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DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

How should we approach the subject of “development” in this moment, when most citizens across the world face economic deprivation with deepening forms of destitution, especially in the global South, and crises threaten the stability of environments and undermine human material improvements? The world is at a turning point regarding not only how to reverse these trends but also how to ensure sustainable life on Earth in coming decades. However, international solidarity and cooperation in the face of these challenges is lacking, especially as grievance politics over the recent elite project of globalization has catalyzed populist authoritarianisms in many countries, turning nations inward.

Yet, at the same time, we have countermovements advocating for social justice and meaningful sustainable development, also of transnational scope and reach. Among them are, for instance, growing sanctuary cities deliberately welcoming migrants on the basis of their “rightful presence,” the global food sovereignty movement, and solidarity over insecurities of livelihoods expressed through alliances between those employed and those who are underemployed or unemployed. Simultaneously, decolonial thought and politics continue to push against dominant epistemic and political frames.¹ For instance, ongoing cases for reparations over colonial violence and injustices demonstrate the extent to which the past is in the present but also enabling and shaping struggles over more just social and political futures, including replenishing planet Earth.²

In this context there have been moves to supersede development at the world-economic scale, reducing reliance on trade and foreign investment by the private sector, and “revitalizing the state’s economic role . . . in the interest of the common good.”³ Here, American economist Dani Rodrik advocates domestic cross-sectoral supply-side measures such as “the embrace of industrial policies to facilitate the green transition, rebuild domestic supply chains, and stimulate good jobs.”⁴ Such talk reflects rising interest in economic nationalism, in response to social unrest produced by unbridled global capital movements undermining stable employments, rural communities, and multilateralism. It also suggests the model for established economies in the **global North** but not necessarily for countries of the **global South**, whose economies depend on substantial export sectors organized for extraction of resources for the richer global North.

As we shall see, such world-economic patterning is the long-term consequence of Western colonialism, which was structured around capture of raw materials (such as rubber, timber, sugar, grains, palm oil, cotton, minerals) and, of course, labor. So remodeling “development” is a charged and contentious subject. And it is our subject here.

DEVELOPMENT AS A HISTORICALLY RELATIONAL PROCESS

Development, today, is increasingly about how we survive the present and future, rather than its claim to improve on the past. But what past, and how is this past represented? By Western convention, the past is viewed *normatively* as the baseline in framing development as a linear process from tradition to modernity. This convention reflects a Eurocentric narrative of *human* progress, even as its signifiers (e.g., rationalism, scientific discovery, technological change) were viewed as unique to the European experience. Such a narrative not only discounts non-European technologies and sciences, including early Pacific Islander navigation techniques, but alternative signifiers of being, such as the world’s 350 million Indigenous peoples, whose lifeworlds value and protect 80 percent of Earth’s remaining biodiversity.⁵

From this idealized Eurocentric account of progress, the non-European world has been represented as embodying the past. This baseline framing of “development” means that the violence of colonization by European states, slavers, and merchants is disarticulated from the history of development. It is reflected in contemporary political attempts to marginalize racial history from political discourse and some schooling curricula, to reinforce a linear, rather than a relational, understanding of human development. Here, what is made visible is at the expense of that which is rendered invisible⁶—producing a discriminatory development narrative.

Such disconnection has a double effect: First, it has produced knowledge conventions about development that override the devastating implications of colonialism for the non-European world and the dependence of European commercial wealth and “development” on that relationship. And such exploitation continues today as a form of **coloniality**, where, for example, the bottom 80 percent of humanity finances the richest 20 percent to the tune of approximately \$660 billion per annum.⁷

Second, it promotes a sanitized understanding of development as a continuum, *within* each country, emulating the idealized European national path of industrialization. But it is more complicated than this: “development” has global dimensions, starting with European colonization and the violence of this project, profiting from trade in enslaved persons to extraction of resources from colonies through the organization of plantation economies. This has resulted in a palpably unequal, and an uneven, world of states in terms of living standards, voice, and power. Even as some southern states form cooperative relations to challenge the U.S.-centered world order,⁸ their domestic economies remain highly unequal.

Accordingly, we seek to integrate the present with its historical past. This method underscores that the world we experience today has been profoundly shaped by colonial and postcolonial relations of power, including narratives of progress and consequences of exploitation. Much tension today around questions of development, sustainable development, and indeed sustainable life⁹ stems from these relationships and how to manage the survival of the natural world, which is so fundamental to the survival of humans and all other beings. The 2023 fires in Maui exposed both the ecological consequences of development through colonial capitalism as well as the ongoing implications of colonial legacies. In particular, the spread of the fires have been linked to nonnative grasses left by previous corporate plantations in Hawaii.¹⁰

While the roots of such inequalities are colonial, the paths taken by non-Western postcolonial states have been shaped since the mid-twentieth century by new global forces. These include the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in alliance with private interests to build economic infrastructures of a global capitalist economy. The resulting neoliberal “free market” international trade and financial relations have fostered global manufacturing and agricultural industries, serving to enrich corporate and financial elites. India is perhaps the exemplar (now the fifth largest economy in the world), where 90 percent of the population are by most measures poor, qualifying for free food rations intended to prevent malnutrition.¹¹ Former Nobel Prize winner and World Bank chief economist, Joseph Stiglitz, commented in 2024:

The neoliberal agenda was always partly a charade, a fig leaf for power politics. There was financial deregulation, but also massive government bailouts. There was “free trade,” but also massive subsidies to big agriculture and the fossil-fuel industry. Globally this led to the creation of rules that preserve colonial trade patterns, with developing countries producing commodities and the advanced economies dominating high-value-added industries.¹²

The resulting inequality is both material and epistemic (how the world is viewed), and interlaced with enduring racial inequality. To be sure, the conditions and representations are always in contention, exemplified initially by anticolonial movements and continuing in postcolonial times in urban anti-austerity uprisings and international solidarity demands for sovereignty for farming cultures and Indigenous rights and, most recently, as authoritarian populist revolts against “neoliberal” economic deprivations, including anti-elite and anti-immigration politics.

Development today is in question, with deepening global inequality and environmental and climate emergency. A 2020 World Health Organization (WHO) commission reported, “Every country in the world is failing to shield children’s health and their futures from intensifying ecological degradation, climate change and exploitative marketing practices.”¹³ Further, “today’s children face an uncertain future,” with every child confronting “existential threats,” and “while the poorest countries need to do more to support their children’s ability to live healthy lives, excessive carbon emissions—disproportionately from wealthier countries—threaten the future of all

children.”¹⁴ In 2023, the WHO director-general emphasized, “The climate crisis is a health crisis, driving more severe and unpredictable weather events, fuelling disease outbreaks, and contributing to higher rates of noncommunicable diseases.”¹⁵ The year 2023 was the warmest year on record on land, as well as in the oceans, with multiple countries experiencing record-breaking heat waves, record-breaking wildfires, record-breaking rainstorms, or some combination.¹⁶ These events are arguably the most dramatic consequences of a mode of development intensifying fossil fuel-dependent economic growth, alongside reduced public regulation, over the last half century.

In 2018, the *World Inequality Report* noted since 1980, net public wealth (state revenues) declined in almost every country. In China and Russia, public wealth declined from 60 to 70 percent of national wealth to 20 to 30 percent, and net public wealth recently became negative in the United States and the United Kingdom and only slightly positive in Japan, Germany, and France. This “limits government ability to regulate the economy, redistribute income, and mitigate rising inequality,”¹⁷ as well as reducing emissions.

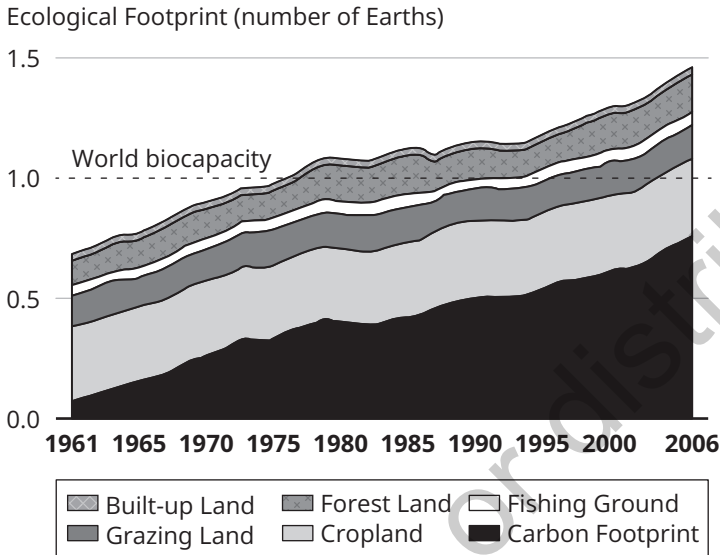
Development’s outcomes are profoundly challenged, as we cross planetary boundaries (e.g., climate change, biosphere integrity, biogeochemical flows, fresh water, land system) and social effects of natural disasters accumulate. The question is how can, or why should, development maintain its goal of increased economic growth (and how does it serve to reinforce social inequalities)? This question animates a broad range of responses at all scales of political and social life, encountered in later chapters.

Development’s economic focus on emulation of an idealized Western material lifestyle became the universal standard when in 1949 U.S. President Truman proclaimed the “era of development” as the alternative to Soviet communism. He defined it as achieving “the decent satisfying life that is the right of all people. Democracy alone can supply the vitalizing force.”¹⁸ *How, and how well, and with what implications development has addressed this goal is our subject.*

Fifty years after Truman’s freedom doctrine, the United Nations General Assembly recycled the development quest on September 18, 2000, in *The Millennium Declaration*:

We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and freeing the entire human race from want.¹⁹

Not only has the entire human race not been relieved of want since the development era began, but also the trajectory of development has increasingly compromised its claims and possibilities. Across the past half century, annual consumption of global resources has outstripped Earth’s carrying capacities (as depicted in Figure 1.1). Such consumption is hardly equal within and across societies.

FIGURE 1.1 ■ **Humanity's Ecological Footprint**

Source: Global Footprint Network, 2010 National Footprint Accounts.

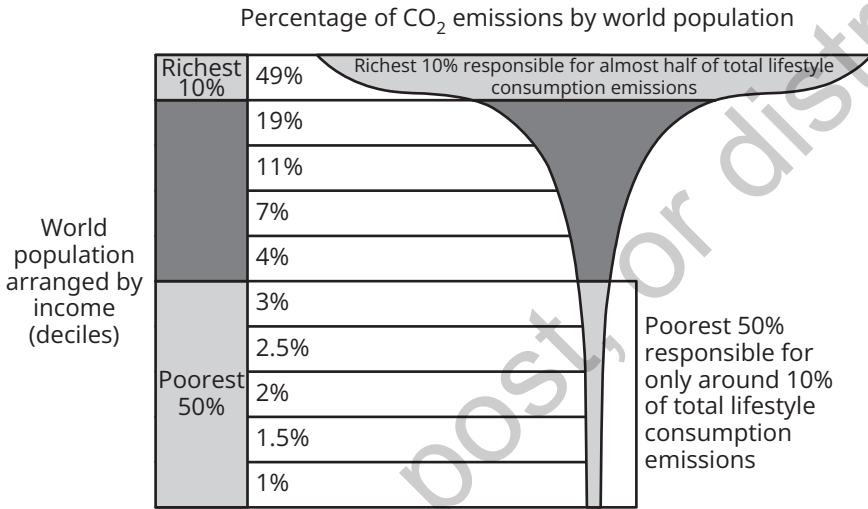
As an orienting term, *emulation* is ideological and unrealistic—not only because of deepening inequalities in Western societies but also because Western (stratified) lifestyles depend so much on non-Western resources. Mass consumption, theorized as the ultimate goal of development, depends on a dense network of global supply chains delivering raw materials, foodstuffs, and manufactured goods produced with majority world resources (including exploited labor) for the world's minority with purchasing power (disproportionately in the so-called developed countries). Such products include timber from Indonesia and smartphone coltan from the Congo, quinoa from Peru and avocado from Mexico, and clothing from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Behind these geographically dispersed relations stands the legacy of colonial exploitation, now compounded in new forms of global market exploitation by powerful corporate and financial interests. This is not to say non-Western societies do not have their affluent elite classes, but there are profound inequalities between the West and the rest of the world. For example, from a gender relations perspective, a 2020 Oxfam report noted that the world's 22 most affluent males combine more wealth than all 325 million women in Africa. Further, “women and girls across the globe contribute an estimated \$10.8tn to the global economy with a total of 12.5bn hours a day of unpaid care work, a figure more than three times the worth of the global tech industry.”²⁰ And such exploitation to source wealthy lifestyles generates an outsized ecological footprint, at substantial expense to non-Western habitats, resources, and weather patterning.

We know that the Western lifestyle footprint is responsible for the grossly uneven greenhouse gas emissions producing climatic disturbances with particularly

devastating effect across the majority world. This is depicted in Figure 1.2,²¹ reflecting the extraordinary inequality between what is conventionally categorized as the “developed world” and the “developing world.” And this inequality of consumption and emissions divides individual countries themselves. For example, in the United States and the United Kingdom, the richest 10 percent of the population produce at least five times the emissions of the poorest 50 percent.²²

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Global Income Deciles and Associated Lifestyle Consumption



Source: Oxfam, reproduced in Beuret (2019).

Note that these figures record data quite differently from the key metric measuring development across all states. That metric is the gross domestic product (GDP), and it measures the total economic output of a country—meaning all *marketed* goods and services. As U.S. economist Simon Kuznets testified in 1934 to the U.S. Senate, “[N]o income measurement undertakes to estimate the reverse side of income, that is, the intensity and unpleasantness of effort going into the earning of income. The welfare of a nation can, therefore, scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income as defined [in GDP statistics].”²³ Extrapolating, the “reverse side of income” suggests labor exploitation primarily but extends to nonmonetized activities such as domestic work and community care, as well as to the unpleasantness of environmental despoliation and public ill-health as effects of income-earning activities. In spite of this limitation, or blind spot, GDP was adopted internationally in the 1950s as the key standard measure of development. And it has remained the principal metric to the present day. As Joseph Stiglitz remarked in 2019,

If our economy seems to be growing but that growth is not sustainable because we are destroying the environment and using up scarce natural resources, our

statistics should warn us. But because GDP didn't include resource depletion and environment degradation, we typically get an excessively rosy picture.²⁴

As the standard, not only is GDP incapable of representing social and environmental well-being across a national society, but also it reinforces a one-dimensional understanding of development—invisibilizing the unequal social relations through which this growth is realized. Accordingly, GDP licenses a powerful and self-reproducing institutional (World Bank, United Nations, financial houses) and policy infrastructure, discounting the market's environmental impact—challenged in the UK *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change* (2006) as “the greatest market failure the world has ever seen.”²⁵ Two years later the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) established the **Global Green New Deal (GGND)** in response to the combined food, fuel, and financial crises.

WHAT IS THE WORLD COMING TO?

Development, then, is a problematic term. Represented as a universal aspiration, its origins are overwhelmingly Eurocentric. It is a trope stemming from the era of European colonization of the Americas, Asia, Australasia, Middle East, and Africa. Colonization was in part justified through a European “civilizing” lens, as non-European cultures were devalued and redefined as “backward,” as their habitats and resources were converted for commercial exploitation.

Destruction of the natural world is not the only source of development disillusion today. We see this all around us: in rebellions cascading across the world as economies stagnate and social services and stable jobs erode; in populist upsurges expressing dissatisfaction with political and economic elites captivated by global economic deals; in renewal of sustainable practices; in demands for race, class, and gender equality; in massive new global circuits of migrant labor; and in declining life expectancy from “deaths of despair” from rising precarity.²⁶ The response to the latter—closing the door to those impoverished by development processes—is perhaps the key allegory of our times. It rests on a disconnection of colonial legacies from the present postcolonial world's condition, expelling displaced people into migrant streams.

At face value, waves of immigration from the non-European world *appear* as masses of people seeking better lives in the “developed world.” But this perception is based on erasure of the historical legacies of colonialism. To *reconnect histories relationally* means to deconstruct development as conventionally framed in terms of a simple dichotomy of “premodern” and “modern” societies. Rather, development remains an unequal world–socioeconomic *relationship*. And here, global development has been historically premised on, and productive of, unequal race relations. Racism is expressed across time in minority world exploitation, patronage, and exclusion of majority world peoples: through enslavement and forced labor, Indigenous genocide, and fear of yielding privilege to nonwhite migrants. Such fear is expressed by French author Renaud Camus, in a

book titled *Le Grand Remplacement* (2011), claiming that “native ‘white’ Europeans . . . are being reverse-colonized by black and brown immigrants.”²⁷

When immigrants from the postcolonial “majority world” now come in waves, seeking redress (symbolically) for centuries of colonial disruption of their life-worlds, their presence triggers political “nativism” in the “minority world.” Underlying this response is an implicit assumption that development is a national process and that racial groups have their place—forgetting white-settler colonization, trade in enslaved persons, historic Chinese and Indian diasporas, and even elite diasporas today, not to mention current freedoms of capital migration across borders versus limitations on people migrating.

To study “development,” then, is to recognize its history, as an integrated and unequal process across world regions, states, and cultures. This is the underlying theme of this book. The historical process is subdivided into successive colonial, development, globalization, and potential sustainability projects—to distinguish key periods, or political conjunctures, in the making of the modern world. Each project shapes its successor, which in turn reconfigures what it inherits from the previous project. And the process of succession involves substantial/large-scale sociopolitical mobilizations.

Thus, the anticolonial mobilization across the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century shapes the **development project** (1940s–1970s), as decolonization and political independence nurtures “economic nationalism,” within a United Nations internationalism. But this in turn was challenged by an increasingly powerful corporate and financial sector, championing a global economy, and hence a **globalization project** (1970s–2010s), opening world markets for trade and investment liberalization. The resulting ecological stress on Earth of intensifying global consumption patterns and a “race for resources” stimulates an array of environmental movements and sustainability initiatives, perhaps anticipating a sustainability project in coming years.

This book is a guide to the rise and transformation of “development” as a powerful instrument of global social change over several centuries. From one (long-term) angle, it appears increasingly cometlike: a brilliant lodestar for ordering the world but perhaps destined to burn out as its energy-intensive foundations meet their limits. From another (immediate) angle, the energy and inequality dilemma forces renewed critical thinking about how humans might live sustainably and equitably on the planet. These perspectives are the subjects of chapters to come.

DEVELOPMENT: HISTORY AND POLITICS

Development originated in the colonial era, as European domination came to be self-justified in terms of superiority and leadership along a development axis. Key to this relationship was power, vested in imperial states, and their military and mercantile operations dedicated to extending the realm of commercial and landed propertied classes. While development is represented in theory as a set of idealized outcomes (at the expense of devaluing other cultures), its implementation often has a violent history.

For example, the private enclosure of land and forests in the name of economic development dispossesses and displaces inhabitants. It also converts such habitats into “resources” to be marketed, thereby replacing one cultural life-world with a singular commodity culture, in the name of progress. Here, development’s ends often justify its means, however socially and ecologically disruptive the process may be. And this process in turn is politically sanctioned and managed.

The distinction between development as an unfolding universal social *process* and development as a political *intervention* is useful here.²⁸ For our purposes it illuminates the ideological belief in “improvement” (European style), paired with distinct power relations to manage modern development. In Enlightenment terms, development was understood in Europe *philosophically* as improving humankind. Nineteenth-century European political elites interpreted development *practically*, as a way to socially engineer emerging national capitalist societies. Elites formulated government policy to manage the social transformations attending the rise of capitalism and industrial technologies. Development came to be identified with *both* industrialization *and* the regulation of its disruptive social impacts. These impacts began with the displacement of rural populations by land enclosures for cash cropping, a process generating impoverished individuals and families, such paupers who were in turn framed as menacing, restless proletarians (“undesirables”), as well as producing unhealthy factory towns.²⁹ Development, here, meant balancing technological change and the rise of new social classes, fashioning policies to manage wholesale social transformations. At the same time, such transformations became the catalyst of competing political visions—liberal, socialist, conservative—of the ideal society.

In Europe’s colonies, the inhabitants appeared undeveloped—in European self-referential (evolutionary) terms—legitimizing imperial intervention. By the nineteenth century, social engineering underpinned European imperialism. While colonial resource extraction facilitated European industrialization, colonial administrators managed subject populations, as they experienced wrenching social transformations. Here, development came to be associated with an additional, normative meaning, namely, a “white man’s burden”—the title of a poem by nineteenth-century English poet Rudyard Kipling. Such racist patronage remains a key legacy of European civilizing claims. When the leader of India’s twentieth-century independence movement, Mahatma Gandhi, was asked what he thought of British civilization, reputedly he replied, “It would be a good idea.”

Thus, development came to mean the extension of modern social engineering to colonies incorporated into the European orbit and through use of justifications steeped in racism. Subject populations were exposed to a variety of new disciplines, including forced labor schemes, schooling, and segregation in native quarters. Forms of colonial subordination differed across time and space, but the overriding object was either to adapt or marginalize the colonized in the processes of their dispossession. In this sense, development involved a relation of power. For example, British colonialism introduced the new English factory model “Lancaster school” to the (ancient) city of Cairo in 1843 to educate Cairo’s emerging civil service. Egyptian students learned the new disciplines

of a developing society that was busily displacing peasant culture with plantations of cotton for export to English textile mills and managing an army of migrant labor, which was building an infrastructure of roads, canals, railways, telegraphs, and ports.³⁰ Through the colonial relation, industrialism transformed both English and Egyptian society, producing new forms of social discipline among working- and middle-class citizen-subjects. And while industrialism produced new class and gender inequalities within each society, the racist underpinnings of colonialism added further and persisting forms of domination and inequality. In this way, new class and racial hierarchies within and across societies were introduced.

While development informed modern narratives in the age of industrialism and empire, it only became formalized as a *project* in the mid-twentieth century. This period was the high tide of **decolonization**, as the Western (British, Italian, German, French, Dutch, Portuguese, and Belgian) and Japanese empires succumbed to the moral force of anticolonial resistance and when development (associated with independence) became an emancipatory promise. The United States, identifying as a noncolonial power (disregarding its settler-colonial history) and strengthened by its New Deal, by which Keynesian public economic stimulus offered a model of “planned development,” seized the post–World War II moment to proclaim a new (free) world project of development. Meanwhile, the United Nations, intent on expanding membership as colonies became independent as sovereign states, institutionalized the System of National Accounts. A universal quantifiable measure of development, the GDP, was born, as key to the development project, based on the ideal of self-governing states united by the ideology of nationalism. Here, formally, postcolonial *subjects* became *citizens*, in an era of U.S.-sponsored “development” that idealized modern society as composed of self-maximizing *consumers*. Western development culture contrasted with Soviet bloc socialism, where industrialism was driven not by consumerism but by central planning and social need—in part idealizing the worker-state and in part for self-defense against Western anticommunism.

DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Identifying development with rising consumption privileges the market as the vehicle of social change. The underlying philosophy—deriving from a popular (but limiting) interpretation of Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*³¹ and formalized in neoclassical economic theory—is that markets maximize individual preferences and allocate resources efficiently. Whether this theory reflects reality or not, it is a deeply held belief now institutionalized in much development policy across the world. Why is this the case?

Naturalizing Development

There are two ways to answer this question. First, a belief in markets is a central tenet of liberal Western philosophy. Hungarian philosopher Karl Polanyi noted that modern liberalism rests on a belief in a natural human propensity for self-gain. This translates

in economic theory as the market principle.³² Self-gain, via the market, drives the aspiration for improvement, aggregated as consumption. Second, as Polanyi noted, naturalizing market behavior as an innate propensity discounts other human traits or social values—such as cooperation, redistribution, and reciprocity, which are different organizing principles by which human societies have endured for centuries. For Polanyi and other classical social theorists, pursuit of individualism via an economic calculus is quite novel in the history and organization of human societies. That is, it is a social construct of modernity, rather than inherent in human social life.

Although individual improvement remains the ultimate goal of development, it is realized quite unevenly across gender, race, and class groupings, as well as across time. In this respect, the middle decades of the twentieth century saw powerful anticolonial, labor, and citizen movements pressing to temper private, with public, provisions, such as infrastructure, education, health, water supply, commons, clean air, and so forth. These measures were included in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in the 1940s and constituted the welfare state most clearly in Western societies in the postwar period. Postcolonial states faced the task of challenging the colonial division of labor and implemented social protections for their destabilized communities. This was the era of the development project, modeling these social protections to regulate uncertain markets. But, as noted earlier, such protections hamstrung increasingly powerful financial interests, whose combined power in policy circles contributed to intensifying **privatization** of public goods, and a pervasive discourse subordinating social-democratic states to market imperatives, as the medium of development in the subsequent globalization project.

This privatizing outcome was prefigured in one of the most influential theories of development emerging in the post–World War II world. In 1960, economist Walt Rostow published *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*,³³ outlining a development theory celebrating the Western model of free enterprise in contrast to a state-planned economy. The “stages” traverse a linear sequence, beginning with “Traditional Society” (agrarian, limited productivity) and moving through “Preconditions for Take-Off” (state formation, education, science, banking, profit systematization), “Take-Off” (normalization of growth via industrialization), and “Maturity” (the second industrial revolution from textiles and iron to machine tools, chemicals, and electrical equipment)—and finally to the “Age of High Mass-Consumption,” characterized by the movement from basic to durable goods, urbanization, and a rising level of white-collar versus blue-collar work, as in postwar America.

This evolutionary sequence, ostensibly distilled from the U.S. experience, represents the consumer society as the terminal stage of a complex historical process. Rostow viewed the U.S. model as the goal to which other (i.e., developing) societies should aspire; this partly explains his book’s subtitle, which references the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union at the time. The theorization of development as a series of evolutionary stages naturalizes a process comprising unequal

relations, framing it in terms of stages, whether with regard to a national (development era) or an international (globalization era) context. Mass consumption was a final goal to be realized through membership of the “free world” at the time, and, by implication, U.S. assistance would be available to spur **Third World** (postcolonial states) progress along the stages.

However, note that Rostow’s “development blueprint” depended on a political context. Rostow’s theory is premised on the convention of approaching development from the “baseline” we outlined earlier. It thereby served to disconnect colonialism and its legacies as an explanation for the conditions of development of the new states. Furthermore, it sought to naturalize liberal capitalism as the development dynamic. That is, markets are not natural; they require securing by **development states**. And development was neither spontaneous nor inevitable; rather, it was shaped by social struggle and required nurturing by an institutional complex on a world scale (a project), via trade, monetary, and investment rules; aid regimes; or a military umbrella—all of which were supplied through postwar, multilateral institutions and bilateral arrangements led by the United States, especially in the capitalist bloc. In this way, a theory of spontaneous markets diverges from reality. But reality was nonetheless shaped by this theory, informing public discourse and translated into implementation of policies governed by a market calculus. This is a central paradox explored in this book.

Global Context

Reality is more complicated than it first appears. For example, Rostow’s prescriptions artificially separated societies from one another, perhaps expressing the idealism of mid-twentieth-century nationalism. But to assign stages of growth to individual societies, without accounting for their historic (and unequal) interdependence, discounts patterns of imperial wealth extraction. As we shall see, not only did European powers once depend on their colonies for resources and markets, but these patterns have continued in the postcolonial era. Because of continuing Western interests on maintaining their access to raw materials from the ex-colonial world, the latter struggled to challenge these historic structural inequalities.

This reality stimulated **dependency analysis** and **world-system analysis**. The concept of “dependency” (referring to unequal economic relations between Western and non-European states) emerged in the mid-twentieth century from several quarters: an empirical observation by economist Hans Singer that “peripheral” countries were exporting more and more natural resources to pay for increasingly expensive manufactured imports; an argument by Singer’s collaborator, Argentinean economist Raul Prebisch, that Latin American states should therefore industrialize behind protective tariffs on manufactured imports; and earlier Marxist theories of exploitative imperialist relations between the European and the non-European world.³⁴ Dependency was, then, a relationship describing the development of Europe at the expense of the **underdevelopment** of the non-European world. Economist Andre Gunder Frank put it this way:

[H]istorical research demonstrates that contemporary underdevelopment is in large part the historical product of past and continuing economic and other relations between the satellite underdeveloped and the now-developed metropolitan countries. . . . When we examine this metropolis-satellite structure, we find that each of the satellites . . . serves as an instrument to suck capital or economic surplus out of its own satellites and to channel part of this surplus to the world metropolis of which all are satellites.³⁵

A similar imagery was used by political scientist Samir Amin, who drew the following conclusion based on an analysis of three case examples from the history of development in the African context: “We have to conclude that there are no traditional societies in modern Africa: there are only dependent peripheral societies.”³⁶ This challenges the conventional baseline framing of traditional and modernity as reflected in Rostow’s stages of development prescription. Complementing Amin, Walter Rodney provides a compelling critique of how Europe underdeveloped Africa,³⁷ detailing the economic, social, ecological, and political consequences. He identifies the European trade in enslaved persons as the key to enduring suffering and ongoing struggles for justice. Highlighting epistemic violence, Rodney critically discloses how the colonial education system was organized for subordination and exploitation.³⁸ Poignantly, he noted that “Cecil Rhodes could afford to leave a legacy of lavish scholarship to white students for study at Oxford University, having made a fortune from exploiting Africa and Africans.”³⁹

World-system analysis, advanced by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, deepened the concept of dependency by elevating the modern social system to a global scale. States became political units competing for, or surrendering, resources within a **world division of labor**. Here, regional labor forces occupy a skill/technological hierarchy, associated with state strength or weakness in the capitalist world economy.⁴⁰ From this perspective, the “core” concentrates capital-intensive or intellectual production and the “periphery” is associated with lower-skilled, labor-intensive production, whether plantation labor, assembly of manufactured goods, or routine service work (e.g., call centers). The point of a world division of labor emphasizes that labor everywhere has a global, rather than a national, locational value, with racist dimensions.

The concept of dependency challenges the assumption that societies are independently aligned on a “stages of growth” spectrum. But its binary, reflected in the framing of development/underdevelopment, rests on valuing Western-style development over other more collective, low-input life-worlds associated with non-Western cultures. Indian postcolonial theorist and political psychologist Ashis Nandy’s critique of the conflation of “poverty” with both modern experiences of destitution and customary frugal lifestyles is instructive here. His point is that when we conventionally refer to poverty, we mean destitution “but are too clever by half to admit that.”⁴¹ Nandy argues this serves to justify a development industry premised on overcoming poverty but producing conditions of destitution, by undermining Indigenous life-worlds and the sovereignty of farm cultures.

While measuring all societies against a conception of (industrial) development may have seemed the appropriate goal for Modernization and Dependency Theory at mid-century, from the vantage point of the *twenty-first century* it is quite problematic. The growing recognition that the planet cannot sustain current Western-emulating socially unequal urban-industrial trends in China and India is one dramatic expression of this new reality.

Agrarian Questions

Urbanization is a defining outcome of development and the “stages of growth” metaphor, where “tradition” yields to “modernity” as industrialization deepens. As political scientist Samuel Huntington put it, “Agriculture declines in importance compared to commercial, industrial, and other non-agricultural activities, and commercial agriculture replaces subsistence agriculture.”⁴² Although this theoretical sequence has some validity (as urbanization deepens), informing policies discounting small-scale farming, there is a question as to whether and to what extent this trajectory is inevitable on a global scale. In fact, as we shall see, the demise of millions of small producers is an outcome of unequal global relations such as colonialism, targeted foreign aid, and policies favoring global agribusiness. How we perceive these relationships is important.

Agribusiness industrializes agriculture, with technologies and chemicals to promote food monocultures on a global scale. Meanwhile, low-input farming polycultures are gaining attention as they save seeds and local knowledge, promote biodiversity, and produce varieties of fresh foods with similar productivity as agri-monocultures per hectare.⁴³ Even so, the modernist preoccupation with large-scale technological change has fostered a broad international system of subsidies for agribusiness trading that discriminates against farming cultures, ostensibly to “feed the world,” even as small-scale farmers produce two-thirds of the world’s food.⁴⁴

Ecological Questions

This example of conversion of farming into an industrial activity underscores a significant *ecological blind spot* in development theory. As is becoming clearer, where the displacement of small farming cultures by large-scale (commercial) agriculture is represented as improvement, or development, it is an insufficient claim if it does not account for what economists call “externals.” These are the significant environmental impacts, such as disruption of agrarian cultures and their ecosystems, dependency on fossil fuels, and agriculture’s responsibility for up to a third of greenhouse gas emissions. Such consequences challenge the wisdom of replacing long-standing knowledge-intensive farming culture/ecology with increasingly unsustainable industrial agriculture.

In 2011 the annual UNDP *Human Development Report* began adopting an ecological sensibility.⁴⁵ This new focus complemented the 2005 *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment*, which noted that the last half century of human action has had the most intensive and extensive negative impact on world ecosystems ever, and yet this has been

accompanied by continuing global gains in human well-being.⁴⁶ And so the “**environmentalist’s paradox**” was coined, where mastery of nature may be effective in the short term in generating rising consumption patterns but also effective in masking the long-term health implications of ecosystem stress, if these are “externalized.” What such research suggests is that development needs a robust sustainability dimension, a possible **sustainability project**.

DEVELOPMENT PARADOXES

The environmentalist’s paradox, when inverted, is, in fact, a **development paradox**. Former World Bank economist Herman Daly formulated this as an “impossibility theorem,” namely, that the universalization of U.S.-style high mass consumption economy would require several planet Earths. Either way, the *ultimate paradox here is that the environment is not equipped to absorb its unrelenting exploitation by the current growth model of endless accumulation*. In other words, development as we know it is undermining itself.

Three of the nine designated planetary operational boundaries (i.e., climate change, biodiversity, and the nitrogen cycle) have been crossed already, whereas others (e.g., fresh water use and oceanic acidification) are at serious tipping points. Meanwhile, the costs of environmental degradation are borne disproportionately by the poor—the very same people the development industry claims to target. This is a key development paradox.

Other paradoxes include such questions as the following: Are low-carbon cultures that live with, rather than seek to master, nature backward? Are non-Western cultures judged poor in what makes Western cultures rich? Is frugality poverty? Why is malnutrition common to Western and non-Western cultures? Are non-Western cultures rich in what Western cultures are now poor (nonmonetized items such as open space, leisure, solidarity, ecological knowledge)? Should we measure living standards only in monetary terms?

Sources: Daly (1990); J. B. Foster (2011); Stern (2006).

SOCIAL CHANGE

As we have seen, development theory offers a blueprint, and justification, for universalizing a European-centered prototype. European industrialization depended on devaluing and displacing non-European knowledges and industry and capturing non-European resources (labor, minerals, raw materials, and foodstuffs). Of course, colonial subjects resisted; for example, there was the successful late-eighteenth-century uprising of the enslaved in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (forming the first, Haitian, postcolonial state in 1804), but also the unsuccessful Amritsar rebellion, put down savagely by British forces in India in 1919. Such uprisings (including by

the enslaved in the southern United States) marked a long-term politics of decolonization, with colonial subjects articulating and gaining moral, material, and political power as **countermovements** to European empires. Resistance to colonialism, including substantial peasant mobilizations from China to Mexico to Kenya, was matched with labor uprisings and political organization during the late-colonial era. The British faced widespread labor strikes in their West Indian and African colonies in the 1930s, and this pattern continued over the next two decades in Africa as British and French colonial subjects protested conditions in cities, ports, mines, and on the railways.⁴⁷

Colonial rule eventually surrendered to definitive anticolonial power struggles, animated by class and cultural mobilizations for independence. The **colonial project** reconfigured and subordinated communities and resources to service imperial needs, including through the creation of labor regimes. However, colonialism was rooted in and defended through racial politics that both justified subjugation (including enslavement) and fueled resistance across the colonial world. These struggles ushered in a postcolonial era, embedded in an expanding system of sovereign nation-states forming the United Nations organization.

The UN Security Council comprised China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States, with new states joining through the 1940s and 1950s. During this period French demographer Alfred Sauvy coined the term *Third World*: the world region of postcolonial states distinct from the **First** (Western bloc) and **Second** (Soviet bloc) **Worlds**. Both **First** and **Second Worlds** were engaged in expanding their spheres of influence in the Third World with economic and military assistance. In this context, the Third World was also consolidating its power as a third force in world politics through the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In this political context President Truman identified the postcolonial states as “underdeveloped” countries, requiring access to Western largesse. This decree licensed the mid-twentieth-century global development project, facilitating the expansion of liberal capitalism and the application of the GDP price metric to measure national economic growth.

The transformation of material relations into commodities is represented in pricing. As Karl Marx pointed out, even human labor-power came to be commodified, as villagers lost their means of livelihood and were forced to work for monetary wages.⁴⁸ Karl Polanyi extended this observation to land and currency, noting that with the rise of nineteenth-century market society each of these substances came to be traded for a price. He argued that neither labor nor land nor money was *produced for sale*, and so they were really “fictitious commodities.” When they are treated as commodities, workers, farmers, and firms are exposed to exploitative or uncertain conditions (as experienced in the 2008 world financial/debt crisis). That is, their labor, farming, or business is subject to competitive relations beyond their control by a market with seemingly independent authority. Accordingly, *social countermovements inevitably arise and advocate for protection from unregulated markets*.⁴⁹ This kind of “double movement” is definitive of the market system, where commodity relations appear to govern social

relations, and people push back, as we see today across the world with a diverse range of mobilizations against wage stagnation, deteriorating commercial environments, austerity politics, and minority marginalization.

Such pushback defined the twentieth-century interwar period, marked by widespread economic depression and disorder, generating communist, labor union, and fascist interventions for market regulation. The eventual defeat of fascism, and containment of Russia, enabled progressive forms of social protection in postwar Western welfare/development states, regulating markets as the development project took hold. Notably, however, the development project did not facilitate such protective measures for communities in the global South. Today, countermovements, both left and right, are again in play for social protection from the market crises of the globalization project, as it produces labor precarity and migrant labor streams, ecosystem breakdown, and financial corruption in both private and public sectors. Notably, in 2019, the *Human Development Report* noted,

The wave of demonstrations sweeping across countries is a clear sign that, for all our progress, something in our globalized society is not working . . . A connecting thread is deep and rising frustration with inequalities. . . . Too often, inequality is framed around economics, fed and measured by the notion that making money is the most important thing in life.⁵⁰

The Projects as Historical Framework

This book frames the development story around three projects: colonialism, development, and globalization, with a sustainability project possible emerging. Each project models a specific kind of development as political-economic and environmental conditions transform. For example, the transition from development project to globalization project was provoked by increasingly powerful business and financial interests and their political allies engaging in a “countermovement” from above, to protect their expanding global markets from public regulations. This was accomplished with policies of market deregulation in the name of “globalization,” legitimized by neoliberal economic theory. That countermovement pendulum swings the other way as social mobilization from below responds to economic destabilization and intensification of social inequalities as markets have largely escaped social controls.⁵¹

The current market malaise and combination of crises—food, energy, climate, social—suggest the world may transition toward another project, which we would term a *sustainability project*. The dynamic that links these projects and accounts for their succession can be thought of as a series of Polanyian “double movements” inflected with struggles for racial and gender justice: politicization of market rule (for or against) via social mobilization. The colonial project, accompanying the rise of capitalist markets, yielded to the development project, as social and decolonization countermovements challenged the ascendancy of the market in their respective territories. Then the development project yielded to a globalization project installed by a global power elite

to restore market sway and *reduce* the power of states and citizens to the status of facilitators and consumers, respectively.

Currently, the crisis of the globalization project (see Chapter 6) stimulates a wide range of sustainability initiatives at all scales, geared to reducing environmental degradation and climate warming. How these may coalesce into some kind of world ordering is not yet clear. Whether we will see a more authoritarian world order built on energy and climate security claims or some decentralized, ecologically based social organization is among the possibilities informing debate. In the meantime, we can situate our condition via some “development coordinates.”

The Development Experience

Contrary to the idealized version of development, which suggests Western citizens enjoy living standards that are the goal and envy of the rest of the world, the West appears to be “undeveloping,” as jobs have relocated to the regions in the global South, as northern public infrastructure decays, as social services such as education and health care dwindle, and as ecosystems degrade. From this perspective, development does not look like a linear process.

In redistributing jobs to lower-wage regions, transnational firms enhance profitability and northern consumers with incomes enjoy access to low-cost goods produced offshore. In this sense, development is identified, for its beneficiaries, as consumption. This, of course, corresponds with Rostow’s idealized final growth stage and not as the unequal *global relationship* it always was. Much of what we consume today has global origins. Even when a product has a domestic “Made in . . .” label, its journey to market probably combines components and labor from production and assembly sites located around the world. Sneakers, or parts thereof, might be produced in Indonesia or China, blue jeans assembled in the Philippines, a smartphone assembled in Singapore, a watch made in Hong Kong, and clothing in Kenya. The British savor organic vegetables from western China, the Chinese eat pork fed with South American soy, and North Americans consume fast foods that may include chicken diced in Mexico or hamburger beef from cattle raised in Costa Rica. Coffee is from Southeast Asia, the Americas, or Africa. We readers may not be *global citizens* yet, but we are certainly *global consumers*.

But global consumers are still a relative minority of the world’s population, consuming the vast majority of global goods and services.⁵² Over three billion people cannot, or do not, consume in the Western style. Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano observes,

Advertising enjoins everyone to consume, while the economy prohibits the vast majority of humanity from doing so This world, which puts on a banquet for all, then slams the door in the noses of so many, is simultaneously equalizing and unequal: equalizing in the ideas and habits it imposes and unequal in the opportunities it offers.⁵³

It is important also to note that while readers may be accustomed to a commercial culture and view it as the development “standard,” other cultures and peoples are not (as) comfortable with commercial definition or are simply marginal (by choice or circumstance) to commercial life.

Nevertheless, the global marketplace binds consumers, producers, and even those marginalized by resource consumption. Consumers everywhere are surrounded, and often identified, by world products. The global economy is a matrix of networks of commodity exchanges, organized in a variety of cross-border chains. In any one network, there is a sequence of production stages, located across a number of countries at sites that provide inputs of labor and materials contributing to the fabrication of a final product. These networks are called **commodity chains** or supply chains. The chain metaphor illuminates the interconnections among producing communities dispersed across the world. And it allows us to understand that, when we consume a product, we often participate in a global process linking us to a variety of places, people, and resources. iPhones, for example, assembled in China, have used components produced across a network of countries, including Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Workers in these sites often have little security or few rights, as they constitute important but undervalued links in these chains stretching across an often unregulated global workplace, here conceptualized as “poverty chains.”⁵⁴ Although we may experience consumption individually, it is a fundamentally social and environmental act realized through unequal relations. Not only does it bind us to producers elsewhere, but those producers may be disadvantaged by exporting potential local resources.

Global agribusiness, for example, transports food (or biofuels) to the global market, undermining local possibilities for food security. Supplying global consumers rather than improving local conditions is extroverted rather than introverted as in the Rostow schema. Globalization deepens development paradoxes by virtue of its sheer scale. Integrating the lives of consumers and producers across the world does not necessarily mean sharing the benefits of development globally. The distance between consumers and producers and their environments means it is virtually impossible for consumers to recognize the impact of their consumption on people and environments elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

In sum, this opening chapter introduces the multiple dimensions of development as a historically relational process. We connect to the world in multiple ways, with development organizing our lives and our thoughts and aspirations. Though we are its participants and agents, we are not its principal architects. The architects are the power brokers in state administrations, international organizations, and corporate/financial circles, in addition to a powerful discourse idealizing the market as natural and a neutral source of material benefits. This is why markets do not just appear; rather, they

are instituted, enabled, and gamed by powerful interests. In this moment, such “market rule” is very much in contention, precisely because of deepening global inequalities and the climate emergency. As stated in the World Bank’s *International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development 2008* report, “markets fail to adequately value social and environmental harm.”⁵⁵ In other words, *externalizing* the market’s unequal social impacts and related ecological footprints means human well-being takes a back seat to living standards measured in market values. *Well-being* has two distinctive meanings. Indian economist/philosopher Amartya Sen argues that development should pivot on a quality intrinsic to individuals, that the “appropriate ‘space’ is neither that of utilities (as claimed by welfarists), nor that of primary goods . . . but that of substantive freedoms—the capabilities—to choose a life one has reason to value.”⁵⁶ Whereas this assumes individual agency, alternatively, the Spanish American term *buen vivir* (“living well”), derived primarily from Indigenous visions of well-being, promotes community, subordinating economy to ecology and human dignity.

Viewing development as a paradox encourages evaluation of how development is represented, how it works, and how it plays out, across disparate spaces. This is particularly so, given the looming threats to human and planetary health, over and above the automation of jobs and continuing socioeconomic inequalities.

Ultimately, it is important to link local effects and global context in such a way as to see the global in the local and vice versa. While development is conventionally assumed and measured as a national process, its coordinates are worldwide, and this has been so from the colonial era onward. Disconnecting European development from colonialism obscures its global history and transfer of wealth from exploited colonial subjects. Development, therefore, is more complex than its conventional measure (GDP). It comprises power relations that are always contested in one way or another.

Finally, development is not the same across time. We address this by identifying its projects as expressing particular world ordering by a dominant set of norms, practices, and instituted policies. The projects embody differential effects across space, as depicted in case studies of local impacts and initiatives, including resistances. In this sense, development is uneven within and among societies. It has been, and remains, contentious. This book illuminates this by emphasizing development paradoxes, offering a global perspective on development controversies, and enabling a more relational historical understanding.

KEY TERMS

Colonial project	Dependency analysis
Coloniality	Development paradox
Commodity chains	Development project
Countermovements	Development states
Decolonization	Environmentalists’ paradox

First World	Second World
Global Green New Deal (GGND)	Sustainability project
Global North	Third World
Global South	Underdevelopment
Globalization project	World division of labor
Privatization	World-system analysis

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