily supplants the traditional worldview, social and ecological disruption is of no account, since the very concept of social and ecological wealth is incomprehensible, society being seen to be no more than the total number of individual producers and consumers who are governed by the same institutions, and nature is but a source of raw materials for the economic process and a sink for disposing of its ever more voluminous and more toxic wastes. In such conditions, the fate of ‘both society and nature itself is virtually sealed. It is but a question of time before they are both cashed-in, and, in this way, transformed into economic wealth.

It is in this way that with the economic development of New Zealand at the end of the eighteenth century, the vast whale population of the surrounding seas was rapidly cashed-in. Then it was the turn of the seals. Once they were gone

it was that of the great Kauri forests of the North Island. Once they had been destroyed, the bulk of the remaining forests were burned to make way for millions of sheep that turned the soil of the mountain areas into dust, and this “runaway” process is still under way today - if anything, it has accelerated, as it has done throughout the Third World since it has been brought within the orbit of the Western-industrial system.

Indeed, everywhere today, forests are being overlogged, croplands overcropped, pasture-lands overgrazed, wetlands overdrained, groundwaters overtapped and rivers and seas overfished. Economic development, of whatever variety, can only mean further increasing the impact of our activities on each of these already overexploited ecosystems and hence further accelerating the process that is already rapidly making our planet uninhabitable.

At the same time, as economic development systematically annihilates the natural world, so does it replace it with a very different man-made or artificial world - the world of houses, factories, office-blocks, warehouses, gas-containers, power-stations, and parking-lots - i.e.: the physical infrastructure of economic development, which, as this process occurs, must necessarily expand in order to accommodate it. So has it expanded in mainland China since economic development has got under way some ten years ago as a result of which some ten percent of that grossly overpopulated country's agricultural land has already been paved over.

In Britain, according to Alice Coleman's Second Land Utilisation Survey, by the year 2157, the last acre of agricultural land will have been paved over, reduced to wasteland or so broken up by different development schemes as to become virtually unusable for agricultural purposes.

But it is not just the man-made world or the Technosphere, as it is often referred to, that, with economic development must be substituted for the natural world or the Biosphere, but also the even more voluminous and more toxic waste products which it must inevitably give rise to.

In the natural world, life processes are cyclic. They must be for two reasons. The first is that though the natural world is an open system from the point of view of energy, it is, to all extents and purposes, a closed system from the point of view of materials. This means that to avoid resource shortages, they must continually be recycled, the waste products of one process serving as

the raw materials of the next.

These must be recycled too in order to avoid the accumulation of unrecycled materials that would interfere with the proper functioning of life processes.

In more general terms, they must be recycled so as to maintain the critical structure of the Biosphere and of its constituent ecosystems.

Thus, because carbon-dioxide and oxygen are constantly recycled by plants and animals, the correct atmospheric content of these gases and, by the same token, the climatic conditions most favourable to life are maintained. If, on the other hand, carbon-dioxide levels are allowed to fall below the optimum, the climate will, in general, become too cold while if the levels are allowed to become too high, as is occurring today, it will, on the contrary; become too hot.

Traditional man felt morally committed to returning all organic wastes to the soil from which they were derived. It was an essential part of his religious commitment to maintaining the harmony and balance of the natural world - so this essential ecological principle was closely adhered to.

With the breakdown of traditional cultural patterns, it was rapidly lost sight of - as indeed it had to be if economic development was to take precedence over all other considerations.

Thus, if the produce of the land is to be systematically exported, as it must be in a market economy, it cannot be returned to the soil from which it was derived - which must rapidly be deprived of its mineral nutrients and organic matter, as is occurring wherever modern agriculture is practised today - a process that can only be exacerbated if human excreta are to be flushed into the nearest waterway or consigned to the nearest landfill, rather than being religiously returned to the soil as they were in tribal and peasant societies.

The recycling of materials, as economic development proceeds, becomes impossible, in any case, because an increasingly degraded Biosphere becomes incapable of coping with the ever more massive throughput of materials.

Consider that modern man now co-opts for his own purposes some 40% of the net biological product of photosynthesis occurring in terrestrial ecosystems - a truly horrifying thought.

In addition he now produces massive amounts of synthetic organic chemicals such as PCBs, CFCs and nearly all modern pesticides which being

totally foreign to the natural world (xenobiotic), cannot be recycled within it and can only accumulate - or break down into decay products that are- often equally unrecyclable - and that more often than not must interfere particularly drastically with its normal functioning.

It will be argued that our present runaway economic activities can be brought under control by the state, assisted by the specialised agencies of the United Nations.

But this thesis is irreconcilable with our experience of the last fifty years. In no country has the state shown any serious concern with the increasingly daunting environmental problems that confront us, while international agencies such as the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations are part of the problem not of the solution.

Thus though the world is losing some 20 million hectares of forest every year, nothing whatever is being done to bring this intolerable destruction to an end, the FAO's Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TEAP) being but an 8 billion dollar economic development project that involves planting vast plantations of fast growing exotics for the benefit of the paper-mills and the rayon factories.

Though our agricultural lands are losing some 26 billion tons of topsoil every year, nothing is being done to reduce the impact of our activities on soil ecosystems. On the contrary, on the basis of FAO's current plans for "developing" agriculture in the Third World, this impact must just about double within the next decade or so.

In addition, though it is now accepted that our destructive economic activities are leading to the rapid destabilisation of world climate to the point that we are already condemned to living in climatic conditions in which man has never yet lived, and which could well render much of this planet uninhabitable, neither governments nor international agencies are doing anything about it.

In each case the reason is the same. To do so would mean taking measures that would reduce the rate of economic development -something that, in the modern corporation-based market economy, is not even remotely acceptable.

In other words, the measures required to assure our survival on this planet cannot, in the aberrant society we have created, be undertaken because they are not "economic. This implies that if we are to survive on this planet we shall have to create a very different sort of society -one in which economic activities



can once again be brought under social control.

# 13

## Seeds of Struggle

Vandana Shiva

The seed is materially the source of all life. It is the enfoldment of life in its diversity. Seed is also the first and last link in the food chain. To use Jack Kloppenburg's analysis, it is both the 'means of production' as well as a 'product.'

Seed has been central to the freedom of peasants.

Today, the seed has become the site of contest between monopolising power and values of Western industrial civilisation and the freedom of farmers from the plurality of cultures of non-Western, non-industrial societies which are based on respect for life, in its diversity.

The conflicts over seed are not just economic and political conflicts. They represent the clash of civilisations. They remind us that in spite of Francis Fukuyama, history has not ended.

### **Seeds of Diversity, Seeds of Monocultures**

For 10,000 years, farmers and peasants had produced their own seeds, on their own land, selecting the best seeds, storing them, replanting them, and letting nature take its course in the renewal and enrichment of life. With the Green Revolution, peasants were no longer to be custodians of the common genetic heritage through the storage and preservation of grain. The 'miracle seeds' of the Green Revolution transformed this common genetic heritage into private property, protected by patents and intellectual property rights.

Peasants as plant breeding specialists gave way to scientists of multinational seed companies and international research institutions like CIMMYT and IRRI. Plant breeding strategies of maintaining and enriching genetic diversity and self-renewability of crops were substituted by new breeding strategies of uniformity and non-renewability aimed primarily at increasing transnational profits and First World control over the genetic resources of the Third World. The Green Revolution changed the 10,000 year evolutionary

history of crops by changing the fundamental nature and meaning of ‘ seeds’ .

For 10,000 years, agriculture has been based on the strategy of conserving and enhancing genetic diversity

According to former FAO genetic resources expert Erna Bennet, “the patchwork of cultivation sown by man unleashed an explosion of literally inestimable numbers of new races of cultivated plants and their relatives. The inhabited earth was the stage for 10,000 years for an unrepeatable plant breeding experiment of enormous dimensions.”

In this experiment, millions of peasants and farmers participated over thousands of years in the development and maintenance of genetic diversity. The experiment was concentrated in the so-called developing world where the greatest concentrations of genetic diversity are found, and where humans have cultivated crops the longest. The traditional breeders, the Third World peasants, as custodians of the planet’s genetic wealth, treated seed as sacred, as the critical element in the great chain of being. Seed was not bought and sold, it was exchanged as a free gift of nature. Throughout India, even in years of scarcity, seed was conserved in every household, so that the cycle of food production was not interrupted by loss of seeds.

The shift from indigenous varieties of seeds to the Green Revolution varieties involved a shift from a farming system controlled by peasants to one controlled by agrichemical and seed corporations, and international agricultural research centres. The shift also implied that from being a free resource reproduced on the farm, seeds were transformed into a costly input to be purchased. Countries had to take international loans to diffuse the new seeds, and farmers had to take credit from banks to use them. International agricultural centres supplied seeds which were then reproduced, crossed and multiplied at the national level.

In the Philippines, the International Rice Research Institute’s (IRRI) seeds were called ‘ Seeds of Imperialism’ . Robert Onate, President of the Philippines Agricultural Economics and Development Association observed that IRRI practices had created debt and a new dependence on agrichemicals and seeds. “This is the Green Revolution connection,” he remarked. ‘ New seeds from the OGIAR global crop/seed systems which will depend on the fertilisers, agrichemicals and machineries produced by conglomerates of transnational

corporations”.

In the 1980s, the Green Revolution gave way to the new biotechnologies, and the international agricultural research system gave way to multinational corporations.

Agribusiness and chemical grants such as Cargill, Sandoz, ITC, Continental, Pioneer Hibred, Hoechst, Ciba Geigy, Lever, are now contesting with Third World farmers over the control of the seed, and hence over life itself. Intellectual Property Rights are the means for this control.

### **Seeds as Commons; Seeds as Private Property**

In large parts of India, the agricultural season begins with the festival of ‘Akti’. Farmers bring their seed to the local temple. offer it to the deity, mix it together and *then take* back part of the “common” seed to bless the agricultural cycle and their crop.

Akti, like many other festivals of the seed, is a reassertion of the seed as commons.

Intellectual Property Rights such as patents and breeders rights are an assertion of the opposite belief of seed as private property.

Since multiplication is the very nature of seed, seed presents capital with an obstacle. Intellectual property rights, and breeding technologies are the legal and technological means to block the free reproduction, multiplication and exchange of seed.

The West’ s technology and legal systems create scarcity even while they advertise growth.

The Taithireya Samhita says, “Cause this seed corn (bijadhanyam) of ours to be exhaustless.”

The Seed Industry’ s prayer seems to be the opposite, “Cause this seed to be exhausted. Let our profits be exhaustless.”

### **Seeds of Resistance; Seeds of Dependence**

The seeds of the Western seed industry embody the West’ s culture of greed, profit, injustice, non-sustainability.

Third World farmers’ seeds embody other cultural values of sharing and

feeding, of sustaining the earth and its people.

These value systems are what are guiding the farmers.' movement against patent monopolies and multinational control of the first link in the food chain.

In India, a massive movement has emerged over the past two years in response to the threats of recolonisation through GKIT, especially its intellectual property rights clauses. We call it the "Seed Satyagraha" following the Gandhian tradition of peaceful non-cooperation with unjust laws and regimes. Literally, Satyagraha means the struggle for truth. According to Gandhi, no tyranny can enslave a people who consider it immoral to obey laws that are unjust. As he stated in Hind Swaraj, "As long as the superstition that people should obey unjust laws exists, so long will slavery exist. And a passive resister alone can remove such a superstition."

Satyagraha is also the key to self rule or Swaraj. The phrase that echoed most during our freedom movement was "Swaraj hamara janmasidh adhikar hai" - Self-rule is our birthright. For Gandhi, and for the contemporary social movements in India, self rule did not imply governance by a centralised state, but decentralised self governance by local communities. "Nate na raj", "Our rule in our village", are slogans of our grass roots environmental movement.

At a massive farmers rally in Delhi in March 1993 we evolved a charter of farmers' rights. One of the rights is local sovereignty. "Local resources have to be managed on the principle of local sovereignty, wherein the natural resources of the village belong to the village".

Farmers rights to produce, exchange, modify, sell seed is also an expression of Swaraj. Farmers movements in India have declared they will violate the GMT treaty if it is implemented since it violates their birthright.

A third Gandhian concept that the Seed Satyagraha has revived is the concept of "Swadeshi". Swadeshi is the spirit of regeneration, a method of creative reconstruction. According to the Swadeshi philosophy people possess both materially and morally what they need to free themselves of oppressive structures.

Swadeshi for Gandhi was a positive concept based on building what a community has in terms of resources, skills, institutions and transforming them where needed. Imposed resources, institutions and structures leave a people unfree. Swadeshi for Gandhi was central to the creation of peace and freedom.

In the free trade era, rural communities of India are redefining nonviolence and freedom by reinventing the concepts of Swadeshi, Swaraj and Satyagraha. They are saying “no” to unjust laws like the GATT treaty which legalises the theft of the biological and intellectual heritage of Third World communities.

A central part of the “Seed Satyagraha” is to declare the “common intellectual rights’ -of Third World communities who have gifted the world the knowledge of the rich bounties of nature’ s diversity. The innovations of Third World communities might differ in process and objectives from the innovations in the commercial world of the West. But they cannot be discounted just because they are different. But we are going beyond just saying “no”. We are creating alternatives by building community seed banks, strengthening farmers seed supply, searching for sustainable agriculture options suitable for different regions.

The seed has become for us the site and symbol of freedom in the age of manipulation and monopoly of its diversity. It plays the role of Gandhi’ s spinning wheel in this period of recolonisation through free trade. The Charkha had become an important symbol of freedom, not because it was big and powerful, but because it was small and could come alive as a sign of resistance and creativity in the smallest of huts and poorest of families. In smallness lay its power.

The seed too is small. It embodies diversity. It embodies the freedom to stay alive. And seed is still the common property of small farmers in India. In the seed, cultural diversity converges with biological diversity. Ecological issues combine with social justice, peace and democracy.

The seed symbolises the resistance to a culture of destruction, it symbolises a movement for cultural and biological diversity as communicated so powerfully in a Palestinian poem -

### **The Seed Keepers**

Burn our land  
burn our dreams  
pour acid on to our songs  
cover with saw dust  
the blood of our massacred people

muffle with your technology  
the screams of aft that is free,  
wild and indigenous.

Destroy  
our grass and soil  
raze to the ground  
every farm and every village  
our ancestors had built  
every tree, every home  
every book, every law  
and all the equity and harmony.

Flatten with your bombs  
every valley; erase with your edicts  
our past.

our literature; our metaphor

Denude the forests  
and the earth  
till no insect,  
no bird  
no word  
can find a place to hide.

Do that and more.

I do not fear your tyranny  
I do not despair ever  
for I guard one seed  
a little live seed  
that I shall safeguard  
and plant again

# 14

## **Privatisation of Health and its, Impact on the People of South Asia**

**K. Balasubramaniam**

### **Introduction**

“It seems likely that fewer than 10 per cent of the world’s people participate fully in political, economic, social and cultural life. For the vast majority real participation will require a long and persistent struggle.”<sup>1</sup> The Alma-Ata Declaration<sup>2</sup> of Health for All by the Year 2000 called for complete physical, mental, economic and social well-being of all persons in all countries. Taking the realities as shown in the 1993 Human Development Report, for a majority of citizens in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the achievement of physical, mental, economic and social well-being is as remote as their getting a chance to go to Mars! What can at best be provided to them is a normally functioning and healthy body and this will need a multisystem approach. It will include appropriate policies on education, particularly female education, nutrition, employment and security, environmental sanitation, rural development and provision of comprehensive primary health care. All these determinants of good health were underscored in the Declaration of Alma Ata. In other words, the only way to provide a normally functioning and healthy body is to alleviate poverty. This paper will examine whether privatisation of health and charging user fees in the public sector will improve the health care services, make it accessible and affordable to all the people of South Asia and other developing regions where poverty is widespread.

### **Poverty and Health**

Poverty is the key vector and the predominant cause of ill health in all developing countries. Poverty creates illness and illness creates poverty. Poverty compounded by ignorance, causes malnutrition which is the most common ill



health in the developing world. It is estimated that in Pakistan 60 per cent of all children below five years of age suffer from malnutrition which is identified as an important cause of child mortality. About 80 per cent of expectant and lactating mothers suffer from anaemia, a major nutrition related problem which contributes to high infant mortality.<sup>3</sup> The 1,000 million poor, half of whom live in South Asia, have none of the determinants of good health and are living in misery as a result. They are caught in a vicious cycle of poor nutrition, illiteracy, unemployment, high infant and toddler mortality and high fertility. In 1976, Robert McNamara, former President of the World Bank referred to this misery as “... beneath any rational definition of human decency” and called for global initiatives which would meet the basic needs of the world’s poorest people by the end of the 20th century.

### **Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP)**

The 20th century is drawing near but unfortunately the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (WB/IMF) are imposing a set of policies on developing countries which are directly contradictory to Robert McNamara’s call in 1976. WB/IMF have proposed certain structural adjustment programmes (SAP) as a precondition for loans. Developing countries need these loans urgently *to* maintain their fragile economies, service outstanding debts, and to import essential items such as food, *fuel* and pharmaceuticals. These countries are caught in a vice and seem *to* have no other alternative. The main policies demanded by WB/IMF under the SAP include the following:

- ? reduce or remove government subsidies on food, education and health.
- ? devalue currency -(prices of imported basic items such as food and pharmaceuticals will go up).
- ? remove trade and exchange controls and liberalise trade -(limited foreign exchange will be used up by the rich to import luxury items; low priced generic drugs may disappear from the market).
- ? privatise public sector enterprises - health care services are one sector targeted - (health costs will escalate).
- ? charge user fees for public sector health care services - (many of the poor will drop out of the safety net provided by free health services).

It is strange that the WB/IMF want subsidies on education removed in spite

of the World Bank's own research, which has shown that investment in women's literacy would pay itself back in financial terms at 20 per cent per year by lowering infant mortality and improving equity.<sup>4</sup>

Very little research has been done on the impact of structural adjustment programmes on developing countries. In one study in the Philippines, Robert Repetto and Wilfredo Cruz found several adverse effects from one restructuring programme that received little or no attention from the economist who planned it. Because of the programme's austerity, real wages fell more than 20 per cent during the two years of the programme leaving 50 per cent of the population below the poverty line.<sup>5</sup>

WB/IMF demand that structural adjustment programmes should be implemented to allow market forces to solve the problems in the South. Free market is seen by its proponents as the most beneficial means of producing and distribution goods and services because it is both effective and protects individual freedom. What freedom is there for the one billion poor and the hundreds of millions of the not-so-poor who are completely outside the market and go to bed hungry? WB/MF insist that the economic problems of the South can be solved by following some simplistic rules gathered from text books on economics, trade and development written by university professors in the North. How can these economists, who have never seen hungry children huddling together and going to sleep night after night, ever know how much misery and suffering the poor and the not-so-poor in the South can take before they crack?

It would appear that the structural adjustment programmes proposed by WB/MF closely follow changes in the international political scene. The early 1980s saw a political shift to the right by some major economic powers - the decade that saw the rise of Reaganism and Thatcherism and monetarist economic policies such as reduced government intervention in the economy, fostering of free market and privatisation of public services.

The free market, non-interventionist approach preached by Reagan and Thatcher is being prescribed by WB/IMF to the impoverished and indebted countries of the South. It is ironic that the US which is perhaps the best model of a free market economy is faced with escalating poverty Five million children under the age of six years or one out of three children in its major cities are in dire poverty If an outside agent ever did to its kids what the US is allowing to

happen to these unfortunate children the Americans would have gone to war against that country.<sup>6</sup>

### **Privatising of Health and Charging User Fees for Public Sector Health Care Services**

Public health expenditure is escalating universally. Impoverished developing countries have been advised by WB/IMF to privatise health and charge user fees in public sector health care services. This is of course an easy and simple way of reducing government's costs. This simplistic approach forgets the beginning. It was the governments in developing countries that took the position that health care should be readily available on the basis of need and not according to the ability to pay. Equity was a central goal of public policy. The governments therefore set up comprehensive health care service systems and subsidies were introduced based on their belief in equity in distribution of health care; efficiency was considered to be of secondary importance.

Removing government subsidies and letting market forces take over production and distribution of health care services in order to make the health care system more efficient, will in fact result in another form of inefficiency due to "excess" demand and consumption of health care services because of insurance coverage. Comprehensive private sector health care services can only survive with health insurance. Whether it is voluntary or compulsory, health insurance always leads to increased demands for health care and thus increases expenditures on health but does not necessarily provide better health.

In all this exercise, the poor will be left out. Equity will be sacrificed for efficiency. This will not be acceptable to the South.

The US is a good example of a country with privatised health care. It is also the country which has the highest proportion of GNP devoted to health expenditure. One out of every seven dollars of its GNP is spent on health. Yet the health care services in that country are in a crisis. Health reform was a major issue of Mr Clinton's presidential campaign in 1992 since millions of Americans have no access to health care because they have no health insurance. In September 1993, President Clinton announced a major policy statement on health reform which included among other things, proposals for government intervention to reduce escalating costs of health care and measures

to promote equity in health. The President's proposal addresses the central issue that a nation's health care system is the responsibility of the government.

This crisis in health care in the US is not a new phenomenon. As early as 1972, Senator Edward Kennedy called on the American people to take action to ensure that quality health care was available to all Americans at prices they could afford. To quote Senator Kennedy,

“Even though we are a nation that places a high value on health, we have done very little to insure that quality health care is available to all of us at a price we can afford. We have allowed rural and inner-city areas to be slowly abandoned by doctors. We have allowed hundreds of insurance companies to create thousands of complicated policies that trap Americans in gaps, disastrously low benefits which spell financial disaster for a family when serious illness or injury strikes. We have allowed doctor and hospital charges to skyrocket out of control through wasteful and inefficient practices to the point where more and more Americans are finding it difficult to pay for health care and health insurance. We have also allowed physicians and hospitals to practice with little or no review of the quality of their work, and with few requirements to keep their knowledge up to date or to limit themselves to the areas where they are qualified. In our concern not to infringe on doctors' and hospitals' rights as entrepreneurs, we have allowed them to offer care in ways, at times, in places, and at prices designed more for their convenience and profit than for the good of the American people.

When I say “we have allowed,” I mean that the American people have not done anything about it through their government, that the medical societies and hospital associations have done far too little about it, and that the insurance companies have done little or nothing about it. I believe the time has come in our nation for the people to take action to solve these problems.<sup>7</sup>

It took more than 20 years for some action to be taken!

The public health services in Singapore were largely privatised several years ago. Singapore is a staunch believer in free market and has always relied on the law of supply and demand; surprisingly the government has recently deviated from this and taken strong measures to curb rising health costs. A recent survey on inflation by a government committee identified health costs as the one that most bothered people in this middle class society.

The measures that have been initiated to reduce the increasing health costs in Singapore include the following:

- i). Limit the production of doctors.
- ii). Limit the number of specialists so that they will not make up more than 40 per cent of the total number of doctors.

Studies have shown that countries with more doctors, particularly specialists, tend to spend more on health care.

- iii). A limit will be kept on the number of hospital beds. Too many beds may result in doctors becoming too ready to admit patients.

- iv). The government would ensure that hospitals do not race to accumulate new technology and new medicines unless they reduce suffering or cut costs.

- v). Private hospital practitioners who overcharge patients using Medisave may be struck off the list of doctors who can claim payment from this saving fund.

The Health Minister of Singapore was quoted as saying, “Our job is not to help doctors and private hospitals get richer. It is to ensure our people get quality health care at charges they can afford.”<sup>8</sup>

Charging user fees for health services creates perverse incentives. Consciously or unconsciously doctors are very likely to maximise services such as additional diagnostic or therapeutic procedures, elective surgery and expensive pharmaceuticals. At a Roundtable Conference on Economics and Health Policy,<sup>9</sup> Prof A Cochrane formerly of the Medical Research Council, Britain, stated “From my experiences around the world, I think paying doctors on a fee-for-service basis is absolutely disastrous. In the first place, it is very expensive, the amount of paperwork involved being enormous compared with that for salaries paid out of direct taxation. In addition, it encourages unnecessary prescribing, operations, and interventions of all kinds. For example, in one area it was shown that surgeons trained in the United Kingdom who migrate to Canada and then come under a fee-for-service system carried out seven times as many cholecystectomies as their colleagues who remain in the United Kingdom on a salary basis. There is no evidence of any advantage to their patients, but there is a great monetary advantage to the surgeons. I also consider fee-for-service bad because it specifically discourages care as opposed to cure, as care can't be itemised. I think care is as important as cure-

in the work of the medical profession.”

The experiences of the US and Singapore seem to suggest that even in these two market economy countries, market forces have failed to deliver optimum health care services. Government intervention has become necessary. Can market forces, therefore, help to solve the crisis in health care in South Asian and other developing countries? It would be necessary to examine the economic and health situations in these countries to determine the possible impact of the new methods of health financing being proposed.

### **Economics and Health in South Asia**

The nature and level of economic development of a country is a major determinant of the health problems it is likely to face and of the level of health services it is able to provide while its economic philosophy and institutional organisation will largely determine how such services are produced and distributed.

A characteristic feature of economic development in several countries is that despite impressive economic growth as measured by rising per capita GNP, large segments of the population continue to live in poverty. A serious Inequity in the income distribution among the people within countries becomes evident. Tables 1 and 2 show the skewed income distribution in five South Asian countries.

Some of the data in Table 1 are several years old. However evidence from Pakistan indicates that the inequity in the income distribution:

**Table 1:**

Distribution of household incomes of the poorest 20 per cent and richest 20 per cent of the population expressed as a percentage of the total GNP in five South Asian countries

| <i>Country</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Percentage share of GNP of the poorest 20 percent</i> | <i>Percentage share of GNP of the richest 20 percent</i> | <i>Ratio of income of richest and poorest 20 percent</i> |
|----------------|-------------|--|--|--|
| Bangladesh     | 73-74       | 6.6  | 46.3   | 7.0  |
| India          | 75-76       | 5.0  | 50.4   | 10.1   |
| Nepal          | 76-77       | 3.1  | 64.5   | 20.8   |

|           |       |     |      |     |
|-----------|-------|-----|------|-----|
| Pakistan  | 84-85 | 6.9 | 46.7 | 6.8 |
| Sri Lanka | 80-81 | 5.9 | 49.8 | 8.4 |

*Source: i). World Resources 1988-89. A report by the World Resources Institute and the International Institute. For Environment and Development in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme. Basis Books Inc, New York.*

*ii). Comparative Country Studies on Social Development Situations, Trends & Policies, Vol.1, Bangladesh, China and Pakistan, United Nations, New York 1990, ST/ESCAP/907.*

bution is getting worse (Table 2). The share of the income of the lowest 20 per cent declined from 8.2 per cent of the total in 70/71 to 6.9 per cent in 1984/85 while the share of the richest 20 per cent rose from 41.4 per cent to 46.7 per cent during the same period. This was because of the relatively faster increase in the income of the richest 10 per cent of the population.

**Table 2:**

Distribution of household incomes of the poorest 20 per cent and the richest 20 per cent of the population in Pakistan in 1970/71 and 1984/85

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Percentage share of GNP of the poorest 20 percent of the population</i> | <i>Percentage share of GNP of the richest 20 percent of the population</i> | <i>Ratio of income of richest and poorest 20 percent</i> |
|-------------|--|--|--|
| 1970/71     | 8.2  | 41.4   | 5.0  |
| 1984/85     | 6.9  | 46.7   | 6.8  |

*Source: Comparative Country Studies, op. tit.*

Pakistan as a whole showed impressive economic improvement from 1976/77 to 1986/87. Per capita GNP grew by 3.46 per cent per annum and the total GNP grew by 6.50 per cent per annum.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, quality of life indicators like nutrition, health and education showed no improvement. Poverty remained widespread.<sup>11</sup> In fact the poor became poorer. This confirms the observation by Professor Aber-Smith that the achievement of rapid growth in income and the national product does not guarantee an adequate degree of improvement in fulfilling basic needs for all segments of the population.<sup>12</sup>

Assuming that the income distribution in the 90s is the same as shown in Table 1, we can compute the per capita GNP of the poorest 20 per cent of the population in the five Asian countries (Table 3). This probably overestimates the

income as the experience of Pakistan. shown in Table 2, indicates; it is reasonable to expect that the income distribution in the other South Asian countries would also be worse off in the 90s than they were earlier.

**Table 3:**  
Estimated per capital GNP of the poorest 20 per cent of the population  
in five South Asian countries

| Country    | Per capita GNP in US\$- for the<br>total population (1990) | Estimated per capita GNP in US\$<br>for the poorest 20 per cent of the<br>population (1990) |
|------------|--|---|
| Bangladesh | 210  | 69.0  |
| India      | 360  | 90.0  |
| Nepal      | 180  | 28.0  |
| Pakistan   | 400  | 138.0   |
| Sri Lanka  | 470  | 139.0   |

Source: Per capita GNP for total population from Human Development Report 1993 UNDP, Oxford.

Table 3 reveals how vulnerable the poor are and how policies under structural adjustment programmes will hit them. The per capita GNP of the poorest 20 per cent in Bangladesh, India and Nepal is less than US\$100. If health subsidies are removed and prices of food grains go up by even a few cents, these people may have to go without health care and adequate food. The bread riots in Egypt a few years ago were a direct result of a rise in price of bread following structural adjustment.

The average per capita GNP which is always quoted in every article and report related to development is therefore meaningless as far as the poor are concerned.

While the income maldistribution within selected Asian countries seems unacceptable, the global income distribution is alarming. During the period 1960-70 the poorest 20 per cent of the world population received 2.3 per cent of the global income. In 1990 the poorest 20 per cent received only 1.3 per cent of the global income or about half of what they received two decades earlier (Table 4).

**Table 4:**



Share of the poorest 20 per cent of world population in global opportunities  
(percentage of global economic activity)

|                            | Percentage of global economic activity |      |
|----------------------------|--|------|
|                            | 1960-70                                | 1990 |
| Global GNP                 | 2.3                                    | 1.3  |
| Global trade               | 1.3                                    | 0.9  |
| Global domestic investment | 3.5                                    | 1.1  |
| Global domestic savings    | 3.5                                    | 0.9  |
| Global commercial credit   | 0.3                                    | 0.2  |

Source: Human Development Report, 1993, UNDP, Oxford.

Free market has no meaning to poor nations and is in fact detrimental to them because they cannot participate on an equal footing the international market or extend market opportunities to their people. Markets reward those who have either substantial purchasing **power and** valuable commodities or services to sell. Poor nations and poor people have none of these. Free market, therefore, serves the rich nations and rich people while PO, or nations and poor people serve the free market. The very poverty of the poor nations denies them international credit; barriers on the movement of both goods and people cut their potential earnings. **The 1992** Human Development Report estimated that poor nations are being denied US\$500 billion of markets annually or about ten times the annual flow of foreign assistance they receive. The poor do not want and are not asking for, charity. All they ask is their legitimate share in the so-called free market which has unfortunately been associated with increasing inequality and poverty as well as large scale unemployment in the South.

The poor have become poorer. Poverty has increased inspite of two decades of UN sponsored development programmes. The 1980s have become the lost decade for a majority of the people in developing countries. Almost all the poor are in the South and half of them are in South Asia (Table 5).

**Table 5:**  
Poverty in the Developing World 1985-1990

| <i>Region</i> | <i>No. of poor (million)</i> |             | <i>Percentage of population below poverty line</i> |             |
|---------------|------------------------------|-------------|--|-------------|
|               | <i>1985</i>                  | <i>1990</i> | <i>1985</i>  | <i>1990</i> |

|                               |       |       |      |      |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|------|------|
| All developing countries      | 1,051 | 1,133 | 30.5 | 29.7 |
| South Asia                    | 532   | 562   | 51.8 | 49.0 |
| East Asia                     | 182   | 169   | 13.2 | 11.3 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa            | 182   | 216   | 47.6 | 47.8 |
| Middle East & N. Africa       | 60    | 73    | 30.6 | 33.1 |
| Eastern Europe                | 5     | 5     | 7.1  | 7.1  |
| Latin America & the Caribbean | 87    | 108   | 22.4 | 24.9 |

*Source:* World Development Report 1992, published for World Bank by Oxford University Press.

Poverty in the South is due to the fact that, among other things, the advanced industrialised countries control world output and trade (Table 6).

Table 6 shows that globally about one fifth of the population consume three quarters of the world's resources. The unequal distribution of income and wealth within countries (Table 1) and among countries (Table 6) are two of the major causes of poverty. This skewed distribution is due to the system which has been institutionalised at the international and national levels whereby there is a shift of resources from the poor to the rich. At the global level

**Table 6:**

**World Output and Trade**

| Countries                | Population (million) | Percentage share of total GNP | Percentage share of total export |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| G7                       | 650                  | 65.9                          | 54.8                             |
| G23                      | 1200                 | 76.2                          | 73.9                             |
| Developing countries 138 | 4100                 | 23.8                          | 26.1                             |

*Source:* World Bank 1990 estimates.

G7 countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK and US.

G23 countries: Advanced industrialised countries (includes G7).

this has been systematically effected since the early 1980s through unfair terms of trade - falling commodity prices and escalating costs of manufactured goods and services and interests in external debts.

Within countries, the poor have been discriminated against by policies which favour profits over labour and policies which tax the poor disproportionately vis-a-vis the rich by regressive taxation. These countries seem to face formidable administrative difficulties in expanding the yield of income tax. An

easy method is to levy additional taxes on consumer goods with the result that direct taxes on incomes and profits (therefore exclusively from the rich) is low in developing countries. Indirect taxes such as taxes on domestic sales of goods and services and on imports and exports constitute over 60 per cent of the revenue collected in these countries. The reverse is true of industrialised countries where direct taxes and social service contributions constitute a major portion of the revenue collected (Table 7).

The dominance of indirect taxation within the tax system shows that in this form of regressive taxation the burden falls more heavily on the lower income earners compared to the more affluent higher income earners. This is well illustrated in Table 8 which shows that the lower and middle income earners in the Philippines contribute a higher percentage of their earnings as tax compared to the higher income earners; the middle income earners are the hardest hit by a regressive tax system.

**Table 7:**  
Central Government current revenue (1990)

| <i>Percentage of current revenue from direct and indirect taxes</i> |                                  |                                     |   |  |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| <i>Countries</i>  | <i>Tax on income, profit and</i> | <i>Social security contribution</i> | <i>Domestic taxes on goods &amp; services</i> | <i>Taxes on int'l trade &amp; transactions</i> |
| Bangladesh  | 8.6                              | 0.0                                 | 25.8  | 27.3   |
| India   | 15.4                             | 0.0                                 | 35.5  | 28.8   |
| Nepal   | 10.8                             | 0.0                                 | 35.7  | 31.0   |
| Pakistan  | 10.0                             | 0.0                                 | 32.2  | 30.6   |
| Sri Lanka   | 10.8                             | 0.0                                 | 46.4  | 28.6   |
| Philippines   | 28.3                             | 0.0                                 | 30.7  | 25.1   |
| Canada  | 53.7                             | 14.2                                | 19.6  | 3.5  |
| UK  | 40.3                             | 17.1                                | 30.8  | 0.1  |
| US  | 51.6                             | 34.6                                | 03.2  | 1.6  |

*Source:* World Development Report, 1992  
World Bank, Oxford University Press

**Table 8:**  
Regressive tax system in the Philippines

| <i>Effective Tax Rate by Income Class 1985 (In percentage of average family income)</i> |                  |                     |                       |
|---|------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Income Class*</i>  | <i>All Taxes</i> | <i>Direct Taxes</i> | <i>Indirect Taxes</i> |
| Low   | 26.8             | 5.2                 | 19.8                  |
| Middle  | 32.1             | 8.8                 | 23.3                  |
| High  | 18.2             | 6.4                 | 11.8                  |

\*Weighted average of the rates applying to each class within the range; the weights are given by the number of families in each class.

Source: World Bank, *The Philippines. The Challenge of Poverty, 1988.*

In several countries of Asia and Latin America, lotteries are organised to benefit social welfare programmes such as health care services. This is selective taxation of the poor. It is the poor who continue to buy lottery tickets regularly to strike rich. These tickets are lowly priced. However, compared to their meagre earnings, the low income earners may be spending on an average about two to four per cent of their monthly income buying the lottery tickets. The rich do buy occasionally.

However compared to their earnings, the amounts they spend on lottery tickets will be an extremely insignificant proportion of their income, probably less than 0.01 per cent. The money collected by governments through lottery is, therefore, money collected mainly from the poor.

Global and national policies facilitate excessive consumption of resources by the rich and intolerable destitution of the poor among and within countries. The South is faced not only with poverty of considerable portions of its population but is also facing increasing financial crisis. Among the solutions advocated by WB/INIF are that developing countries should reduce government spending let the private sector take over so that market forces control the production and distribution of goods and services essential to the people.

The demand that developing countries should reduce public spending may create the impression that the public sector in these countries is large and public spending is high. This is a myth. The

**Table 9:**

Central government expenditure as a percentage of GNP (1990) in selected regions and countries

| <i>Region / country</i> | <i>Central government expenditure as a percentage of GNP</i> |
|-------------------------|--|
| European Community      | 39   |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Nordic countries                       | 40 |
| Southern Europe                        | 44 |
| Bangladesh                             | 15 |
| India                                  | 18 |
| Nepal                                  | 20 |
| Pakistan                               | 24 |
| Sri Lanka                              | 28 |
| Average for five South Asian countries | 20 |

*Source:* Human Development Report 1993, UNDP, Oxford.

fact is that public spending or government expenditure as a percentage of the total GNP in South Asian countries is less than half the public spending in European market economy countries (Table 9).

While the central government expenditure as a percentage of GNP is small in South Asian countries, the amounts allocated for health and education in these countries are even lower (Table 10); the amounts allocated by India and Pakistan are extremely low.

**Table 10:**

Central government expenditures on health, education and defence expressed as a percentage of total government expenditure in five South Asian countries (1988)

| <i>Country</i>    | <i>Percentage of expenditure expressed as a percentage of total central government expenditure</i> |           |         |
|-------------------|--|-----------|---------|
|                   | Health   | Education | Defence |
| Bangladesh (1972) | 5.0  | 14.8      | 5.1     |
| India             | .8   | 2.9       | 19.3    |
| Nepal             | 4.3  | 10.9      | 5.6     |
| Pakistan          | 0.9  | 2.6       | 29.5    |
| Sri Lanka         | 5.4  | 7.8       | 9.6     |

*Source:* World Development Report 1990, The World Bank, Oxford.

**Table 11:**

Central government military expenditure expressed as a percentage of combined health and education expenditures in developing countries and market economies

| <i>Countries</i>         | <i>Military expenditure expressed as a percentage of combined health and education expenditures (1990)</i> |
|--------------------------|--|
| All developing countries | 169  |
| European Community       | 27   |

|                  |    |
|------------------|----|
| Nordic Countries | 17 |
| Southern Europe  | 29 |

*Source:* Human Development Report 1993, UNDP, Oxford.

Developing countries allocate much more of the central government expenditure for defence than for health and education combined (Table 11). The central government budget allocation in developing countries for the military is more than one and a half times that of the money allocated for health *and* education combined. In the European market economies the allocation to the military is about a quarter of that given to health and education.

Public spending for health and education is very low in developing countries. If South Asian and other developing countries want to ensure that everyone of their citizens has the basic education and adequate health to benefit from the free market and that there are effective and efficient social safety nets to protect the vulnerable groups, these countries should increase public spending on health, education and nutrition. The advice given by WB/IMF that developing countries should reduce public spending on health, education and nutrition is, therefore, detrimental to human development in the South.

The move to privatise health and charge user fees in South Asian and other developing countries would seem to suggest that the government expenditure on health constitute a major share of total health budget in these countries. This is yet another myth.

**Table 12:**  
Government and private health spending as a percentage  
of the total health expenditure in seven countries

| <i>Country</i> | <i>Percentage Govt. Share</i> | <i>Percentage Private Sector Share</i> |
|----------------|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>North</b>   |                               |  |
| Canada         | 86.7                          | 13.3                                   |
| Sweden         | 82.1                          | 17.9                                   |
| UK             | 91.9                          | 8.9                                    |
| <b>South</b>   |                               |  |
| India          | 24.0                          | 76.0                                   |
| Philippines    | 33.0                          | 67.0                                   |
| South Korea    | 14.0                          | 86.0                                   |
| Thailand       | 33.0                          | 67.0                                   |

Source: Milton I, Romer, "Private medical practice: obstacle to health for all, World Health Forum, Vol. 5, 1984, pp. 195-201.

One of the striking features of the financing of health services in developing countries is the fact that households spend considerable amounts of money seeking curative treatment. This is true of both urban and rural areas.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, in the market economics, the major share of health expenditure comes from the government (Table 12). In the developing countries where over one billion people live in poverty and particularly South Asia where about half the population lives below the poverty line (Table 5) the major share of health expenditure is from the private sector (Table 12). Health insurance is almost unknown in these countries. The services provided by the private health sector is paid for by the people. The data in Table 12 refer to the late 1970's and early eighties.

A number of studies in the mid and late 80' s have examined the utilisation patterns of health care services in India. The findings of all these studies confirm that more people went to private health care facilities and that their spending on health care as a proportion of total consumption was quite significant. The data also showed that government expenditure in the health sector is small in proportion to what is being spent by the people.

A study in the State of Maharashtra in **1989** revealed that for over three quarter (77 per cent) of illness episodes the patients chose

**Table 13:**  
Aggregate expenditure on health care by government and households in India,  
1984-85

| <i>Sector</i>      | <i>Rupees (millions)</i> | <i>Percentage of total expenditure</i> |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Central government | 6,940.00                 | 7.82                                   |
| State government   | 20,167.00                | 22.72                                  |
| Local bodies       | 5,816.00                 | 6.55                                   |
| Households         | 52,912.00                | 59.62                                  |
| Non-households     | 2,915.00                 | 3.29                                   |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>88,750.00</b>         | <b>100.00</b>                          |

Source: Satia J. K. et al 1987. Study on health care financing in India, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

to visit private practitioners and hospitals.<sup>14</sup> A study on diarrhoeal diseases in rural India found that more than 80 per cent of the patients were taken to

private practitioners while only about 10 per cent went to government health facilities.<sup>15</sup> From 1984 to 1985, the share of the central governments and local bodies' total health expenditure was estimated to be around 37 per cent while the remaining 63 per cent was provided by household and private nonhousehold sectors (Table 13).

These studies confirm the data obtained in the seventies and quoted in Table 12.

According to a study done by the Foundation for Research in Community Health in 1989, about 242,650 physicians qualified in the allopathic system of medicine were practising privately as compared to 88,105 in government Service.<sup>16</sup>

Recent studies in the Philippines also confirm the data shown in Table 12. The government's expenditure on health is low; the major share was provided by households (Table 14).

**Table 14:**  
Estimated total health care expenditures in 1985 and 1991 (in current prices) in the Philippines

| <i>Source</i>           | <i>Percentage of total</i> |             |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
|                         | <i>1985</i>                | <i>1991</i> |
| Government              | 38.4                       | 36.3        |
| Household out-of-pocket | 54.5                       | 53.3        |
| Medicare                | 5.6                        | 8.5         |
| Private insurance       | 1.5                        | 1.6         |

Source: From a paper presented by Alejandro N Herrin entitled "The Philippine Health Care System: Socio-Economic Dimensions" at a WHO sponsored workshop "Towards a Healthy Pharmaceutical Industry by the Year 2000" at Ternate, Cavite, Philippines, 23-24 September 1993.

Table 13 shows that private health insurance was not available in India in 1984-85. In the Philippines private insurance paid only 1.6 per cent of the total (Table 14) compared to 31 per cent in the US (Table 15).

It is surprising to learn that in the US where health is said to be privatised, the government in 1985 financed the largest share of the money spent on health. The \$425 billion spend on health came from three major sources. Consumers paid directly out of their pocket \$106.1 billion. Private health



insurance coverage took care of \$131.7 billion. The largest share, \$174.2 billion, was financed by the government. Medicare and Medicaid accounted for almost two thirds of the government health spending (Table 15).

**Table 15:**

Where the health dollars come from? - USA, 1985

| <i>Source of funds</i>   | <i>Amount in \$ billion</i> | <i>Percentage of the total</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Consumers or patients    | 106.1                       | 25                             |
| Private health insurance | 131.7                       | 31                             |
| Government               | 174.2                       | 41                             |

Source: Economics of Social Issues, 1988 (Eighth Edition) by Sharp A. M., Register CA and Leftwich Business Publication Inc, IRWIN, Homewood Illinois 60430, USA.

There is ample evidence that in all developing countries, the people are paying for their own health care. The World Bank argues that the current levels of household expenditures for health care indicate a general willingness and ability to pay for their own health care.<sup>17</sup> This is the justification used by the WB/IMF to argue that developing countries should charge user fees for health care services in public health facilities.

The WB/IMF have further extended this argument and are advocating a change in health financing which will allow a greater role for market forces in the production and distribution of health care services. These two arguments should be examined.

People's willingness to pay does not mean their ability to pay. There are reasons why people do not use the free services provided by the government. The high costs of the "free services" including travel expenses to the city and waiting time in a public health facility may discourage them. Another reason could be the skillful marketing by the private sector health care providers. Perhaps the most important reason that willingness to pay does not necessarily reflect an ability to pay comes from Thailand where 60 per cent of involuntary land sale is due to the need to pay high medical bills.<sup>18</sup> The landless peasants in South, Asia may not be able to sell any land but they get heavily indebted and may be forced to send their children as indentured labourers.

In South Asian and other developing countries hospital based health care in the urban areas dominates government expenditure absorbing almost 60 per

cent of the total.<sup>19</sup> Consequently there is limited funding for rural health facilities where a majority of the people live. Limited access to government facilities leads to inequity in health care services and inequity in health care payments. Poorer rural households are forced to use more expensive alternative care than the rich. For example, in Sri Lanka, examination of household health expenditure for maternal and childhealth (MCH) care in one district showed that total expenditure “per MCH event was 15 percent higher in rural than in urban areas.”<sup>20</sup>

The escalating health budget is also due to the increase in high technology diagnostic and therapeutic procedures that seem to be more routinely employed without any controlled evaluation, in city hospitals. A major share of health resources are concentrated in the urban areas of high economic growth. The crisis in health care in developing countries is due to over consumption by the affluent. In attempting to resolve this crisis and in the process of cost containment the poorest of the poor are asked to pay to resolve a crisis created by the rich.

WB/MF have argued for a greater role for market forces in the production and distribution of health care services. But conditions for efficient market allocation are not met in the health care market. For example, health care users are not fully informed of their health needs or the comparative evaluation of different methods of managing them. They may not, therefore, demand health care when it is needed. Or they may not, when they demand it, make an appropriate and informed choice between the various providers in the market. Since the conditions for efficient market allocation are not met in the health care market, it cannot generate efficient production and distribution without substantial government intervention.<sup>21</sup>

The World Bank has proposed that charging user-fees will increase resources available to the government health sector. The additional resources raised through fees can be used to benefit the poor by improving the access and quantity of services. To ensure that the poor do benefit, they should be exempted from the full impact of fees. This will require some form of fee exemption mechanism. However, nowhere in the World Bank's discussion of such mechanisms is the feasibility of their introduction considered.<sup>22</sup> The key difficulties relate to the problem of income assessment. How can income be realistically assessed when much of it is generated through subsistence

farming? The major drawback of this type of approach occurs if the poor are unwilling to draw attention to their state by opting for special assistance. This may mean that large numbers who qualify for special assistance do not request it.<sup>23</sup>

Thus exemption mechanisms remain an elusive concept, rather than a clear and practical approach to protecting the poor from the impact of the charges.

### **Health Insurance**

Developing countries wanting to privatise health need to have health insurance systems to support the private health sector. It will be important to examine the potential for either voluntary or compulsory health insurance in developing countries.

At present, private health insurance is almost non-existent in South Asia. Large corporations provide health insurance for their employees.

People who have no money to pay when they fall ill can hardly be expected to set aside a monthly premium when they are not well.

**Table 16:**  
Share of self-employment in five selected countries

| <i>Country</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Self-employed expressed as a percentage of total labour force</i> |
|----------------|-------------|--|
| Bangladesh     | 1987        | 41   |
| India          | 1981        | 31   |
| Pakistan       | 1984        | 56   |
| Germany        | 1987        | 08   |
| USA            | 1987        | 08   |

Source: Human Development Report, 1993, UNDP, Oxford.

It has been shown earlier that those who are willing to pay for health care do so not because they are able to pay but because they have no other alternative. And they often get into debt to pay for health care.

Considerable sections of the labour force in South Asia are self-employed and the majority of them are in the agricultural sector. They do not get a monthly wage to set aside money for insurance premiums. Nor do they have medical and vacation leave.

Table 17: shows the labour force employed in agriculture

**Table 17:**

Employment in agriculture in three countries in South Asia

| Country    | Year | Labour force employed in agriculture expressed as a % of total labour force |
|------------|------|---|
| Bangladesh | 1985 | 47.6  |
| Pakistan   | 1990 | 49.5  |
| Sri Lanka  | 1990 | 39.9  |

*Source:* Compendium of Social Development Indicators in the ESCAP Region: Quality of Life in the ESCAP Region. United Nations' Economic & Social Commission for Asia & The Pacific, 1993.

An important problem, often ignored by planners, is the adverse effect of monsoons and seasonal changes in Asia and other tropical countries on the health needs and cash availability of the rural people. Agricultural seasons determine income earning opportunities. Times of low income, such as during monsoonal rains and floods and long periods of drought often coincide with times of potentially greatest illness and need for health care. Periods of great vulnerability to ill health are associated with low cash availability.

Private health insurance schemes will deny the poor the health care they need but inflict on the rich treatment they do not need. It encourages the insured to avail themselves of the maximum health care services to obtain value for money. The private health sector will be supportive of such people. General medical expenses will increase and the health insurance premiums will spiral upwards in a vicious cycle. Private health insurance is limited generally to hospital in-patient treatment only, leaving out a host of common illnesses which can be treated without admission to a hospital. And more importantly private health insurance does not cover the costs of preventive treatment.

Privatisation of health and health insurance should also be viewed in the context of the on-going Uruguay Round of Negotiations in GATT (General Agreement on Trade & Tariffs). Advanced industrialised countries are calling for the free flow of services. If accepted this will enable health industry from the North to set up subsidiaries in the South. Already United States health chains have set up hospitals in Singapore to cater for the wealthy in South and South East Asia.<sup>24</sup> Very soon the insurance industry will set up subsidiaries in the South, displacing the infant national insurance industry and attracting the

affluent sections of the people in the region who will get tax concessions. This will drain resources from public revenue thus reducing the government revenue and the health budget. The quality and quantity of public sector health care services will be compromised.

### **Solution to Problems: To Plan is to Choose**

This paper argues that equity should be a central goal of public health policy. Equity as a goal was unanimously accepted by the world community when all Member States of the World Health Organisation unanimously accepted the Alma Ata Declaration on Primary Health Care.

There is a crisis in the health care services in both developing as well as some advanced industrialised countries. In responding to the current crisis, it is important that policy makers do not make decisions which will conflict with the equity goal.

WB/IMP has proposed structural adjustment programmes which, among others, demand that developing countries introduce new financing systems for health. User-fees, fee-for-service and privatisation of health have been recommended. It has been shown in this report that all the three measures recommended are counter productive and detrimental to human development in the South. The central goal of equity will be lost.

Structural adjustment programmes have had an extremely detrimental impact on the health of the poor and the underprivileged. The group worst affected are infants and young children. The following two excerpts, taken from UNICEF's "The State of the World's Children" reveal the mortality figures for children in 1982 and 1992.

*1. Everyday of this last year more than 40, 000 young children have died from malnutrition and infection. And for every one who has died, six now live on in hunger and ill-health which will be forever etched upon their lives...*

*... To allow 40,000 children to die like this every day is unconscionable in a world which has mastered the means of preventing it. (The State of the World's Children 1982-83).*

*2. A quarter of a million of the world's young children are dying every week, and millions more are surviving in the half-life of malnutrition and*

*almost permanent ill health.*

*This is not a threatened tragedy or an impending crisis. It happened today, it will happen again tomorrow.*

(The State of the World's Children, 1992) Infants and young children continue to die in equal numbers in 1992 as in 1982. And several millions continue to survive in utter misery in 1992 as in 1982. Structural adjustments have denied these children the resources that should have gone into their welfare.

The gap between the health "haves" and health "have nots" is widening rapidly. As Dr Halfdan Mahler, the former Director General of the WHO pointed out in a speech at the Vatican in 1986, "... the existing social and health inequity closely resembles inequity - a sin - and it is a sin that mere repentance will not remove. Action is sorely needed." The actions necessary to deliver equity oriented health care services in the South have been suggested by an elder statesman, Julius K Nyerere, Chairman of the South Commission and the former President of the Republic of Tanzania.

"We cannot afford to provide facilities for a few people to get advanced treatment for special heart diseases while the masses of our people are not able to get treatment for the common diseases which make their life a misery. This is a hard doctrine, but it is a question of priorities. To plan is to choose."<sup>25</sup>

A government must make certain choices before it can proceed to formulate plans and policies in the health sector. For governments in the South these choices are tough to make. The choices will determine, among other things, who will live and who will die. The choices are clearly moral and ethical issues and not technological ones - and they cannot be made by the medical establishment. The Alma Ata Declaration pointed to the direction of the choice; Julius Nyerere gave it a form. When a country's resources are limited the government has to decide, for example, whether to keep a limited number of elderly adults alive by operating intensive cardiac care facilities or to save the lives of thousands of infants and young children and help them achieve their full physical and mental potential. This alternative requires effective immunisation programmes and primary health care (PHC) services for all.

Since the Alma Ata Declaration in 1978, there has been an enormous amount of literature published on PHC. The issues discussed in the hundreds of

papers range from philosophical concepts, social justice and equity to country experiences and blueprints for implementation of MC services. The support for MC was initially vociferous and universal. It was agreed that there would be a shift of resources from the high technology curative, city based hospitals to the periphery to set up primary health care centres. No developing country has so far made this shift in resources. It is interesting that recently the government of Britain accepted the Tomilson report to close down ten teaching hospitals in London and reallocate the resources to provide primary health care. Only Britain appears to be implementing one of the recommendations of the Alma Ata Declaration!

The World Health Organisation, the international agency mandated to protect and promote the health of the people of the world has, since 1978, reiterated repeatedly that primary health care is the only way to achieve Health for All. The 89th Session of the WHO Executive Board in 1992 reaffirmed the primary health care approach to attain Health for All remained valid. Equity is the central thrust in the Alma Ata Declaration. WB/IMF are proposing programmes contradictory to the Alma Ata Declaration. Perhaps international organisations should adhere to major international health goals accepted unanimously by the world community namely the achievement of health for all by the year 2000 through primary health care.

What is primary health care? Its content was clearly outlined in the Report of the International Conference. Primary health care should include at least:

- ? education concerning prevailing health problems and the methods of identifying, preventing and controlling them;
- ? promotion of food supply and proper nutrition;
- ? an adequate supply of safe water and basic sanitation;
- ? maternal and child health care, including family planning;
- ? immunisation against major infectious diseases;
- ? prevention and control of locally endemic diseases;
- ? appropriate treatment of common diseases;
- ? promotion of mental health; and
- ? provision of essential drugs.

The above list shows that the Alma Ata Declaration is a comprehensive

statement of all the major influences on health rather than an assessment of priorities among them. There was no attempt to indicate which of these developments should be taken as priorities by those countries which would not be in a position to promote all those listed. It is clearly impossible for several countries in the South to do so. For example, a WHO report on sanitary progress makes it evident that we are not in sight of the time when clean water and adequate sanitation will be generally available in developing countries, particularly in rural areas.<sup>26</sup> It is therefore, necessary to consider the components which should be given priority. Previous experience suggests that a minimum of three components should be given priority. These are nutrition, education and basic health services to all.

The basic health care services to be provided will vary from country to country. But the essential point to remember is that quantity is more important than quality. It is better to have lower quality care for every one and upgrade it gradually than to set up pockets of high-technology hospital based curative services inaccessible to the vast majority of people.

The minimum health services that should be provided to all will

- ? Maternal and child health care and fertility control;
- ? Immunisation against common infectious diseases;
- ? Treatment of common illnesses;
- ? Provision of essential drugs.

Where can the money to implement the Alma. Ata Declaration come from? The Declaration itself provided the answer. It was stated, among other things, "... a genuine policy of independence, peace, detente and disarmament could and should release the additional resources that could be devoted to social and economic development of the people." Examination of Tables 10 and 11 shows how appropriate the above statement is.

The existing problem of resource shortages in the health sector should not be seen only as a sector problem. It reflects the overall shortages of government funds. The Ministry of Health is not the government agency responsible for addressing this problem.

Taking a broader view of the resource problem allows, for example, consideration of tax reforms. The current worldwide recession has undermined the basic economic situation of many countries and may imply that it is



impossible to raise additional resources through taxation.<sup>27</sup> However, this may be too pessimistic a view; it is instructive to remember that earlier studies of economic growth within developing countries suggested that ‘redistribution with growth’ was possible.<sup>28</sup> These analysts suggested that the potential for tax collection was higher than expected in some developing countries.<sup>29</sup> What developing countries need, therefore, is not structural adjustment programmes, but research into alternate and appropriate models for development. The two decades of UN-sponsored development have faded and brought the developing countries into the ‘lost decade’. It will be necessary for economists to re-examine ‘redistribution with growth’.

While economists search for alternate models of growth best suited for developing countries, it may be useful for health ministry officials to stop assuming that methods of financing health care should be changed. Instead they should examine how to improve the existing health care services, reduce wastage and improve value for money. They will be justified in doing this and in demanding a higher level of allocation for health to enable ‘redistribution with growth’.

It is suggested that the overall performance of government health care systems could be improved by giving attention to the following:

i) Ministries of Health need to strengthen their management skills and practices. Undergraduate medical and pharmacy curricula should include courses in management sciences. Continuing medical and pharmacy education should also include courses in management sciences.

ii) Universities and research institutes at present confine their priorities to biomedical research. This should change. Health systems research and health economics research should be encouraged.

It would be desirable to examine the appropriate level for delivering different health services and particularly the care that can be appropriately delivered at the primary care level.

iii) The European office of WHO now includes health economics among the priorities in its health service research. *Drugs and Money*, published by this office is a very useful document. Regional offices of the WHO in the developing regions should include health economics among its priorities of health service research.

iv) In addition to health professionals the public should be informed and educated on the economic aspects of health care services. People would then be in a position to accept external controls by the state as justifiable and not as curtailing their freedom of choice.

v) Expand primary health care services and use less costly paramedical personnel instead of physicians. Explore possibilities of training traditional healers to deliver modern technology.

vi) Change in emphasis from hospital to community care.

vii) Limit the number of doctors in the country particularly specialists. Singapore has initiated a scheme to fin-lit the numbers. There are unemployed and underemployed doctors in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. It is a waste of limited resources to train physicians who cannot be usefully employed.

viii) Limit the expenditure on expensive diagnostic and laboratory procedures, e.g. computerised axial tomography (CAT scan), diagnostic x-rays.

ix) More control and evaluation of new techniques in diagnostic medicine and treatment before their general introduction.

x) New clinical techniques should be subjected to the same rigorous testing procedures as new drugs.

xi) Health officials should be given suitable and reliable information on costs and effectiveness of health services.

xii) Research into specific areas of clinical management such as prescribing practices of physicians.

Finally and perhaps most important, a country should prepare a National Health Policy with detailed descriptions of goals, strategies and programmes.

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# 15

## The Citizen as Consumer

Anwar Fazal

GAIA (pronounced ‘ga-yah’) is the Greek word for Mother Earth, a living, complex sphere.

GAIA we are told is 4,600 million years’ old.

If we condense this mind-boggling figure into something we can understand, and assume that GAIA is 46 years of age, we are told:

- ? nothing is known to us about the first seven years of GAIA’ s life;
- ? nothing much is known about GAIA as a teenager or young adult;
- ? only at age 42, did GAIA begin to flower;
- ? dinosaurs and the great reptiles appeared only a year ago when GAIA was 45;
- ? the ice age enveloped GAIA only last weekend;
- ? modern humankind has been around for four hours;
- ? during the last hour, we discovered agriculture; and
- ? the industrial revolution began one minute ago.

During that minute, those sixty seconds, we have ransacked the planet in the name of development, sometimes for need, very often for greed!

We have caused the extinction of some 500 species of animals. We have accumulated such deadly weapons that can kill us many times over.

We have also generated much happiness, creativity, beauty.

But it is a constant struggle.

It is as if GAIA, Mother Earth, is itself suffering from AIDS. Her immune systems are being devastated as:

- ? her circulation systems, the water, and air, are being poisoned.
- ? the lungs, the forests, are being wantonly destroyed.

? her skin, the ozone layer and soil, are being scared and scraped.

All this devastation may go down paths from which there may be no return.

Can we do something to reverse this madness? Can we create a new paradigm of development and happiness that enables peace within ourselves, peace with other people, and peace with mother earth?

As citizens, as consumers, we can and we must!

There is now a worldwide revolution by consumers, of consumers, for consumers. I like to share with you the essence of this revolution.

And I hope that in the sharing you too will join the struggle for a better world through a better lifestyle.

### **Some History**

The consumer struggle is not new.

Some 3,500 years ago, the Hittites, in Anatolia, now in Turkey, had two very simple but powerful laws.

The first stated, “Thou shalt not poison thy neighbour’s oil” (i.e. there should be no unsafe products).

The second stated, “Thou shalt not bewitch thy neighbour’s oil” (i.e. don’t engage in misleading or manipulative market practices).

The so-called “Middle Ages” saw some tough laws. The French Law of 1481, for example, required that *anyone who* sold butter containing *stones or* other foreign bodies (to fraudulently increase the weight) would be put in a pillory and the offending butter placed on the seller’s head until entirely melted by the sun. In addition, dogs were allowed to come and feast off the butter, and people allowed to insult the seller.

The battle for safe products and responsible market practices has continued over the centuries. The continued exploitation of the consumer saw the birth of the organised consumer movement and in 1960, a world body, the International Organisation of Consumers Unions (IOCU) was founded.

The movement grew from strength to strength and on April 9, 1985, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a worldwide charter on consumer protection. Its official title was the “United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection.”

This decision bestowed a universal legitimacy on the decades of efforts by consumer advocates, and highlighted the importance that consumer protection had on economic and social development.

These guidelines addressed six legitimate needs” of consumers

The protection of consumers from hazards to their health and safety

The promotion and protection of the economic interests of consumers;

Access of consumers to adequate information to enable them to make informed choices according to individual wishes and needs;

Consumer education

Availability of effective consumer redress;

Freedom to form consumer and other relevant groups or organisations and the opportunity of such organisations to present their views in decision-making processes affecting them.

These guidelines provide a challenge to consumers, to business and to government. They provide the framework for assertive, socially responsible production, marketing and consumption of goods and services.

### **What is the consumer movement really about?**

However, the consumer movement has suffered from taking a very narrow view - it talked too much about “value for money”. It did not talk enough about “value for people” and “value for mother earth”.

I like to share with you a new vision of the movement, a vision that not only requires us to be micro-sensible but also to be macroresponsible.

The consumer movement is about 5 important things.

First, the consumer movement is about **PEOPLE**. People who are about society from a very special perspective, a perspective that concerns every single human being, man, woman, child, the hawker, the doctor, even the lawyer and politician. This perspective is about ourselves as consumers - about the food we eat, the drink we take, the medicines we use, the products and service we get or don't get. It is also about those who try because they put profits before health, to manipulate our behaviour against our very interest, through advertising and through the power they have to impose deprivations on us.

Secondly, the consumer movement is also about **POWER** - power of the



ordinary people to organise themselves collectively to serve as a countervailing force to promote and protect our interests as consumers, to help us fight the violence, waste and manipulation that characterise so many of our societies.

Thirdly, the consumer movement is also about **HUMAN RIGHTS**

- ? the right to a decent life with dignity;
- ? the right to organise ourselves as consumers.

In particular, the consumer movement is about eight specific consumer rights. They are:

? *The right to basic needs* which means the right to basic goods and services which guarantee survival. It includes adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care, education and sanitation.

? *The right to safety* which means the right to be protected against products, production processes and services which are hazardous to health or life. It includes concerns for consumers' long-term interests as well as their immediate requirements.

? *The right to be informed* which means the right to make an informed choice or decision. Consumers must be provided with adequate information enabling them to act wisely and responsibly. They must also be protected from misleading or inaccurate publicity material, whether included in advertising, labelling, packaging or by other means.

? *The right to choose* which means the right to have access to a variety of products and services at competitive prices, and in the case of monopolies, to have an assurance of satisfactory quality and service at a fair price.

? *The right to be heard* which means the right to advocate consumers' interests with a view to their receiving full and sympathetic consideration in the formulation and execution of economic and other policies. It includes the right of representation in governmental and other policy-making bodies as well as in the development of products and services before they are produced or set up.

? *The right to redress* which means the right to a fair settlement of just claims. It includes the right to receive compensation for misrepresentation of shoddy goods or unsatisfactory services and the availability of acceptable forms of legal aid or redress for small claims, where necessary

? *The right to consumer education* which means the right to acquire the knowledge and skills to be an informed consumer throughout life. The right to

consumer education incorporates the right to the knowledge and skills needed for taking action to influence factors which affect consumer decisions.

? *The right to a healthy environment* which means the right to a physical environment that will enhance the quality of life. It includes protection against environmental dangers over which the individual has no control. It acknowledges the need to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations.

Fourthly, the consumer movement is also about the **ENVIRONMENT** - about a sustainable earth. We cannot just be concerned about serving and protecting the insides or our bodies, our “inner limits”, but we have equally to be concerned with the “outer limits” of mother-spaceship earth, a powerful complex and yet so fragile, an exploitable structure that gives us the opportunity for a good life but which can be destroyed not by people’s needs but by people’s greed, ignorance and carelessness.

Fifthly, and lastly, the consumer movement is also about **JUSTICE** about the way in which our political, legal and economic systems are organised to bring about a fair, just, equitable and rational basis for the promotion and protection of the public interest.

These five pillars, I believe, are the bases on which to judge the relevancy, the competence and the success of a consumer movement. These five pillars have become an integral part of the work of many consumer groups. In particular, in Malaysia, the Consumers Association of Penang has led in integrity and social responsibility -demonstrating this humanistic and ecological approach to the consumer movement as few groups in the world have done. It has made the consumer movement relevant and it has shown that it can make a difference.

To many groups in the Third World for whom mere survival is victory, Malaysia is a precious model of what can be done. A critical, constructive, humanistic and ecological approach can be a constant source of guidance and inspiration for the rest of the world, guidance and inspiration so badly needed in many countries where corrupt governments in league with greedy business interests do not like to see a strong consumer movement (unless, of course, they can run it themselves).

In many parts of the world, consumers are not able to exercise their rights

or even know they exist. The law should protect and promote these rights and, sometimes even more critical, the right to organise around them. But laws are only a reflection of the state of our society -a violent, corrupt, manipulative society will breed laws that serve it. Laws can pervert and subvert justice and they can become a powerful instrument for systematic repression. Laws do not mean justice nor do they imply automatic action. There must be safeguards and the ultimate safeguard must be a critical, informed, active citizenry that is rooted in strong, clear, humanistic and ecological principles that can provide a unifying bond for our pluralistic society. We need to be active, to be informed, to be critical. The late Tun Hussein Onn embodied these qualities and as long as there are more such people, we can hope for a more caring and just society

### **Towards a Caring and Just Society**

We live today in a world that is dominated by three terrible technologies:

? the *technology of violence* both of the structural kind that, through neglect of provision of essential services, causes death and misery, and the technological kind emanating from products, processes and wastes that maim and kill. An example is the irresponsible use of pesticides which are associated with over one million deaths in the third world.

? the *technology of manipulation* both from the machines of bureaucratic propaganda and behaviour control exercised by unbridled advertising techniques. These can prevent the free and informed expression of people's participation. Vicious forms of hidden advertising like "product placement" in feature movies and children's programmes that are designed to create a consumer craving to buy and buy are becoming rampant.

? the *technology of waste* - garbage has become a good measure of mal-development. Greenpeace estimates that some 3.2 million tons of wastes are exported to developing countries which are playing a role as the world's garbage dumps. About 1.2 billion of the world's 5.5 billion people are "over consumers" and are responsible for 70% of the damage to the environment.

The world is fast moving to becoming a global supermarket as well as a superdump. We do not want to end up as its dustbin, as its prisoner, as its victim.

### **Towards a New Vision**

We should seek a new vision which embodies these three caring cultures:

? a *culture of balance and harmony*, representing the cycles and systems so well established by the laws of nature.

? a *culture of trusteeship and stewardship*, as we are only guardians of this earth.

? a *culture of accountability*, not only in the political sense but also to the future, and to God Almighty

### **Six Ways to Spend US\$25 billion**

One of the best examples of the perverted state of global priorities was stated powerfully in a recent United Nations report.

The 1993 “State of the World Children’s Report’ by UMCEF states that US\$25 billion extra a year is what it would take to meet the most basic needs of *all the world-’s children* by the end of this decade. And yet what goes on instead is very different.

? *Smoke and Drink*: \$25 billion is less than what America spends on cigarettes every six months and Western Europe spends on alcohol every three months.

? Aid for Russia: \$25 billion is a little less than the 1992 support package for Russia agreed to by the “Group of Seven” rich nations.

? *An airport for Hong Kong*: \$25 billion is a little more than the estimated cost of Hong Kong’s new airport.

? *Wages of war*: \$25 billion is about as much as the developing world spends every six months to pay the wages of its soldiers.

? *A new road for Japan*: \$25 billion is less than what the government of Japan has allocated in 1992 to the building of a new road from Tokyo to Kobe.

It makes you think about so-called Development!”

### **The Consumer Movement in Malaysia**

An occasion like this cannot be allowed to pass without some specific comment on the consumer movement in Malaysia.

Malaysia fortunately, has much to be proud of.

Firstly, we are one of the few countries to have a full fledged Ministry dealing with consumer affairs. The Malaysian government clearly takes consumer protection seriously.

Secondly, the framework for national, state and local consumer councils is also quite rare. The vision of making consumer protection decentralised and participatory is very good. It's a new idea so it will take time to root but it is in the right direction.

Thirdly, consumer groups are uneven in their size and ability but we have a lively scene. The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) is a world class citizens movement and there are several others that do very credible work, particularly the consumer associations in Selangor, Pahang and ERA Consumer in Ipoh. FOMCA, the Federation of Malaysian Consumers Association, does the difficult job of liaison and coordination and if you look around Third World countries and view its activities in that context, even FOMCA is quite an achievement. Its recent selection as the NGO Resource Centre, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme, gives it new opportunities and challenges.

Fourthly, the school system is beginning to incorporate consumer education. We need more books, more activity ideas, more teachers who know how to develop this but an important beginning has been made.

Fifthly, the International Organization of Consumers Unions (IOCU) has its Asia Pacific office in Malaysia. It has provided training and documentation services for many countries. We are also, therefore, a regional leader and can build on this role with advantage.

I believe the stage has been set for substantial improvements. We can of course, do more in schools, in the media, in improving laws but that is an ongoing process and we have that process in place. The rest is getting good people and ensuring good implementation. I am optimistic we can have both.

I particularly like to see the universities doing more active research. A Malaysian *Institute for Consumer Studies* is urgently needed to provide an independent think-tank on a continuous basis. We have a core of good people who could form a network which could be inter-university, inter-disciplinary and, inter-sectoral. This institution could identify research needs, trends, legal gaps, develop policy materials and more textbooks. It could serve as an

intellectual blood bank for the consumer movement, the government and even responsible business. It could be financed from such creative sources as a cess on the sales tax or advertising.

### **The Responsibilities of Consumers**

I talked a great deal about consumer rights. For the future, even more important are going to be consumer responsibilities. Rights are the trunks and branches, responsibilities are the roots and the soil.

I like to share with you 5 principles which I have found useful which provides a framework for action as responsible consumers. We can call them the “panchasila” for consumers or the “RUKUN PENGGUNA’ .

? *CRITICAL AWARENESS* - *we* must be awakened to be more questioning about the goods and services we consume. “Why” should we consume should be as important as “what’ and “which” .

? *INVOLVEMENT OR ACTION* - *we* must assert ourselves and act to ensure that we get a fair deal. We can start with ourselves then with those around us and move on to the community and the nation.

? *SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY* - *we* must act with social responsibility, with concern, sensitive to the impact of our actions on people, in particular, in relation to disadvantaged groups in the community. Purchasing power is real power and the power to boycott is a powerful weapon. By voting with your purchasing power, you can, for example, reinforce racist or repressive regimes or you can through selective purchases, and non-purchases, help to bring not just better products but a better world.

? *ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY* - *there* must be heightened sensitivity to the impact of consumer decisions on the physical environment, which must be developed in a harmonious way, promoting conservation. We must fight against-the degradation of the environment if we are to see improvements in the real quality of life for the present and the future.

? *SOLIDARITY* - the best and most effective action is through the formation of citizens’ groups who together can have the strength and influence to ensure that adequate attention is given to the consumer interest.

You can start with these principles yourselves. You can learn from this saying

“If the people are asleep, awaken them.

If the people fear to act, give them courage by taking yourself the first step.”

### **Conclusion**

And you must take that first step quickly.

In one city not far from here, the umbilical cords of some two dozen babies born on one day in a leading hospital were tested for lead. Every one of the tests showed lead levels higher than those safely acceptable. Those babies were being born poisoned, retarded. In that same city, an international team studied air quality and found the air so unhealthy, they refused, for their own health, to return to that city for a follow-up monitoring exercise.

That city recently won notoriety as the world’s most air polluted city. It also happens to be a favourite destination for many Malaysians.

If we are not careful, our cities can end up with that kind of future, with poisoned wombs and poisoned babies.

In conclusion, let me share with you a poem that reminds us about GALA, about mother earth, about being responsible consumers.

**“Harm not** the land, nor the sea nor the trees  
For the earth is the mother of all  
And we who abuse her  
and poison her now,  
By abuse and poison will fall.

**Harm not** the land, nor the sea, nor the trees,  
For water is more precious than gold,  
And our sisters the oceans  
that bring us new life.  
Till the warmth of the sun grows cold.

**Harm not** the land, nor the sea, nor the trees,  
For the leaves of the  
Forest bring rain  
And our brothers the trees are the cradle of life  
To destroy them will mark  
us with deep pain.

**Harm not** the land, nor the sea, nor the trees,  
Though fortunes are to be made,  
But a fortune is false  
if the soul of the land  
is the price that will  
have to be paid.

**Harm not** the land, nor the sea, nor the trees,  
For they are not yours or mine,  
They belong to the children  
of children unborn  
From now till  
the end of time.”

*This paper was originally delivered as the 1993 Tun Hussein Onn  
Memorial Lecture on 16 October 1993 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.*



# Other JUST Publications

## Books

- Human Fights and the New World Order \* *Chandra Muzaffar*  
Peace Dividend? \* *Jennifer Mourin*  
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## Booklets

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and International Law  
Human Rights in Asia: \*  
The Struggle for Human Dignity  
Let Bosnia Live \*  
The Just Cause \*