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Development Studies and the Oikos Perspective

Benjamin T. Tolosa, Jr.



This article seeks to contribute to the search for a distinctive "Oikos of Community and Ecology Perspective" by providing an overview of the main theoretical debates in Development Studies. "Development Studies" here is understood in the narrow sense of the social science "subdiscipline" that emerged to grapple with the phenomenon of the "new nations" and the problem of "underdevelopment" after the Second World War. For purposes of simplification, these diverse and complex debates shall be classified under two broad theoretical traditions: "Liberal" and "Marxist." Under the general "Liberal" heading shall fall the debate between Development Economics and neoclassical Economics. The latter heading shall include the debate between classical Marxism and neo-Marxism.

It is quite apparent that the emerging "Oikos Perspective" tends towards neither of these two main theoretical traditions in the development debate. Its analysis is more informed by what social scientists have called variously the "populist," "normative," "Counterpoint" or "living economics" tradition in development theory which has origins quite distinct from either Liberalism or Marxism (e.g., see Hettne 1990; Kitching 1989; Ekins and Max-Neef 1992). In order to appreciate more fully where the Oikos position is implicitly coming from and thus to recognize its possible strengths and weaknesses as an analytical framework, this tradition has to be viewed more closely.

At the same time, it shall also be noted that some of the themes of the "third tradition" find echoes in both the "Liberal" and "Marxist" debates. More particularly, it shall be pointed out that much recent Marxist and "structuralist" analyses have been open to insights such as those which emphasize "decentralization," "participation," "community" and "ecology" concepts which have always been at the heart of the populist vocabulary. Similarly, it can be asked to what extent the populist vision is sufficient both as theory and policy and

whether it can be enriched by insights coming from both the Liberal and Marxist traditions.

Perhaps, ultimately, a crucial question that must be posed is whether the "Oikos Perspective" necessarily implies the adoption of populism or environmentalism as its main theoretical standpoint or whether the concern for "community" and "ecology" can be also consistent with the continued use of Liberal (though certainly not neoliberal) or Marxist (albeit more revisionist) standpoints, but enriched by Counterpoint themes.

The "Third World" and Development Studies

As noted earlier, the term "Development Studies" is used here in the strict sense of that social science "subdiscipline" which emerged in the 1950s-60s—a period of widespread decolonization in the world, leading to the emergence of the so-called "Third World." It was argued that there was a need for a Development Studies precisely because the situation in the Third World was distinctive. Mainstream social science, at least as it had evolved then, could not effectively explain what was taking place in this category of nations. There was therefore a need for a new perspective which could understand the Third World in its uniqueness.

Some observers have traced the origins of the term "Third World" to the nonaligned movement and thus to the attempt to chart a "third way" between the United States and the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War (see Toye 1987). Others have argued that the concept could also be taken in a derogatory sense to mean "third class" or "third rate." But the fact is that the term has evolved through the years to assert national independence and self-determination particularly vis-a-vis the "First World." This nationalist usage of the concept includes the emphasis on collective uniqueness. Indeed, "Third World" is inseparable from the "politics and psychology of decolonization" (Toye 1987). It was this shared experience which united almost all these countries and which accounted for their distinctiveness.

The concept, however, has become more problematic in recent years. How does one define a "typical Third World country" in the face of diversity: rapidly growing East and Southeast Asian economies; heavily indebted Latin American countries (which may well include the Philippines); and drought-stricken African countries (see Streeten 1992; Hettne 1990; Toye 1987). This imbalance in "Third World" development, coupled with the perceived failure of "statist"

solutions with which "developers" have been associated, has contributed much to the questioning not only of the "Third World" as a term but also of Development Studies itself as distinct field of inquiry. A number of social scientists have spoken about the crisis, "decline" or sometimes, even the "death" of the subdiscipline (Seers 1979; Hirschman 1981; Hettne 1990; see also Leeson 1988). Development Studies is in a period of genuine self-criticism and rethinking of basic assumptions and approaches. There is a real openness to alternative perspectives and new syntheses.

Its contemporary problems, notwithstanding, Development Studies as a distinct field in the social sciences may be presented schematically under two broad traditions: "Liberal" and "Marxist."

Development Economics and Neoclassical Economics

One line of debate which may be broadly classified under the "Liberal" heading is centered around the emergence of a separate "Development Economics" in the 1950s-60s. This in itself is a diverse field which may be difficult to pin down. But if one were to search for a defining characteristic, one could argue that within the economics discipline, Development Economics was very much associated with the rejection of the so-called "monoeconomics claim," i.e., that economic theory was universal and thus could explain reality whether it be in the advanced or backward countries (Hirschman 1981).

Development Economics proposed to deal with a historically and structurally distinct "Third World" as opposed to orthodox neoclassical and Keynesian Economics, both of which were perceived to have grown out of the experiences of the then advanced countries. Indeed a classic article in Development Economics was entitled "The Limitations of the Special Case" precisely to underline the fact that economic theory as it had evolved at that time, was a "special case economics"—developed out of the experience of the industrialized First World (Seers 1963). Thus it was necessary to formulate an economics for the "general case" of the largely agricultural and underdeveloped Third World.

Development Economics is also associated with "structuralism," which argues that economic processes cannot be left to market forces because there are structural and historical impediments to development. Unless corrected through systematic state intervention, this situation continually breeds inequalities—both domestic and international.

The emergence of this new perspective within Economics was facilitated in no small measure by an earlier rejection of dominant economic theory (Hirschman 1981). The rejection of the principle of *laissez faire* associated with classical and neoclassical Economics was in fact inherited by Development Economics from Keynesianism. The belief that the state has a beneficial and necessary role to play in the economy, not only in short-run economic stabilization but also in the long-run promotion of economic growth is obviously Keynesian-inspired. That is why it has been observed that many of the early Development Economists were themselves "Keynesian" in training and orientation (Leeson 1988). This is not to say, however, that these economists did not also criticize Keynesian Economics as inapplicable to Third World realities (e.g., Seers' famous critique of the limitations of the multiplier theory). But having been a child of the 1950s-60s, Development Economics was no doubt very much shaped by the spirit of the so-called "Keynesian Revolution."

Among the issues which have preoccupied Development Economics have been the problems of continuing underdevelopment, persistent poverty, inequality, unequal trade relations—the resolution of which would require no less than economic restructuring and surely substantial government intervention.

In the 1980s, the neoclassical perspective returned with a vengeance—which has been aptly termed the "counter-revolution" (see Toye 1987). All Keynesian-influenced theories have come under attack, including Development Economics, which has been described in the polemics as "dirigiste dogma" (Lal 1983; see also Bauer, 1981). A central issue of the debate was the role of the state in development, with the neoclassicists insisting on the "primacy of the market" in the development process. Moreover, the neoclassicists have reasserted the universality of economic theory (i.e., neoclassical theory).

The above-mentioned debate should therefore make us conscious of the need to be more specific when speaking of a "mainstream perspective" under the general label of "neoclassical Economics." We may be missing out on very crucial nuances and distinctions such as those between Development Economics/Structuralism and neoclassicism/neoliberalism.

Marxism and Neo-Marxism/Dependency Theory

A separate and quite different sort of "development debate" began in the mid-1970s between classical Marxists and neo-Marxists/

dependentistas on the nature and effect of imperialism and capitalist development in the periphery. Like the Development Economists, the neo-Marxists and the dependentistas of Latin America also rejected the "monoeconomics claim" and asserted the distinctiveness of the Third World, or to use their term, the "satellites" or "periphery." Neo-Marxists and dependency writers go beyond the structuralists by saying that underdevelopment is not simply the result of supply bottlenecks or declining terms of trade. The problem has to do with the larger capitalist system that emerged in the context of colonial and neocolonial history. Underdevelopment cannot be understood apart from the world capitalist system which created it. Frank's early and most radical work speaks of the "development of underdevelopment" (Frank 1966) in the sense of the First World or the "metropolis" actively "underdeveloping" the Third World or the "satellites" (Foster-Carter 1974).

A more intermediate concept is the notion of "associated dependent development" (Cardoso 1972; Cardoso and Falletto 1979). The existence of a global system is recognized and therefore should be central to analysis, but it does not necessarily produce stagnation or retrogression. In fact, the precise character of socioeconomic and political change in the periphery has to be understood in terms of the precise interaction of external and internal class forces (see Palma 1981)

Nevertheless, the basic assumption is that "peripheral capitalism" is still different from "capitalism in the center" and therefore advanced countries cannot be held up as models, whose characteristics can be transferred through a painless process of "diffusion" of "modern" technology, values and political systems into the periphery. This point was the neo-Marxists'/dependentistas' main argument with the modernization theories of the 1950s as exemplified by such writers as Rostow, Parsons and McClelland (see Frank 1969; Bernstein 1971).

Upon closer examination, however, it is apparent that the neo-Marxists were also critical of the basic classical Marxian notion of capitalism as historically progressive. Marx, of course, is famous for the idea that the industrialized countries only show to the less developed "the image of their own future." He believed that colonialism was the unwitting agent of capitalist development in the "Asiatic" countries. Capitalism and imperialism therefore, even if they are by definition exploitative in character, also contain the seeds for progressive social transformation.

Later Marxists, however, beginning with the Communist International of 1928, increasingly became identified with the anti-colonial

struggle. Moreover, neo-Marxists following the work of Paul Barn (1957), have insisted that capitalism itself, i.e., "monopoly capital" (which is associated with the imperialist era), is devoid of progressive characteristics. On the contrary, it was an agent of retrogression. Therefore what was needed was not further integration but a break with the world capitalist system.

Classical Marxists criticized the neo-Marxists precisely for failing to acknowledge the "brutal but progressive" nature of capitalism in the latter's emphasis on the negative effects of the world capitalist system. Taking the heaviest brunt of the attack was the work of Andre Gunder Frank. Bill Warren (1980) argued that neo-Marxists, by insisting that capitalism was creating underdevelopment or at most dependent development, were actually missing out on the very contradictions of capitalist development. Their "romantic anti-capitalism" was blinding them to the very conditions which could give rise to socialism. They had in effect become the agents of "nationalism" rather than of "socialism" (see also Bernstein 1979, 1982).

Keen observers have noted, however, that the far more sophisticated and indeed "classic" dependency work is not that of Frank but of Cardoso and Falletto which is more consistent with the classical Marxist tradition (Palma 1981). Moreover, Paul Cammack (1988) has pointed out that the Cardoso and Falletto work (which was written in Spanish in the mid-sixties but not published in English until 1979) anticipates by more than a decade the contemporary interest on the "state" and the "political" as opposed to an overemphasis on the "economic" which has been the tendency of much Marxist theorizing.

Politics, the State and Development

By the late 1970s, discussions in Development Studies began to center on the question of politics and the state. One reason for this focus was that early Development Economics simply took on the notion of the technocratic state from Keynesianism and did not question the possibility that the state could be inefficient and corrupt—precisely the main contention of the resurgent neoclassicists. Keynesianism, because of its policy prescriptive approach, did not question whether bureaucrats in the state structure were simply working for themselves and not for the abstract "public good" (see Leeson 1988).

In the Marxist tradition, analysts have noted an "impasse" of sorts resulting from what has been described as the "metatheoretical commitment" of Marxists (as exemplified by both Frank and Warren) to demonstrate the "necessity" of outcomes under capitalism (Booth 1985); or what some have termed as the "essentialization of the economic" (see Slater 1992, 292). While Frank and Warren may come to diametrically opposed conclusions about the effects of capitalism, both believed that these are necessary results of the "laws of motion" of capital either as a "world system" or a "mode of production." That is why there is a need to study more carefully the "sociopolitical" dimension, particularly the complex nature of politics and the state which possess "relative autonomy" from the economic system. Of course, as noted above, it has also been argued that certain versions of dependency theory, e.g. Cardoso's, never overlooked the issue of state autonomy (Cammack 1988).

Nevertheless, what is interesting is the seeming convergence of interest on the state among both Marxists and Liberals (in the case of the neoliberals, in order to demonstrate its utter failure). A non-Marxist "statist" tradition has also emerged in political science and political sociology with the explicit project of "bringing the state back in" (Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 1985).

The Counterpoint and the "Oikos Perspective"

When viewed in terms of these two main lines of debate in Development Studies, it is quite apparent that the main inspiration for the emerging "Oikos Perspective" comes from a different theoretical tradition—a "third alternative." The emphasis on "community" and "ecology" seems neither basically "Liberal" nor "Marxist." These concerns originate from a school of thought in the social sciences which one writer has called the "Counterpoint"—dating back to the period of the Industrial Revolution (Hettne 1990).

For all the differences between the two traditions of Marxism and Liberalism, both of them accepted the Industrial Revolution as historically progressive. For the Liberals, that revolution was associated with the emergence of the market economy and the promotion of individual freedom. While the early Marxists were critical of the exploitative nature of capitalism, they never questioned its historical progressivity in terms of the development of modes of production. Capitalism was far more productive and efficient than feudalism or

the "Asiatic mode of production." Socialism therefore was not a step backwards into the past but a step forward beyond capitalism.

Unlike both Liberalism and Marxism, the Counterpoint never reconciled itself with the assumptions and effects of the Industrial Revolution. It rejected the whole notion of growth as linear material progress. Industrialization and capitalist development in general brought about increasing depersonalization. The "community" was sacrificed in favor of both the "state" and the "market." There was a failure to see the inherent superiority of decentralized, people-managed enterprises. It is a tradition rooted in the *gemeinschaft* type of society as opposed to the *gesellschaft* model which dominated Western modernization (Hettne 1990, 155). Indeed, as Kitching (1989) notes, "populist" ideas emerged to confront the "threat" of industrialization and urbanization with:

an alternative 'vision' of development, concentrating on small-scale enterprise, on the retention of a peasant agriculture and of nonagricultural petty commodity production, and on a world of villages and small towns rather than large cities (98).

This school of thought, however, is more diverse than either Liberalism or Marxism. It is heir to various traditions ranging from conservative romanticism which stressed the negative aesthetic and ethical implications of social change; utopian socialism which reacted to large-scale industrialism and proposed the creation of alternative microsocieties; anarchism which rejected statism in its various manifestations and stressed the necessity and superiority of decentralized sociopolitical organizations; and populism and neopopulism which emphasized the need to pay attention to agriculture and rural society, and to build the alternative from the base of the peasantry rather than the proletariat (see Hettne 1990, 156–59).

The Catholic reaction both to Marxism and Liberalism also seems to fall within the Counterpoint. Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, for example, called for a third way between Liberalism and Marxism—pointing to the more paternalistic precapitalist structures (e.g. the guild system) as the more humane alternative.

Precisely because of its diffuse nature, this tradition has reemerged time and again in social thought. Gandhi's ideas on development may be cited as a prominent twentieth-century example. More recently, it has found popular contemporary expression in E.F. Schumacher's "small is beautiful" and Julius Nyerere's *ujamaa* model. Notions of

"participatory development" and "people empowerment" which are very popular among nongovernment organizations (NGOs) are imbued implicitly with such a perspective. As Kitching (1989) has observed:

... one is still struck by the extraordinary vitality and durability of the essential populist 'vision'—a world of equality, of small property, a minimally urbanized world—and by its capacity to manifest itself again and again in various situations, even though invested in somewhat different vocabulary and arguments (101–2).

But no doubt, the most visible manifestation and synthesis of the Counterpoint today is the "Green" movement with which many individuals and organizations all over the world have come to identify themselves. One such group is the international "Living Economy Network" whose analytical framework is clearly shaped by Counterpoint insights, as summarized by Paul Ekins and Manfred Max-Neef (1992):

... ecological economics and the concern with sustainability; ... an emphasis on development, including economic development, as a creative and participatory process; and ... a perception of the economy that recognizes the productive role of households and the voluntary sector, as well as of business and government. (xiii)

There is an obvious reaction to the logic of productionism associated with capitalism which has led to the destruction of the environment and thus to an "unsustainable" development process. There is also an explicit criticism of the positivism of "mainstream economics" which is believed to underpin such a capitalist strategy.

But socialist economies do not seem to have fared much better—a problem which is similarly traced to its intellectual underpinnings. Some Marxists, for example, have noted that Marxism has traditionally believed that socialism implies not only social control of the means of production but also presupposes technical control which involves developing to the fullest the "forces of production." This means that societies become more progressive the more human beings are able effectively to "master" nature. In other words, it is a perspective which suffers from a tendency towards the kind of productionism which fosters human "domination" of nature (see MacEwan 1990; Benton 1989, 1992; and Grundmann 1991).

In a very real sense, for the proponents of the Counterpoint, the more important ideological contradiction is not between Liberalism

and Marxism, but between ecologism and the mainstream (i.e., nonpopulist and nonecological) social sciences.

Ecodevelopment necessitates a development strategy which differs radically from conventional strategies with their universal elements: capital, labour, investment, etc. An ecodevelopment strategy, in contrast, consists of specific elements: a certain group of people, with certain cultural values, living in a certain region with a certain set of natural resources. The goal of an ecodevelopment strategy, then, is to improve that specific situation, not to bring about 'development' in terms of GNP or some other abstraction. (Hettne 1990, 188)

Indeed, when one reads representatives of this tradition, one gets the impression that they do not address Marxism (or for that matter structuralism) at all. The only real debate seems to be between mainstream "neo-classical economics" and the alternative "living economics" (see Ekins and Max-Neef 1992).

Counterpoint Themes in the Main Theoretical Traditions

Having noted the basic distinctions between Liberalism and Marxism on one side and the Counterpoint on the other, a closer examination of Development Economics and neo-Marxism would also reveal, however, that these perspectives have not altogether been blind to Counterpoint themes. For example, in the 1970s, many Development Economists began using such concepts as "growth with equity," "basic needs," "rural development," "the informal sector" and a "new international economic order" which appear to have populist roots (see Todaro 1977). The emphasis on the meaning of development as "humanization," rather than simply growth, is also a Counterpoint idea which has permeated even the mainstream development literature (see Seers 1972; Adelman 1975; Elliott 1971).

In the case of neo-Marxism, we noted earlier that their classical Marxist critics have suggested that there is an obvious normativism behind such concepts as "satellite development" or "dependent development" which point to the possibility and desirability of a "genuine" development which is nationalist, self-reliant and equitable. The critics have stressed that the primary inspiration for such notions of development and underdevelopment seems to be utopian socialism and populism, rather than Marxism (see Kitching 1989; Warren 1980

and Bernstein 1979, 1982). But whether "Marxist" or "un-Marxist," what is quite obvious about neo-Marxism is that much like the Green movement, it is an heir of the "New Left" and the "new social movements" that have stressed the issues of "self-determination," "environmentalism" and "feminism."

Moreover, the recent crisis in Development Economics arising out of the attacks of the neoclassical counter-revolution against statism, and likewise the impasse in Marxism brought about by its own theoretical weaknesses and the collapse of "actually-existing" socialist models, have led to much rethinking on questions of state and civil society, on culture and ethnicity, and on alternative forms of development and democratization which are more in tune with the concerns of the Counterpoint.

Transcending the Limitations of the Counterpoint

The preceding discussion raises the issue of a possible dialogue between the Counterpoint and the "mainstream" (both Liberal and Marxist). It also gives rise to the question of whether indeed the Counterpoint perspective can likewise be enriched by "mainstream" insights—particularly from certain aspects of Development Economics/Structuralism and Marxism.

In the search for a distinctive "Oikos Perspective," one cannot also be blind to the weaknesses of the populist tradition from which it derives its main theoretical inspiration. For example, Marx's own critique of utopianism—for all its "productionist" undertones—cannot simply be dismissed.

In rejecting Proudhonist and other 'petty bourgeois' or 'utopian' visions of socialism, Marx clearly believed that in some ways human societies could and must pass *through* a phase of industrialization and urbanization, of the large-scale concentration of people, forces of production (technology) and capital, in order to use the knowledge and productive power acquired in that process to create *afterwards* a smaller-scale, more democratic and less alienated world . . . Though [populist theories] draw attention to the desirability of going about industrialization in a manner which does not simply sacrifice millions of peasants either to 'market forces' or to some state-directed process of crash industrialization, *in themselves* they do not provide a coherent and practicable way to do it (Kitching 1989, 180).

While a self-managed, communitarian society may be an attractive vision indeed, there is the real question of how it can be brought about in the context of the prevailing global and domestic political-economic system and its concomitant power relations. Such is the focus of Marxist, neo-Marxist, and to a lesser extent, structuralist analyses. Despite its own contradictions and failures in practice, the Marxist tradition remains a sharp and compelling critique of the status quo.

Moreover, there is the question of the role of the state which has become a central concern of development theory and policy in recent years. The Counterpoint, given its origins, has had an underlying anti-statist bias at the heart of its theoretical framework. It has a tendency to see the state as inherently hierarchical and undemocratic.

The assumption seems to be that in a stateless, decentralized, democratic and humanly scaled society, people will have more control over their society and a greater sense of responsibility to each other, which should lead them to manage their environment and natural resources in a rational way (Yih 1990, 18).

In the contemporary era of neoclassical hegemony, some people may even get the impression of a tacit alliance between neoliberals and neopopulists against structuralists and Marxists on the question of the role of the state in development. Of course, from another perspective, the neopopulists with their emphasis on "community," also bring in an added dimension to the current "state-market" or "public-private" debate. Their entry into the discussion expands the notion of "private" to include communities, cooperatives and people's organizations—thus transforming the whole concept of "privatization" so dear to the neoliberals.

But at the same time, a purely communitarian perspective which discounts the need for systematic intervention within the state, not only to alter existing public policy, but also to transform the socio-political and administrative character of the state itself, is bound to fail in its objectives. Even assuming initial success at building alternative arrangements at the local level, in the end, these communities cannot be insulated from the conflicts and contradictions in the larger society and the international system. The issue of power—particularly of class power—is of critical importance and must be confronted directly (see Wallis 1992, 15).

The strength of the Counterpoint lies in its explicitly normative standpoint on what constitutes "genuine," "humanistic" and "sustainable" development. It awakens us to the need for a development

strategy that respects the "inner limits of the human person" and the "outer limits of nature" (Hettne 1990); development that is decentralized, participative, nonviolent and ecologically sound.

There is indeed much to be gained in the "reintegration into socialism of its utopian component" (Wallis 1992, 9). But pure ecologists and populists also have to recognize that they can benefit as well from structuralist and Marxist insights.

. . . Marxism's unequivocal position is that *ecology can't provide a specific vision of society or a program by itself*. In contrast, social ecologist . . . define their politics in terms of ecology and ecological criteria . . . A larger political analysis is needed in order to move toward a more rational ecological and social order. The corresponding program must embrace both the goal of ecological rationality and the more socially defined goals of equity and democracy. A Marxist perspective provides a crucial element of the larger political analysis with its critique of capitalism and specifically the theory of accumulation . . . It is necessary to be red as well as green (Yih 1990, 17; 24-25).

Conclusion

As part of a search for an "alternative perspective" on development, this article has sought to examine the main theoretical debates which have dominated that field in the social sciences which is specifically concerned with the question of development. Central to this essay is the attempt precisely to locate the emerging "Oikos Perspective" in Development Studies. It has been pointed out that the strong emphasis on the themes of "community" and "ecology" evident in the Oikos discussions reveals the underlying influence of the Counterpoint tradition—a perspective which is distinct from the two main traditions under which one could generally classify the theoretical and policy issues which have preoccupied social scientists in Development Studies. The Counterpoint is an old and persistent critique of the process of modernization and its intellectual underpinnings, dating back to the period of the Industrial Revolution. It is a perspective which has reemerged time and again in history to challenge "mainstream" ideas on social change—whether Liberal or Marxist.

It has also been argued, however, that there is much room for dialogue between the Counterpoint and the "mainstream"—or at least some elements of it. One could even say that such a dialogue has already been underway for some time as can be gleaned from certain aspects of both structuralist and neo-Marxist thought.

It has been the contention of this article that the weaknesses of the Counterpoint also recognized and confronted. While indeed it can provide a powerful critique of modernity and likewise present a very attractive vision of an alternative society which is truly humanistic, it also suffers from the failings which have always characterized utopian and populist tendencies.

The search for a distinctive "Oikos Perspective" calls for much openness and creativity. And while it is true that theoretical consistency and rigor should be demanded, the spirit of pluralism and dialogue must also pervade the process. For after all, that is what is most consistent with humanistic and sustainable development.

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