



8TH INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON EDUCATION AND THINKING

ARUBA 2007 - May 2-5, 2007

Systemic Frameworks for Development-Oriented Education:

Fostering Humanity through Civic Education Based on Competencies

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DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIETY IN THE AMERICAS¹

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In the Americas, society was not born out of development. This core statement implies that the genesis of contemporary society in the New World was not primarily linked to development as a driving force in history and social evolution, but rather to its abortion from outside. Historically, the exact opposite and the very negation of development constituted the main factor in shaping society in the Caribbean and the American mainland. This sheds a critical light on the theme of “Development and Society”, two terms that have been dramatically misunderstood and deliberately distorted in social science, politics and social life.

The fate of our societies was not shaped by an own internal dynamism in fulfilment of own aspirations or in response to challenges posed by nature and environment. Our societies were born as the scar of oppression, as a healing process of inflicted wounds, as a reconstitution of a future out of incomplete genocide and fuzzy deletion. But the New World was only the telling example of what was a wider expansionist project of global reach.

The history of the last five hundred years of humanity can be summarized in one phrase as the globalization of the local experience in the West that turned all other human settings into trailer societies, towed not towards their own destiny but towards the destiny and teleology of Western civilization. As a trailer behind the truck, the trailer society was deprived from a steer wheel and engine of its own, and turned into an instrumental appendix of an alien economic enterprise and expansionist project. As the tale goes, Europe was responsibly complying with the moral obligation to give life to prenatal societies.

¹ These reflections for a lecture and conversation at the “8th International Meeting on Education and Thinking” (Aruba 2007 - May 2-5, 2007) form part of a more comprehensive statement in a book in preparation. Further elaboration of some of the issues can be found on www.crscenter.com.

The outcome was the virtual obliteration of the other, her successful metamorphosis from subject into object, his removal from history and social evolution, and her domestication by an alien destiny. It was a dramatic sublimation of the other to be absorbed as a volatile substance and to be reformatted into the logos of an alien civilization. That process of domestication of the other by the West and her incorporation into an alien destiny was based on three critical clusters of factors, which are: (i) abolitions, (ii) appropriations and (iii) changes of landscape.

The globalization of the local experience of the West was based on eight discursive abolitions that stood at the cradle of that expansionist process.

1. The *abolition of context* was based on the tenet that all universals come from the West. Inherent in this universality claim is the transfer of devices, deemed context-free and insensitive to the specificities of the environment, geography, culture and history of other latitudes. In trailer societies, the model is not adapted to suit reality, but instead, reality is modified to accommodate the model.
2. The *abolition of culture* was based on the tenet that the only beneficial course open for the future of all destinies was to adopt Western culture. The indigenous society was civilised to the extent that it abandoned the culture of its ancestors, in order to imitate Western modernisation and achievements, which would banish its own patrimony to the margins of social life. The Amerindian was civilized to the degree she changed her dress for Barbie clothes.
3. The *abolition of evolution* was based on the claim that Western civilisation was the spear point of human evolution and, hence, constituted the target and yardstick for any progress and development. It was in the own interest of the distant destiny to give up its own variegated project embedded in its own historically based social genesis. To imitate the West and mimic its achievements was the best short cut and the only feasible road to the future.
4. The *abolition of internal social dynamism* undermined the indigenous command over the engine of development and creation. Internal social dynamism measures the degree to which social forces operate as the engine of development and creation. No need existed to mobilize local factors and social forces, since it was wise to leave control in hands of the more civilized.
5. The *abolition of social life* was based on contempt for tribal life and collective social organization that was forced to make place for the Western style modern nation state, based on extreme individualism, competition and egoism as the pillars of society.
6. The *abolition of spiritual life* was based on disregard for all other belief systems and myths and disregard for the religion of the other that was declared superstition. Western Christianity, which in reality was a Romanized Semitic

religion, was to be imposed at all costs on all latitudes preferably by persuasion and conversion, but if so required with the use of genocidal force.

7. The *abolition of history* was based on the axiom that universal history coincides with the genealogy of the West. The encounter with the West was the entry ticket to history. As Eurocentric wisdom had it, the 'discovery of America' was, in the first place, the inauguration of its history. It is contemptuous, arrogant and shameless to label the life and social evolution and history of another human setting as 'prehistory', a term that should be banned immediately from all scientific thought.
8. The *abolition of the social project* took as the premise that Europe was the future face of all. Instead of watching the palm of our hands, we could read our own future just by looking at Europe. For that reason, no other social project was needed, since we could readily copy-paste by imitation and mimicry, instead of having to pass all over again through the multiple pains and slaughters that the West endured.

In addition to these eight abolitions, four alienating appropriations would orphan the Amerindian from his embedment in nature and context.

1. The *appropriation of habitat* started when the living space of the other was declared no-man's-land. The guest declared himself host. The house of the other was hijacked, opening thus the road to centuries of colonialism.
2. The *appropriation of fellow humans* was inaugurated by putting in doubt the humanity of the other. When the issue was settled in a positive way, they proceeded to reducing the other human being into private property. The road was open to centuries of slavery and indenture in service of a political and economic domination of peoples around the globe.
3. The *appropriation of resources* was the logic next step in the no-man's-land. All natural resources and economic assets were appropriated and claimed as legitimate alienable property of the bearer of civilization. The physical appropriation of the planet and of the habitats of others gave rise to a reckless destructive exploitation of global proportions that now threatens the physical survival of all species on earth.
4. The *appropriation of knowledge*, of relatively recent fabrication, was meant to hijack the common good of humanity by declaring it private property. Appropriation of knowledge and technology is against the principle of creation and an assault against evolution. One monkey takes a stick and drops the ripe banana from the tree and, then, proudly tells the other hungry monkeys: "You have all seen what I did, but you are not allowed to do that, for it is my property."

That is not how evolution works. In a strife for survival and development, all members of a species make efforts to look for solutions to deal with the multiple challenges posed by nature and history. Most find no clue, many die in the effort, and only some succeed. But any feasible solution, no matter by whom and how, is automatically welcomed as an asset of the collectivity, as a conquest to enhance the survival chances of the species. Property of knowledge is at variance with any existing religious or ethical system. Not even a minimal reference will be found in the sacred books on the planet, which typically tend to rescue and codify all deep-rooted human values and principles of justice. Patent law is a crime against humanity; it is piracy and theft, because it hijacks the common good, regardless whether the life of the others or even the future and survival of the species is put at risk.

Related to the abolitions and appropriations, seven altering landscapes detach the indigenous destiny from the natural environment and invalidate the interactive responses to dangers and challenges that were found and transmitted since ancestry.

1. The *alteration of the geographical landscape* divorced the humans from the natural shapes, assets and appearances of the earth. Arbitrary lines were drawn that did not respond to the shape and natural flow of the earth, but instrumentally derived from the commands of the urge to dominate and control the alien destiny by Western military devices. Geography was overwhelmed by cartography.
2. The *alteration of the infrastructural landscape* introduced a totally new physical use of land and water with a new superimposed infrastructure that served domination and exploitation. The railroad system of Argentina extended itself as a superimposed cobweb connecting the most distant places with the port, which was turned both into the center of communication and the residence of the spider. In the Caribbean, at strategic locations for easy access at the end of sea routes, new centers were created as bridgeheads that were deemed strategic for the defense against rival powers and pirates at sea, and against the indigenous barbarians on land. The need to control the land, to dominate the locals and to exploit the resources demanded a brand-new infrastructure connecting plantations, ports and forts. The Caribbean got invested with newly invented centers of control with names that tell the truth, like Port of Spain, Fort the France, Fort Zoutman, Port-au-Prince, Fort Nieuw Amsterdam. Wherever you approach a capital or port in the Caribbean Sea, you will be welcomed by a rusty colonial cannon.

3. The *alteration of the cultural landscape* brusquely altered the living patterns in response to displacement, slave trade, forced migration, and immigration, all of which contributed to a persistent change of the cultural landscape. The price to be paid by indigenous people was horrific in terms of the marginalization of living culture. Culture was castrated into folklore, into lifeless and dead expressions distant from any influence and impact on the further course of history.
4. The *alteration of the demographic landscape* was one of the most cruel episodes of human history, particularly with the genocidal extermination of a significant part on the newly discovered lands, accompanied by forced replacement of people and implanted populations assembled into a quilt of peoples from all continents.
5. The *alteration of the social landscape* was achieved by the imposition of the modern nation state to the detriment of all existing social organization and indigenous ordering of social relations and by outlawing longstanding institutions that formed part of the social evolution of the indigenous people.
6. The *alteration of the economic landscape* was the most thorough action to be executed, since it touched the very heart of the colonial enterprise. Tens of thousands of plantations were established to grow staples that were unrelated to the own reality and environment. The pasting of capitalism in communities based on collective belonging and solidarity was one of the most disturbing distortions of the economic landscape.
7. The *alteration of the political landscape*, was the necessary primary requirement for external domination and rule, which culminated in the imposition of Western style liberal systems that were based on extreme antisocial individualism and, for that reason unfit for collectivity based settings, as the persistent tribal wars in Africa dramatically prove.

These eight discursive abolitions, four alienating appropriations and seven alterations of landscapes suppressed our essential internal life processes, truncated our own evolution, interrupted our history, alienated us from our own assets and environment, overwrote our culture, and undermined the creative force of the internal social dynamism. However – and this is the cornerstone of the project for the future – unless a society is completely eradicated, its own project cannot be extinguished.

In the last half millennium, societies that have risen in the Americas under conditions of domination were the unintended, undesired and unwanted complication of a business that was set up from outside for the sole purpose of economic gain. What was established as a profitable plantation for the purpose of accumulating wealth for the metropolis soon got life of its own and, with time, derailed into a society. Historically, society in the Americas is the collateral damage of colonial

exploitation. It was an effect, though, that would fiercely fire back. It could not be contained and, eventually, it would become so powerful as to swallow colonialism altogether. They started a plantation and got stuck in a society. The Caribbean society was born against the currents and the tides. That has been the true genesis of the Americas in the last half millennium.

This historical process of abolition of the life world of the other, appropriation of her essential assets, and the panoramic alteration of his landscapes for the sole purpose of exploitation all raise the same question: To what extent there was a process of development in operation? The answer is given by the new development-envelopment paradigm, a most powerful tool to analyze and understand human history and its future options.

You can provide the mango seed with water, sun, fertile soil and protection to let it grow into a strong mango tree, but it will never become an apple tree. The implication of this self-evident truth is far reaching. Development cannot be donated, transferred or imposed; it can only be triggered, encouraged, and stimulated. Development is always from within. What was labelled as development in the last 60 years was not development but its exact opposite, envelopment, the incorporation in an alien destiny and the annexation of life spheres by insertion in another destiny. It was a process of envelopment, of wrapping up and cover as with an envelope, envelopment.

That explains why all development theories and paradigms of the last fifty years failed, without exception. They were not development theories but envelopment theories. The historical failure of all of them was to pursue progress by a mechanical transfer, implantation and imitation of achievements and devices from elsewhere. Centuries of persistent crises, critical poverty, political and social instability and violent confrontations, with an extremely high social and human cost, have irrefutably corroborated that development is not a commodity that can travel the oceans. It is a process from within that one can trigger, support and sustain, benefitting from devices from elsewhere that can be seasoned for proper use, but one can never donate development by transfer, not even as a generous gift. The correct definition of development is, therefore, the mobilization of the own potentialities in interactive response to nature, habitat, resources and history to realize a project of one's own.

Any seed, any embryo will tell you exactly the same story that development is from within. You can only grow out of your own genes; never out of the genetic codes of another, not as an organism, not as a society. Strictly speaking, you cannot grow a plant; a plant grows itself.

What was labeled in fifty years of development theories as 'development' was 'envelopment', a paternalist process to incorporate the other, to enclose and wrap up

by envelopment. Transfer and mimicry of devices were taken as the prime agents of progress, in an attempt to clone oneself in other societies, instead of mobilizing their own potentialities and inner forces. The unmasking of the false development discourse led to a new promising explanatory model, the development-envelopment paradigm, with development as self-realization and its negation, envelopment, as the incorporation in an alien project. It offers a powerful tool to reinterpret our history and design our own project for the future.

This brings us back at the theme of this presentation “Development and Society” and the core statement that “In the Americas, society was not born out of development.” We may now add: Envelopment from Europe shaped the nature of society in the New World. The West cloned itself in the rest of the world under the axiomatic tenet that what is good for the West is best for the rest. The global mission of the West was not to impart but to collect. Convincing historical proof is found in the extremely high correlation between the priority to colonize a destiny and the resources and wealth of the new lands. It was not precisely the poorest destinies that might be regarded as most in need of ‘civilization’, which were the first to be colonized. In reality, the project of the West was not a matter of civilizing the other, but of domesticating the savage by detachment from all that was dear to her, in order to mold her into a malleable instrumental asset for exploitation and capital accumulation in the West. That is the true demystified historical content of the still ongoing globalization of the local experience of the West that was falsely depicted as ‘civilization’. Gandhi already demystified that myth in the previous century, when asked what he thought about Western civilization, with the compassionate answer: “It would be a good idea.”

Envelopment belongs to control and domination from outside. Development is the universal force of self-realization based on the inner force and the inner clock. In nature, as well as in history, there is a cosmic desire to survive, to grow, to flourish, to bear fruit and to defeat death by reproduction. That force is what is called development. The history of the Americas and the Caribbean should be understood as the clash between two opposing processes: envelopment, a modelling from outside, and development, commanded by the inner clock; in other words, a clash between forces of subjugation and imitation versus forces of creation and self-realization.

The development-envelopment paradigm goes beyond the mechanical opposition of the internal and external. In evolution and social processes, the external cannot be opposed to the internal, because the moment an external element is incorporated, it has already become an internal factor. It is a law of evolution that life always sprouts from interaction between the internal and external. It's more, any process of

envelopment is immediately responded by development in a reaction that goes beyond the dialectical relation of thesis and antithesis, both disappearing in a synthesis. Development as the everlasting response to envelopment, will never disappear. The most prominent image of this responsive relation of development to envelopment is found in the scar, as the healing process to cure the past, in order to set the stage for inaugurating new futures. Development is the natural cosmic response in a future oriented process. That is the real proof that history is on our side.

We now have a powerful tool, the development-envelopment paradigm, to rewrite our history, understand our own reality and draw the correct lessons from the traumas of the past, in order to design our project for the future. Now it becomes clear why all 'development' theories failed, because they were not development theories but envelopment theories, whether conceptualized around evangelization, civilization, modernization, westernization, industrialization, globalization, consecutive historical stages, dependency, peripheralization, world systems or sustainable status quos. In addition to the abuse of the concept 'development', many other concepts need to be unmasked in images and discourses meant to tell a tale in a fictive narration to justify the untenable.

'Nation state' is such an erroneous social science concept without any analytical value to understand the society in the Americas. In the West the state was born out of nation-like entities, exactly the opposite of what took place in the Americas, where the existing nation was destroyed, in order to impose the colonial state as a structure of domination and governance. In Europe the nation preceded the state, in the Americas the state preceded the nation. What we have, therefore, in our hemisphere are not 'nation states', but 'state nations'. A nation was destroyed to install a state without a nation. That provoked a reaction in the form of a developmental process that was subversive to colonialism, in an desperate intent to create an own nation-like structure assembled with the quilt of motley implants. That was the genesis of society in the Americas in a process of inventing a nation to be able to cope with the future. The full library of literature on nation states in our societies should, thus, be questioned, and the bulk of it should be readily discarded as imitative igloo building in the tropics.

This unfortunate imitation of the western model of nation state bore the seeds of the biggest dramas in the decolonisation process, infested with postcolonial traumas, violent conflicts and civil wars. The dilemma was that the modern state should subdue the nation, but a destroyed nation eliminates the nation state. The solution of decolonization was to castrate culture into folklore, into invariant sterile national symbols, required by the state to homogenise and forge identity and unity.

Folklorisation provided the response to establish the modern state in trailer societies by suppressing the contradiction between culture and modernisation, while co-opting traditional culture and power in the realm of the lifeless symbolic patrimony of the state.

From the viewpoint of the development-envelopment paradigm, education is a critical device for the mobilization of potentialities. Unless 'to educate' is assisted self-education, it forms part of a paternalistic transfer of knowledge and skills against which Paulo Freire warned, when discussing the banking concept of deposited knowledge. To educate is to provide useful knowledge and tools to set in motion existing talents. One should never underestimate the talents hidden in the seed to become a grown up tree that can produce seeds, on its turn. That is where education for competencies should be located. Education is a process of mobilization of potentialities and of setting in motion hidden forces that are anxious to explode.

Human societies cannot survive without physical and social survival, which demand a process of biological and cultural reproduction. Education forms part of the cultural reproduction of society to secure survival in an adaptive process to the demands of environment, and to guarantee stability and continuity through the institutionalization of forms of peaceful coexistence. But culture, as a response to nature, is not static but the dynamic answer to challenges posed by contextual circumstances. For that reason, education cannot be reduced to the transfer of tradition and heritage and to a mere device to reproduce society, definitely not when existing society is unjust and unsustainable as ours that is heading for multiple disaster. The question "to educate for what" becomes, for that reason, a preeminent one.

Should we educate for a capitalist society that is contemptuous of the sacred values of equality and justice and that can comfortably coexist without remorse with widespread famine and critical poverty of most? Should we educate for a communist society that is contemptuous of freedom and paralyzes self-realization of the individual and his creative response? A society where egoism is the highest of virtues and competition is taken for the driving force of social evolution, while solidarity is seen as contrary to evolution and nature, can never be the existential basis of no species in evolution; not of ants, elephants or dolphins, not of human beings. In nature if you do not participate, you die. Development, therefore, demands a totemic respect for democracy, where everyone can raise his voice to speak his thoughts in the cadence and intonation of his own voice. A critical ethical principle of education is, therefore, to initiate the new breed into social life without surrendering the potentialities and talents of humans on the altar of ideology nor sacrificing their creative force on the tabernacle of the market.

Transfer of knowledge can be a valuable complement, but from the focus of development in itself it is not yet education, as Paolo Freire proves with his life work. When the objective of education is to mold and dominate minds, education is part of envelopment. It only becomes development when committed to mobilizing own potentialities by focusing on energizing talents and acquiring competencies.

The reverse side of the story, seen from the perspective of the trailer society, has already been told by such distant dwellers as Enrique Dussel in Latin America with his philosophy of liberation, by Samir Amin in Africa who revealed the mythical basis of Eurocentrism, by Susantha Goonatilake in Sri Lanka who mapped the systematic abortion of the intellectual creativity and tradition outside the West, by Paolo Freire in Brazil who could locate education beyond its instrumentality to reproduce the unjust society, by Leonardo Boff who pointed from the sphere of liberation theology to the distortion of sacred books to justify a devastating anthropocentric world view, by Lloyd Best in the Anglophone Caribbean who stressed how the dynamism of the plantation was not within but abroad, and by Frantz Fanon in the francophone Caribbean, who pointed to the deep-rooted alienation by colonial imprint. The story has been told in a piecemeal way, and now a more comprehensive understanding of the genesis or our fate can provide the roads for development to shape the future of our liking and aspirations.

Three factors are accountable for social evolution and human history. The urge to survive and social forces in society are prime actors that are always a given, but a third factor, awareness, is the critical one to open our capacity to change the world and reset the course of history. Precisely around this vital factor an emasculating myth has been weaved by Western discourse that processes of awareness always take extremely long, often generations. If change in awareness is impossible on short notice, then, by inference, any structural social and political change becomes utopian. Fortunately, the history of the Caribbean offers a valuable episode that demystifies this defeatist tenet.

Inspired by the Last Supper, a devout planter in colonial Cuba decided to line up his slaves and wash their feet during the Eastern tide, offering them a banquet in addition. The slave rebellion that soon destroyed his plantation and killed his daughter has been recorded in Western historiography as the apex of ingratitude. Perplex slaves conveyed to each other with their glance that the planter who was washing their feet below was a willful tyrant, who had to admit the truth that the slaves were his equal in the fear of his own God. An awareness that centuries of slavery and hardships were unable to achieve, was completed in a span of minutes. Here, history dramatically shows that one can only dominate people by controlling their mind and thought, but that consciousness can be at the corner. In a simple and

transparent description 'awareness' can now be defined as "to recognize an alternative".²

'Development', 'creation', 'culture' and 'cultivation' all belong to the same dimension, and we may now add to it 'awareness'. These are almost synonyms that were turned into a confusing falsified amalgam of enveloping designs. A 'society' that binds us together beyond the model of competing atomistic individuals who see solidarity as alien to nature, will not be found in the nostalgia of the past but in the shaping of the future by willful actions. The society that we got by foreign command was, primarily, the product of envelopment, but the society that we are already building in the meantime, against the currents and the tide, was the work of development. Development, as the mobilization of our own potentialities, constitutes the only option to build the society of the future. Nostalgia always take the contrary road to progress, creation and self-realization.

Development is birth, envelopment is abortion. It is not difficult to decide on which side the creative force of history lies, a force that eventually may turn out to be the only road for salvation of a species in danger under most peculiar circumstances. For the first time in known evolution, long before nature demands it, a species is threatened by extinction by collective suicide on a planet that is still willing to host its presence. Not all is lost, for still some quota of hope lies buried in the poetic tone of the words of Rabindranath Tagore: "Every child comes with the promise that God is not yet discouraged of man." But to live and see that this becomes reality, swift action is required by an awakened species, not in the first place by looking at the neighbour. The magic that is needed has just been spelt out; it is called 'development'. It gives some hope that none of today's dwellers of the earth will be the last woman or the final man.

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² For a more elaborate statement, see on www.crscenter.com Glenn Sankatsing, People's Vote Compatible with People's Fate. A Democratic Alternative to Liberal Democracy. In: *Political Democracy, Social Democracy and The Market in the Caribbean*. Edited by Jack Menke. Paramaribo, Democracy Unit, Faculty of Social Sciences, Anton De Kom University of Suriname, 2004.