



ACTION IS THE BEST PREDICTION

Moral authority of vulnerable states

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Abstract

In the Caribbean, we cannot stop the misconduct of irresponsible global actors who agitate the winds beyond their natural cycles and push the sea over our shores, but now, we should refuse to leave our destiny in the hands of those for whom nature’s only beauty is its monetary value. Humanity is treading on its earlier footprints before nature has had time to erase them. That undermines sustainability, the backbone of continuity, survival and development, which goes beyond the pleonasm of sustainable development invented by the dominant system in order to maintain its predatory economy rather than a sustainable ecology. Forced to live from reconstruction to reconstruction, the Caribbean has the moral authority to speak out and take command of our destiny along with other vulnerable states, in a fusion of local and global action.

1. The Caribbean in a wider world

The Caribbean, our home, is a confluence of extreme beauty and extreme danger. Seasoned with this tension, our ancestors have taught us to make the Sea of the Antilles the wonderful living space we have today, despite the strong winds that threaten us from time to time. Our ancestor's responses to nature's whims became inadequate when man-made disasters began to shake the winds beyond their natural cycles. Our region, as Antiguan and Barbudans know, has reason to fear being caught in an endless loop from reconstruction to reconstruction. As vulnerable states suffering the consequences of the irresponsible acts of others, we may not be powerful enough to assert our rights, but we have the moral authority to speak and demand to be heard.

As victims of the self-interest of those who harm our planet, we must understand that we have had no control over our future, since the beginning of the colonial enterprise, which reaps the fruits while pouring the costs into other communities. Beyond the economic, social and cultural domination that decolonization has called into question, today we suffer from the ecological colonialism of global elites, whose reckless pursuit of economic benefits destroy our physical living space with impunity.

Global warming has become a global fever, a pathological expression of the exploitation of the Earth by an economic system that serves no human purpose. Humanity has disconnected from the logic of evolution and has gone astray. By degrading nature into an object of predatory exploitation, we destroy our life-giving environment like a parasite that kills its host plant. As the Latin American liberation philosopher Enrique Dussel pointed out: "We find ourselves in a historical moment, in which life is in mortal danger."¹

Nature warns us with presages to rectify, sometimes in the intonation of a final call that is difficult to misinterpret. But the selfish economic, political and military elites who have hijacked our spacecraft Earth for personal gain have imposed a predatory system whose main purpose is to process nature into bank accounts. True

¹ Fernando Gomez, Interview with Enrique Dussel. *Boundary 2*, 28 (1), Spring 2001

human needs, even the survival of our species, do not appear on their agenda. The only beauty of nature is its monetary value. For the megacorporations that run the world, the most interesting part of human beings is their wallet. The powerful states tell us to our faces that they are unwilling to pay the economic price for rectifying their destructive behavior. Our survival or extinction has no symbol in the equations of modern economics.

The big question is, what are we going to do about it? Either we accept an imminent catastrophe, or we join forces to regain control of our destiny on a habitable planet. This cannot be limited to efforts to save Antigua and Barbuda or the Caribbean, because no local response can tame the growing ferocity of hurricanes driven by global warming. It makes no sense to paint one's cabin in beautiful colors when the ship sinks. Our response must be simultaneously local and global.

How can we translate this formidable task into a practical response, if the ecological problem of Antigua and Barbuda is the problem of the Caribbean, of the Americas, of planet Earth, of humanity? When the survival of humanity is at stake, only a fusion of local and global action can work. The starting point, therefore, is to translate the awareness of our terrible conditions into a joint global initiative to rescue the future of humanity.

Preventing the extinction of Earth's most talented species is a task of cosmic proportions with many obstacles. The first problem is that many valuable concepts have historically been adulterated to legitimize domination. Bob Marley addresses this issue in his Redemption Song, sharing with us Marcus Garvey's call to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery.² But what is mental slavery and where does it come from?

The cultural critic Ziauddin Sardar of Pakistani origin gives us the clue. "The real power of the West is not located in its economic muscle and technological might. Rather, it resides in its power to define... The non-Western civilizations have simply to accept these definitions or be defined out of existence. To understand Eurocentrism, we thus have to deconstruct the definitional power of the

² Marcus Garvey, *The Work That Has Been Done*. Speech in Nova Scotia, October 1937. *Black Man Magazine*, 3 (10) (July), 1938.

West.”³ This power to define can abort transformative action by making dominated people perceive an evil as a virtue, which aborts their capacity for critical reflection.

2. Freedom and civilization

The Caribbean is full of scars from the wounds of civilization. One wonders if the civilizing mission also had some good elements. I want you to raise your hand if you disagree with the following statement. “The idea of freedom is a positive contribution of Western civilization.” If you do not agree, raise your hand. There are good reasons for those of you who disagree.

Freedom was compatible with three hundred years of slavery. On its untouchable western pedestal, freedom oversaw fifteen generations of hereditary slavery in the Caribbean. The deliverer of freedom was colonialism, its extreme negation. The struggle for freedom of the Haitian people was considered terrorism against France, the apex of civilization, which has gone through a revolution to establish the principles of freedom, equality and fraternity.

Let me check once again what you think. The idea of freedom is a positive contribution of Western civilization. Raise your hand if you do not agree with this. Those who now raise their hand have taken a step in the right direction, but we are not emancipated yet, because many other terms that we take for granted also find their origin in the power to define. Be warned, the dictionary is a dangerous book!

To understand our current misfortunes, we must know where we come from. This immediately points to the tension between freedom that empowers us from within and the civilizing mission that has formed us from abroad.

Only a barbarian can be civilized; otherwise, there is nothing to civilize. To civilize was to domesticate the Other in a servant for the purpose of economic gain. It is an extreme form of alienation that

³ Ziauddin Sardar, Development and the Locations of Eurocentrism. In: Ronaldo Munck and Denis O’Hearn (eds.), *Critical Development Theory. Contributions to a New Paradigm*. New York, Zed Books, 1999, p. 44

reminds us of the domestication of a wolf-like creature in a servile dog. The civilizing mission was to clone the West into the rest, a successful mission, for that matter. The history of the last 500 years was the globalization of the local experience of the West, which has turned communities all over the world into remote-controlled trailer societies, dragged without steering wheel or engine like a trailer behind a truck. There is no global village; one village went global.

This sheds a different light on the claims of civilization. The global mission of the West was not to impart, but to collect. The protocol of the civilizing mission passes through nudity. The Amerindian woman was civilized only when she had taken off her colorful clothes and put on Barbie clothes. The expansionist process of conquest and domination needed a blank slate, for which the colonizer applied a matrix of five alienations:

- i. the appropriation of assets (habitat, resources and fellow humans);
- ii. the abolition of conditions (history, culture, language, spiritual life and context) - yes, universal models are context-free;
- iii. the abortion of processes (social evolution and internal dynamism);
- iv. the alteration of landscapes (infrastructural, economic, cultural and political landscape) and
- v. the annihilation of worldviews (communitarianism, cosmocentrism and ecological harmony). Indigenous culture was abolished or devitalized in folklore as the fossilized symbol of dead culture. Cultural genocide paved the way for the growth of a foreign implant.

All these tentacles make the colonial project complex. But even so, its essence can easily be summed up in just five words: The guest became the host. Someone walks through the front door and tells you: "You're my guest. Not only is your house mine, your lands are mine, your resources are mine, and so are you." The intruder's right to reshape us was based on the mantra of Eurocentrism: What was good for the West is best for the rest.

The civilizing mission was marketed as a vocation to develop us. But if they really wanted us to reach their level of economic prosperity, they should have made their technology available to us. How could they compete with us on the world market with our wealth of

raw materials and cheap labor, if we had their technology? The bottom line is that the development of others is not consistent with capitalism driven by competition and greed. What then has been the era of development that still haunts us today?

3. Development and evolution

Development has mesmerized the world, but instead of tangible results, it has left a trail of devastation. All the development theories and paradigms of the last seventy years have failed with a terrible aftermath in poor countries.

You can give a mango seed sunlight, water and fertilizer to grow into a healthy mango tree, but it will never become an apple tree. This self-evident truth causes sleepless nights for development experts, because development cannot be brought, transferred or implanted from the outside, not even as a generous gift. Development is intrinsically from within. Strictly speaking, you can't grow potatoes; potatoes grow themselves. Development is the mobilization of inherent potentialities in interactive response to challenges posed by nature, habitat and history to realize a sustainable project with an internal locus of command.

The colonial and imperial project of the last half millennium was the opposite of development, it was envelopment, what is done with an envelope, a process of annexation, incorporation and molding from the outside. Envelopment is the paternalistic and disempowering control of an entity by an external place of command at the expense of its internal life processes and ongoing evolution. Development mobilizes the potentials in response to context, while envelopment alienates through demobilization.

However, development and envelopment do not interact as a simple dichotomy, because any act of envelopment triggers new development. If you prune a tree, it will produce several new shoots. A scar is not a wound but the victory over the injury. Social evolution and history are driven by what can be called development-envelopment dynamics.

The dance of limbo did not arise in the Caribbean, nor did it come from Africa. Limbo was born on slave ships, where space was

small and chains short. The joy of limbo was created by people on their way to centuries of slavery. This is the force of development overwhelming envelopment. A dominant system can oppress people to the brink of death and deprive them of the tools to survive, but life and culture always find a way.

This powerful concept of development-envelopment dynamics was important in the difficult task to identify the driving force of evolution, which Charles Darwin had mistakenly called natural selection. A year after his masterpiece on the origin of species, Darwin himself questioned this term based on mere probability.⁴ Let me quote from the letter Darwin wrote to a colleague. “Talking of ‘Natural Selection’, if I had to commence de novo [all anew], I would have used ‘natural preservation’ ”.⁵ This is a different story.

Through ideas about the preservation of life, such as Arthur Schopenhauer’s ‘will to live’, Albert Schweitzer ‘reverence for life’ and Hans Jonas ‘imperative of responsibility for life’, the new understanding of development could be directly connected to evolution. In nature and history, there is a cosmic impulse to survive, grow, blossom, bear fruit and defeat death by reproduction. Natural selection plays its part, but the driving force of evolution is that life seeks more life. This is also what drives development.

This new analytical framework explains why the era of development became such a terrible failure. So-called development models did not improve our ability to mobilize our potential. They were all models of envelopment to incorporate us into another’s project. But isn’t sustainable development the exception?

Sustainable development is one of the most revealing examples of the power to define. Unsustainable development is a contradiction, since unsustainability means discontinuity, crisis, collapse and extinction, which are the negation of development. Development is sustainable by definition; otherwise, it is not development. The conclusion is that sustainable development is a pure pleonasm, which postulates repetition as innovation and redundancy as novelty.

⁴ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, 1859

⁵Letter of Charles Darwin to Charles Lyell of September 28, 1860, <http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/>, Darwin Correspondence Project

Think of participatory democracy, as if non-participatory democracy were an option.

The trigger for launching sustainable development in the 1980s was not sustainable ecology but sustainable economy. The concern was not the wellbeing of nature, which had been the victim of devastation in the search for wealth for centuries. The alarm only sounded, when the reckless exploitation of nature threatened the continuity of the profit-generating system. Sustainable development was not about greening the planet, but about greening greed. Clean energy for a dirty system makes no sense. Sustainable development is neither development nor is it sustainable. It is sustainable envelopment to ensure the continued exploitation of nature to sustain a cancerous growth, which is an invitation to ecological collapse.

The oldest and best statement on sustainability is in the Book of Genesis, chapter 2, verse 15. "And the Lord God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and to keep it." Today, we see exactly the opposite of this mandate to benefit from cultivating the land while we take care of it. Humanity has been tampering dangerously with the exceptional conditions that made life on Earth possible.⁶

But damage to nature is only one of the consequences of the three deadly sins responsible for our misfortunes, which are power, greed and fame, which led to a fourfold domination. The domination of nature is the cause of an imminent eco-cataclysm. The domination of human beings brought devastating colonial and imperial adventures. The domination of culture provoked irreconcilable fundamentalisms, each praying to God to kill the God of the other. The domination of the mind led to mental slavery. As a result, nature has become a legitimate object of predatory exploitation, war has become the supreme arbiter for resolving conflicts and fundamentalism has become the violent defender of God, as if the divine were not powerful enough and needed mortals as bodyguards.

The root of our existential problems is anthropocentrism, the predatory ideology that places the human being at the center of the Universe, asserting that the purpose of nature is to serve humanity.

⁶ Glenn Sankatsing, *Quest to Rescue Our Future*. Amsterdam, Rescue Our Future Foundation, 2016, www.rescueourfuture.org

“We like to imagine that man is nature’s goal”.⁷

What is unsustainable is not development, but humanity itself, which has gone astray. Our ecological footprint is so large that we are stepping on our previous footprints before nature has had time to eliminate their harmful impact.

Either we turn a blind eye to the current predatory system, or we replace the term ‘sustainable development’ with ‘sustainable humanity’, which is a condition for survival. The elimination of sustainable development from our vocabulary causes a tectonic shift, given the more than 75 million websites that mention it on the Internet and the thousands of institutions and university chairs on sustainable development. We must replace the Sustainable Development Goals with the Sustainable Humanity Goals, which requires a metamorphosis of the current system that endangers our permanence on Earth, because an anthropocentric worldview must give way to a cosmocentric worldview. There is no other way to live and prosper than in harmony with nature.

4. Action to rescue our future

Let us go back to the Caribbean Sea, which has become an even fiercer cauldron as we speak, because global warming does not wait. Regardless of the ecological measures we take, there is no Caribbean solution to a global problem.

The era of naïve belief in dialogue with the devil is over. The ultimate answer of powerful states and corporate capital, even at world summits organized to curb climate change, is that they will not sacrifice their predatory economic system for the survival of humanity. We have no choice but to join forces with other vulnerable states and the many positive actors in the world to reverse the fatal trend.

Are you ready for revolution? If so, I must cool you down. The idea that you have to destroy first before you can build has proved

⁷ Pedrag Cicovacki (ed.), *Albert Schweizer's Ethical Vision. A Sourcebook*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, Chapter 10 The Ethics of Reverence for Life. Originally published in *Christendom*, 1 (2), 1936

wrong in history. Instead of wasting time fighting evil, we must nurture the good that can overrun evil. Instead of fighting wild weeds, plant the tree that will deprive them of sunlight and water. Evolution is the best revolution. How should we translate this into action?

The victims of the predatory system have the moral authority to speak out first and act to rescue the future of humanity. To maintain the dominant system, the economic, political, military and technological powers want us to be pragmatic and opt for the lesser evil. We must refuse to do so. A pragmatic slave is an eternal slave. Pragmatism enabled centuries of slavery in the Caribbean. We must reject a system in which we lose by the rules of the game, even before the game begins. To choose for a lesser evil that does not offer a survival option is to postpone execution. The coldest place in hell is not an acceptable option.

Today's dominant system is structurally flawed and cannot offer an alternative from within. It has co-opted all potential spaces for structural transformation, including politics, religion, science, civil society and the media. The great transformation needed to rescue our future requires an extrasystemic path. The social force that can embark on this task is what we can call the moral reserves of humanity, you and me, the millions seeking a better world, most of humanity who are the victims of a predatory system.

An encouraging example of extrasystemic action is the youth leaving the school that educate them for a future that may never come. We must bring together in a Rescue Our Future Movement the many communities, groups, social organizations, institutions, activists and critical thinkers, alarmed by the prospect of the disruption of humanity's stay on Earth. A pluralistic, democratic, equality-prone, development-supportive initiative should merge the local and global scene in a future-oriented response based on a communitarian and eco-friendly development route.

The Caribbean and other vulnerable societies can host this gathering to overcome the current existential dangers. A prerequisite for this is cosmopolitanism, which is the opposite of the myopia of nationalism. Addressing the pitfalls of nationalism gives a critical look at the asymmetric relation between Antigua and Barbuda, because of insularism, which is one of the big concerns of this conference. Insularism is a special case of nationalism.

The term nationalism is based on linguistic usurpation. 'National' has its etymological roots in 'nation' but refers to the state.⁸ The terms 'national liberation' and 'international' do not refer to nation but to state, which are not the same. The state is a power structure with a sovereign government that rules over the people and controls a given territory. Nation derives from *natus* in Latin and means 'to be born'. It is a group of people with a shared culture and a common ancestry with a spirit of belonging. There are not more than 200 states but more than 2000 nations in the world.

For indigenous peoples, nationalism and nation building continue traditional colonialism with the institutional suppression of nations and their culture through a strategy of homogenization and unification of all within the state. When indigenous lands are needed for national development projects to exploit natural resources, the state devours indigenous nations. Similarly, in the spirit of nationalism and national unity large islands can devour smaller ones. In contrast, the most notable attempt in the world to overcome nationalism as a modern form of colonialism is the plurinational state declared constitutionally in Bolivia, which prevents that unity overwhelms diversity.

Mutually beneficial cooperation for a common cause can go hand in hand with respect for the culture, tradition and worldview of the community and its development. Love for our family, group, tribe and nation go hand in hand with the desire to survive and thrive as a species born of common ancestors. Nationalism leads to internal colonialism and external polarization with confrontations and wars within one state or with other states.

In the spirit of harmonizing the local and the global in a respectful compromise, we need a cosmopolitan approach that transcends nationalism and its manifestation in insularism, if we want to achieve a better world, since there is no local solution to global problems.

Today, humanity is not at a crossroads, not even at a fork in the road, but we have reached the end of the road and are standing on the edge that separates survival from extinction. Fortunately, evolution is on our side with its driving force of life always looking for

⁸ See Rodrigo Borja, *Enciclopedia Política*. México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997

more life. When faced with death or extinction, all organisms and species become creative, but no sacrifice should be too great when our survival is at stake. Better a stone age than no age!

The Caribbean's vulnerability to today's existential threats urges our region to be the first to respond. Those who have the most to lose in an impending disaster are the ones who can most benefit from a viable solution. With the moral authority of vulnerable states suffering disasters caused by others, the Caribbean can be at the forefront of mobilizing the moral reserves of humanity as critical agents in the quest to rescue our future.

Instead of sleepwalking into extinction, we must rise to take control of our destiny. With the power to define in our own hands, we can emancipate ourselves from mental slavery with the moral authority to speak to the world about the precarious condition of humanity. We must begin with a critical reflection on our potential, for which the Caribbean is blessed with a long intellectual tradition.

Let me conclude by dedicating these reflections to one of these icons of Caribbean thought, who has been a source of inspiration since I met him in Santo Domingo in 1990. At a conference breakfast, I told him that social science disciplines did not have the right to exist and that they had to be banned from all scientific premises in order to make room for the extradisciplinary approach.⁹ As I was preparing for his angry reaction, Lloyd Best became agitated when he replied: "That's what we've always been looking for in the New World Group!" I did not have to explain that extradisciplinarity¹⁰ puts an end to the inverted logic that the anatomy of the Academy is the anatomy of society, the bias that society is structured in the same way as university corridors. It was the beginning of long dialogues on development and prospects for the Caribbean, often at his home in Tunapuna, Trinidad.

Half a century ago, addressing the age-old academic question that had troubled so many Western minds about how to connect

⁹ Glenn Sankatsing, Social science as victim of its own disciplines. In: Christine Barrow and Rhoda Reddock (eds.), *Caribbean Sociology: Introductory Readings*. Kingston, Jamaica, Ian Randle Publishers, 2001 (orig. 1995 in Spanish)

¹⁰ First proposed in Glenn Sankatsing, *Caribbean Social Science: An Assessment*. Caracas, Unesco, 1989.

critical reflection and transformative practice, Lloyd Best gave the brilliant answer: “Thought is the action for us.”¹¹ This should resonate in our joint quest to rescue our future. What matters most is not what we say, but what we do with the outcome of critical reflection. Action is the best prediction.

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¹¹ Lloyd Best, Independent thought and Caribbean freedom. In: Selwyn Ryan (ed.), *Independent Thought and Caribbean Freedom. Essays in Honour of Lloyd Best*. Trinidad, Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (University of the West Indies), 2003 (orig. 1967)