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ETHNOCIDE OR ETHNODEVELOPMENT: THE NEW CHALLENGE

The backlash of development

A major and as yet unresolved task in the development process is to achieve that people really do become the beneficiaries of capital investments, technological innovations and modernization in general. As a recent World Bank publication formulates it, the time has come for ,,putting people first". It has been known for several decades now that development projects, the introduction of a monetary economy in subsistence agricultural systems and other elements of modernization, may have harmful and negative effects on large masses of the population, particularly traditional communities and indigenous and tribal peoples. But development planners and practitioners have often preferred not to become too aware of these issues. These used to be dismissed as the ,,inevitable social costs" of development, and it was expected that their effects would be transitory and that the affected populations would soon become incorporated into the benefits of the modernization process and would enjoy higher and more desirable standards of living.

Alas, reality has been unkind to the modernizers. The harm that has been wreaked upon countless millions of people around the world by ,,modernization" and ,,development" has yet to be fully documented and digested. From desertification and deforestation, through pollution and intoxication, to pauperisation, marginalisation, social polarisation and dependency, the effects of so-called maldevelopment or perverse development probably add up to one of the major human tragedies of our time. To be sure, this is not what modernizers have intended, and there is no denying that numerous benefits to sundry populations have indeed occured. But then, as so many recent evaluations and post-hoc studies have shown, such benefits have much too often accured to only a small segment of the target population, to specific social classes or even subgroups within these classes. A frequently cited case in point is the ,,green revolution" and similar rural development schemes, which have only rarely made prosperous farmers out of poor peasants and have most often than not condemned the already poor to further and often harsher poverty. (See the studies carried out by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), under the direction of Andrew Pearse).

Internal colonialism and ethnocide

A particularly heavy burden has befallen numerous ethnic minorities as well as tribal and indigenous peoples in a large part of the world. As a result of conquest and colonization, they have generally come to occupy a position of clear-cut subordination and domination within the countries in which they live, a situation which may be defined as internal colonialism. In recent decades, after centuries of exploitation and marginalization, not only have many of them become the economic victims of all sorts of development schemes, but in many cases they have been physically destroyed as viable groups. Quite frequently their collective disappearance as identifiable communities is not simply a regrettable by-product of development, but actually the stated or implicit policy objective of the development planners. In contrast to the weaker social classes (peasant, artisans, workers in traditional manufactures, small traders, specialists in obsolete services, or simply members of communities in depressed areas) who suffer the backlash or the unintened consequences of development, in many cases ethnic groups are the victims of a deliberate strategy of destruction by the State or a country's dominant elites.

This process has been called cultural genocide or ethnocide, and it is a widespread phenomenon in the contemporary world.

Ethnocide entails two principal aspects; one is economic and the other is cultural. Economic ethnocide is imbedded in the theory and practice of development. It means that all pre-modern forms of economic organisation must necessarily disappear to make way for either private or multinational capitalism or state-planned socialism or mixes thereof. Cultural ethnocide (perhaps a tautology) means that all sub-national ethnic units must disappear to make way for the overarching nation-state, the Behemoth of our times. Development and nation-building have become the major economic and political ideologies of the last quarter century or more. Both of them, as traditionally expounded by statesmen and academics alike, have been ethnocidal in that they imply the destruction and/or disappearance of non-integrated, separate ethnic units. This is frequently carried out in the name of national unity and integration, progress and of course development.

Governments generally tend to deny that they commit ethnocide or the like. The concept, after all, has a rather distasteful implication. They usually affirm that their policies are intended to improve the situation of this or that distinct ethnic group, that their aim is simply to grant backward or traditional or marginal or primitive groups (the terms used may vary from region to region) the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. Sometimes, however, State policies are clear: minority ethnic groups must assimilate or intergrate for the good of the country, and of course for their own good. Examples abound in the North and the South, in the East and the West. Public opinion has been aroused in recent years about genocide of Amerindians in Guatemala and Paraguay (the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights has received complaints and published special reports on these cases, some of which have also been brought to the attention of the UN Commission of Human Rights). In Bangladesh, the Chittagong Hill Tribes' resistance to encroachment by outsiders has been violently repressed and in Indonesia the government's transmigration program from the overcrowded central to the less populated outer islands has brought enormous hardship to the original peasant populations. The struggle of the Australian Aborigines for their land rights has become a major political issue in that country, and

has also been brought to international attention in fora of the United Nations and elsewhere. In Namibia, the Bushmen have been driven off their lands, in Ethiopia the Eritreans fight for their independence, and in the Sudan the Christian populations of the South resist forced Islamization by the dominant Northerners. The Kurds in Western Asia have not ceased their struggle for an independent homeland and the Berbers in North Africa resist Arabization. In Western Europe, the best known case is that of the Basques, but it is by no means the only one. The Roma have been hounded by most European governments for centuries. In Eastern Europe, recent years have witnessed the percution of the Hungarian minority in Rumania and of the ethnic Turks in Bulgaria. Multi-national Yugoslavia has its share of ethnic problems with the Albanians of Kosovo, whereas in the Soviet Union, the plight of the Jews and of other minorities (Crimean Tatars) has been amply documented. In the United States, Chicanos and Native American Indians, as well as native Hawaiians and Inuit (territorial minorities, to be distinguished from later immigrant minorities) have suffered and resisted (to a certain extent) ethnocidal policies designed to hasten their assimilation into the dominant mold. And in Canada, only recently have Indian rights been considered as a political and constitutional issue.

The list could go on, for there is hardly a country in the world (not even monoracial Japan) in which there aren't one or several ethnic groups or ethnies which have been the victims of ethnocide. Not to mention hundreds, if not thousands, of distinct peoples who have simply disappeared definitely from the face of the earth during the centuries following the colonial expansion of Europe. Ethnocide may be defined, briefly, as the process whereby a cultural distinct people (usually termed an ethnie or an ethnic group) loses its identity due to policies designed to erode its land and resource base, the use of its language, its own social and political institutions as well as its traditions, art forms, religious practices and cultural values. When such policies are carried out systematically by governments (whatever the pretex: social progress, national unity, economic development, military security) then such governments are guilty of ethnocide. When the process occurs due to the more impersonal forces of economic development, cultural change and modernization, yet not guided by any specific government policy, it is still ethnocidal as to its effects but may be labeled, in sociological or anthropological terms, simply social change or acculturation.

This distinction betweem two forms of ethnocide does not lack importance even though the end result may be the same: the disappearance or significant diminution of the group. Governments, as was stated before, do not generally like to be accused of ethnocide; and when social change occurs „spontaneously", so to speak, in which an ethnie tends to disappear as such, it is of course better for everybody concerned to attribute this cultural fact to the „invisible hand" of history. Thus, nobody is to blame. But when governments are responsible for ethnocidal policies, and when such policies are carried out without the consent and the participation of the ethnies involved, then it is likely that the State incurs in specific violations of internationally recognized human rights, as shall be pointed out below.

Social, economic and cultural change are of course universal phenomena: no people ever remain static and unchangeable over any lenght of time. Intercultural influences and diffusion are also universal processes, which take place even when States attempt to eliminate them or maintain them at a strict minimum (eg. Japan before the Meiji Restoration, China between Liberation and the Four Modernizations, Iran under

Khomeini). These processes are fairly natural and should not be considered as ethnocide. The latter occurs only when due to such changes (whether consciously imposed or spontaneous) an ethnie loses the capacity to reproduce itself socially and biologically as an ethnic group and becomes unable to maintain its culture as a creative tool for the solution of collective problems and the satisfaction of its own primary material and spiritual needs. Thus there is a clear difference between social, cultural and economic change in which every human group in the modern world is caught up willynilly, and ethnocide.

I started out by saying that many economic development projects may be labeled as ethnocidal, even when ethnocide is not clearly their objective. If economic development is to serve the people, then ethnocidal development should be considered a contradiction in terms. Yet it occurs frequently for two principal reasons. Firstly, many development projects and programs are designed for reasons which have little to do with the well-being of the people, but rather with political, financial, external interests etc., and their execution will mainly benefit technocrats, bureaucrats, ambitious politicians or multinational corporations. Secondly, those responsible for development projects and programs are usually fairly ignorant about the situation of ethnic minorities, do not particularly care about the problem and usually hold such groups in contempt. This is particularly the case when the dominant State ideology is based on the concept of a single nation which rejects, and lacks respect for, those other heteronomus ethnies.

Whereas most countries in the world are multi-ethnic, few States acknowledge this fact and even fewer have developed specific legal safeguards and policies for the protection of the ethnic minorities whithin their borders. Governments generally argue that by providing equal rights and opportunities to all of their citizens they are respectful of the cultural specificities of particular ethnies. This is of course not entirely correct and it usually doesn't work out that way. Most States have an explicit or implicit assimilationist bias and despite the formal recognition of fundamental liberties and individual human rights, ethnic minorities are usually at a disadvantage vis-avis the State. This is particularly the case as regards indigenous and tribal peoples, who are not, strictly speaking, ethnic minorities at all.

Indigenous and tribal peoples

Indeed, indigenous peoples may be defined as follows, according to a special United Nations report:

> Indigenous populations are composed of the existing descadants of the peoples who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world,overcame then and, by conquest, settlement or other means, reduced them to a nondominant or colonial condition; who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic and cultural customs and traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they now form part, under a State structure which incorporates mainly the national, social and cultural characteristics of other segments of the population which are predominante.
>   E/CN.4/Sub.2/L.566, p. 10

As for tribal populations, the definitions vary, but they generally include relatively small, geographically isolated social units who have maintained only occasional contact

with the State or the dominant society and who preserve their own specific social organization which differs from that of the majority population. Usually, theirs is a subsistence economy at low technological level. In some parts, as in India, tribes enjoy a special legal status and are the object of specific tutelary legislation (the ,,scheduled tribes"). In other parts, as in some African countries, a tribe is an identifiable ethnic unit which distinguishes itself from other similar units yet interacts freely with the rest of the national society (they would be called nationalities in some European countries).   .

A common feature of many indigenous and tribal peoples is that their traditional habitat has only recently become the object of ,,national development planning". Areas which used to be remote and isolated from national decision-making centers, have now become ,,poles of growth", reserves of vast amounts of sometimes strategic mineral and other natural resources, the sites of costly dams and mining enterprises, the targets of land development and settlement schemes. For technocrats and planners, multi-national corporations or poor, landless squatters, such areas have become a ,,new frontier". The best known of such regions is of course the vast Amazon basin in South America. But there are similar, albeit smaller, areas in the jungles, mountains and savannahs of many Third World countries, and recently in the Arctic region as well.

In the scramble for land and riches, it is usually forgotten that many of these areas have their traditional inhabitants and owners, namely, the indigenous and tribal populations. When the expanding frontier and the merry development planners reach the territory of these peoples, conflicts usually occur, which sometimes may become violent. Many indigenous and tribal comunities have been physically extermined by the expanding frontier. The best known case, sung by poets and idealized by Hollywood, is the American Wild West. But this seems to be no longer of major concern (except to the American Indian people themselves), because it was over and done with by the end of the nineteenth century. But similar events have occurred and are occurring in the Amazon, in southern Chile and Argentina, in Central and Southern Africa, in India and Bangladesh, in the mountain regions of Thailand and the jungle areas of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, in the deserts of Northwestern Australia.

The first and principal onslaught on the way of life of indigenous and tribals is the attack upon their land and their ecological resource base. The loss of land and territory has contributed to wipe out many peoples around the world. It is probably the principal factor in the ongoing process of ethnocide of which they are the continuing victims. For indigenous and tribal peoples, land is not only a productive resource, an economic factor. Land is habitat, territory, the basis for social organization, cultural identification and political viability; frequently associated with myth, symbols and religion. Land is the essential element in the cultural reproduction of the group.

Development planners and indigenous and tribal peoples continue to clash over the issue of land; what for the former is simply a factor in economic calculus, for the latter constitues a vital necessity for survival. Land development − or ,,amenagement du territoire" as the Fench would say − stands in stark contradiction to the significance of land to indigenous and tribal peoples. As long as this contradiction is not solved, ethnocide will continue in the name of development.

Besides the issue of land, ethnocide proceeds by other ways and means: the monetary economy which creates new consumer needs, brings in new products and

displaces old ones, the disappearance of traditional occupations and the penetration of wage laboi into the economy; the national school system which not only introduces the official or dominant language but also other values and attitudes which replace traditional ones. In short, the process of modernization and secularization (so dear to the development sociologists of the fifties and sixties) has contributed to irreversible ethocide in many parts of the world. .

Only during the last few years, perhaps since the middle seventies, have governments and official agencies become aware of the human implications of savage, impersonal, tehnocratic develpment. States are now in order that the human and social factors of development plans must be carefully studied and taken into consideration before any major policy decisions are taken. The World Bank has now decided to make credit for major development projects in the Third world contingent upon safeguards for the well-being of tribal peoples. Governments have been pressured into passing legislation for the protection of indigenous and tribal cultures and comminities. Unfortunately, very frequently such safe-guards and legislation exist on papei only.

International human rights and ethnocide

The international community has not been insensitive to the problems raised by ethnocide and the persecution of ethnic minorities by so many States throughout history, but its efforts have been only partially succesful so far. Between the two world wars, the League of Nations attempted to establish an international regime for the protection of national minorities, principally in central and eastern Europe. The results were far from satisfactory, and the League's minority protection system was declared inoperative after the Second World War.

The United Nations Organization has not fared much better, yet there are a number of legal instruments in the UN system which bear directly upon the situation of ethnic minorities and indigenous and tribal peoples. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, while not directly concerned with minorities, prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, national origin and other factors. For some, this was considered sufficient to guarantee equal rights to all individuals. The UN Convention against Genocide is directed against the deliberate physical extermination of human ethnic group (it was directly inspired by the Holocaust of the Jews in Nazi Germany), but it stops short of mentioning cultural genocide or ethnocide.

The UN Sub-commission for the Prevention Of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities has been working for many years on a draft declaration of the rights of ethnic minorities, but it has not yet been able to reach an agreement. In the meantime, the rights of ethnic minorities are only referred to in Article 27 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966, which reads:

„*Article 27.* In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language."

This article has been considered by some observers as not being strong nor precise enough to effectively guarantee the rights of ethnic minorities. It still refers to individual and not to collective or group rights. Yet the preservation of ethnies, particularly in the face of ethnocide, requires the recognition and codification of collective rights, not only individual human rights. This is a step which the UN has not yet wished to take, at least as far as ethnic groups are concerned. That is why many ethnies, and particularly indigenous peoples, reject the provisions of Article 27 and claim protection under Article 1 of both the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant of Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (both Covenants were adopted by the General Assembly at the same time). The fact that Article 1 is the same for both instruments shows the importance that the General Assembly attributed to it. Drawn directly from UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 of 1960 (Declaration on Decolonization), Article 1 states:

„*Article 1*. All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

The right of all peoples to self-determination is now considered to be a fundamental, universal human right to be applicable only to colonial territories and definitely not to peoples within an established independent State, when this State adheres to generally accepted human rights practices. Yet many ethnies in the world (whether ethnic minorities or indigenous peoples) do consider that the right to self-determination should also apply to them. Indigenous peoples in particular, distance themselves from the concept of „ethnic minority" as considered in Article 27 of the ICCP (quoted above), claim the right to be labeled a „people" in the full sense of the word, and therefore demand the right to self-determination established in Article 1 of the two international Covenants.

This argument has been wielded by representatives of indigenous peoples in the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the UN Sub-Commission, which has been meeting yearly since 1982 (except in 1986) to discuss a possible declaration of rights of indigenous peoples, as distinct from a declaration of rights of ethnic minorities. Indigenous and tribal peoples have also been the subject of Convention 107 of the International Labor Organization (ILO), adopted in 1957. This Convention, well-meaning as it was at the time of its adoption, and inspired mainly by the situation of the Indians of South America, has been criticised for its paternalistic tone and assimilationist bias. This is the reason why the ILO itself has decided to revise and update Convention 107, a process which should be accomplished by ILO's General Conference in 1988.

The ethnocide which is occurring among so many ethnic minorities and indigenous and tribal peoples around the world, stands in direct convention of a number of international human rights instruments, despite the fact that ethnocide or cultural genocide as such is not explicitly considered in any of them. Thus, the defence of the rights of these peoples has become an international human rights issue. It is not a question of anthropological romanticism, or of conservative opposition to progress, or of a reactionary negation of the realities of capitalist development and the class struggle in dependent countries, or even more, a subversive if not downright pro-imperialist attack upon the unity of the national state, as some critics might argue. It is

simply a question of basic human rights as relevant to thousands of distinct peoples and hundreds of millions of human beings in all parts of the world.

Ethnodevelopment

No one has understood this better than the ethnic minorities and indigenous and tribal peoples themselves. While their resistance to ethnocide and genocide is as old as these destructive practices, the political organizations of many of these peoples, at least on the international scene, is a fairly recent phenomenon. Many minority peoples have lobbied the United Nations since its inception for their particular interests. Some of them did so more or less effectively since the days of the League of Nations. For example, the Armenians to seek redress for genocide at the hands of the Turkish state; the Kurds for independent statehood; the black South Africans for deliverance from apartheid; the Palestinians, Namibians, Saharouis and others for self-determination and independence; the Timorese for liberation from Indonesian annexation; the Puerto Ricans for an end to American domination. Some of these „cases" may be considered as part of the decolonization process, initiated in the UN in 1960. Others, however, are the result of more complex historical situations and require more imaginative and innovative solutions.

A specific case in point refers to indigenous and tribal peoples, most of whom are now considered to be a part of established, internationally recognized independent states. The first international NGO conference on indigenous peoples and their rights took place at the UN in Geneva in 1977. One of the prime movers of this important event was the International Indian Treaty Council, an organization of North American and Canadian Indians who maintain that they represent independent, sovereign nations who had signed international treaties with the U. S. and Canadian governments in the nineteenth century, which had been unilaterally violated and abolished by these governments, against the interests and the will of the indigenous peoples involved. This conference was followed by another NGO conference held in Geneva in 1981, and attended by representatives of many other indigenous groups of the American continent. While not all of these peoples could base their arguments on a history of broken treaties, their social and economic situation was similar and their demands coincided.

In 1975 a number of indigenous organizations: North and South American Indians, native Hawaiians, Inuit (Eskimos) from Canada and Alaska, and Sami (Lapps) from Northern Europe decided to organize the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. This organization has adopted a declaration of indigenous rights, it has held several international assemblies and it has been present at numerous international meetings at which it has cogently argued its case. Other regional and sub-regional indigenous organizations have likewise been active internationally, particularly in North, Central and South America. Social scientists and workers of voluntary service agencies (including religious groups) who over the years have been closely associated with indigenous and tribal groups have also held meetings and made public statements, such as the Declaration of Barbados II of 1977, in which they question traditional State myths and development wisdom and call for new approaches. In 1981, UNESCO and the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) sponsored an expert meeting on ethnocide and ethnodevelopment in Latin America, which produced a document called

the „Declaration of San Jose". UNESCO later went on to organize similar meetings in Africa and Europe.

The gist of all these activities by intergovernmental, non-governmental, academic and indigenous bodies has been the recognition of the need for a new approach to the problematique of economic and social development of ethnically distinct peoples within the context of the modern so-called national state. As against policies which lead to ethnocide or preserve internal colonialism, there has arisen a call for self-determination, autonomy and ethnodevelopment. This means basically that indigenous and other ethnies demand the right to decide about their own affairs, to participate in the decision-making bodies and processes where their future is discussed and decided; to political representation and participation; to respect for their traditions and cultures; to the freedom to chose what kind of development, if any, they want. Ethnodevelopment means that an ethnie, whether indigenous, tribal or any other, maintains control over its own land, resources, social organization and culture, and is free to negotiate with the State the kind of relationship it wishes to have.

Ethnodevelopment, like the concept of self-reliant development, means looking inward, it means finding in the group's own culture the resources and creative force necessary to confront the challenges of the modern, changing world. It does not mean autarchy or self-imposed isolation, and much less retreat into a museum of „tradition", though ethnies that may wish to remain isolated (as some tropical forest tribes in the Amazon basin) should by all means be free to enjoy the basic human right of isolation. Ethnodevelopment does not mean political secession or separatism from an existing State, though a people which aspires to nationhood and independence (such as the Kurds) should by all means be free to exercise the right of self-determination, as formulated by the United Nations. Ethnodevelopment does not mean breaking-up existing nations and subverting the process of nation-building (a major task of our time, particularly in the Third World), but rather redefining the nature of nation-building and enriching the complex, multi-cultural fabric of many modern States (such as India, Sri Lanka or Nicaragua), by recognising the legitimate aspirations of the culturally distinct ethnies which make up the national whole. Ethnodevelopment does not mean blurring the very real social and economic class divisions which characterize the modern world capitalist system by stirring up some artificial „tribalism" but rather it assumes that not only class but also ethnic identity and community are socially intergreating principles. Thus classbased social movements in the modern world can only benefit and improve their performance if they recognize the validity and legitimacy of ethnic demands (such as has occured in the revolutionary movement in Guatemala or the struggle in Northern Ireland). Ethnodevelopment, finally, means rethinking the nature and objectives of local-level development projects, from hydroelectric dams to the introduction of plantation crops by keeping in mind, first and foremost, the needs, desires, cultural specificities and grass-roots participation of the ethnic groups themselves.