

## **DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

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### **Summary**

Recognizing education (schooling) and development for what they are – compulsory programs for integrating individuals and peoples into a rapidly globalizing, market-dominated culture, imposing on them a pattern of thinking and living that otherwise has been alien to all known traditional, linguistically-distinct cultures, is crucial to the formation and success of grassroots movements that seek to achieve sustainable social and ecological relationships. Following this train of thought, it becomes vital for grassroots movements that seek social and ecological sustainability to closely monitor and guide the schooling and development processes within their communities. The reason for this is simple. As the driving force behind the current epoch's rush toward modern development, or toward what Lewis Mumford has called the "megatechnic" economy, the market's growth imperative, which schooling and development promote, helps to expose it as a socially and ecologically devastating virus.

As it infects human communities, this economic growth imperative launches an uncompromising assault on the symbolic and literal soil upon which more traditional cultures had created their identity as a people. As it destroys the foundations of that which had once defined them as human beings, it moves like a contagion to transform them and their progeny into agents of its future replication. For once it has sucked the life from one community and destroyed the commons that had once sustained it, the market-dominated culture, promoting growth, progress and development, must spread to find another. The spread of the market virus (aka: global economy) will only result in further undermining the sustainability of humanity's social and environmental relationships.

## 1. Introduction

Though many politicians and educationists, such as those who served on the National Commission for Excellence in Education that produced the now infamous *A Nation At Risk* report, like to implicitly credit the quality of American schools for the ascendancy of US economic power, it is clear that military and political domination over an expanding global system of economic imperialism fell to the United States largely by default in the aftermath of World War II. The war had left the national, industrial infrastructures of that system's other traditional powers in ruin. While prewar planners in America's Council on Foreign Relations had hoped for and predicted a German defeat of the Soviet Union that would have permitted the United States to claim total hegemony, the survival of the Soviet state and its acquired satellites offered US strategists a useful foil in formulating their post-war plans. The ideology of the Cold War, from the US perspective, pitted the benevolent American system of democracy and free market capitalism against the Soviet system of totalitarian socialism. American propaganda immediately exploited the internationalist flavor of the various socialist movements that emerged as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century to paint the Soviet Union as an evil nation dedicated to world domination. Hence, the doctrine of the Cold War allowed the United States to cast its own plans for global hegemony as defensive in nature, never to be perceived as naked aggression.

Though hardly a military threat to US power, the Marxist rhetoric exploited by the Soviets did pose, in the eyes of American planners, a very real ideological threat to their designs. This threat rested in the appeal that socialist ideals held for common people, which US planners recognized as lacking in their own plans. To counter that appeal and disguise its own imperial designs behind a cloak of righteousness, President Harry Truman pronounced a global campaign to replace the old system of colonial expansion and economic imperialism with a new program of *development*, allegedly based on the concept of democratic fair dealing. This global campaign promised to lift the world's social majorities out of their undignified condition of *underdevelopment* by remolding their societies in the image of the new global, democratic capitalist masters.

## 2. The Genocidal Nature of Development

Less than two years before Truman pronounced *development* as the rationale for expanding US intervention in the affairs of other nations, the United Nations retained Rafaël Lemkin to head a committee charged with drafting a law to define, prevent, and punish the crime of genocide. It was Lemkin who had originally coined the term *genocide* in 1944, by combining the ancient Greek word for race, tribe or nation (*genes*) with the Latin word for killing (*cide*), to refer to any policy intended to bring about the elimination of a targeted human group. Though obviously moved by the atrocities of Nazism in Germany, this original definition recognizes that outright physical acts of murder represent only one method by which to carry out policies aimed at the extermination of a people. Even so, in pursuing its activities that would lead to the creation of the Secretariat's Draft of the current Genocide Convention, Lemkin's committee significantly expanded and lent greater specificity to Lemkin's original definition. Not only would a policy qualify as genocidal if it intentionally sought the destruction of some racial, national, linguistic, religious or political group, but also if it

sought to prevent the preservation and development of that group. The committee also specified three means by which such policies could be carried out.

1. *Physical Genocide* could include the direct method of physical extermination as employed by the Nazis against numerous groups during their reign of terror, but Lemkin's committee included a number of other measures under this category:

- Deliberately imposing conditions of life that would surely result in the slow death of a people
- Mutilations and biological experiments not intended for curative purposes
- Depriving a group of their means of livelihood by confiscation, curtailment of work, and the denial of housing and supplies otherwise available to other groups within the same geographic area

2. *Biological Genocide* included programs of involuntary sterilization, creating obstacles to marriage and segregating the sexes so as to prevent procreation among the target population.

3. *Cultural Genocide*, which will come to hold the greatest significance for this article, includes all policies intended to eradicate the specific traits by which a targeted population defines itself as a culture by imposing on that population an alien national pattern.

By refusing to assign a hierarchy to these three categories of genocide, Lemkin's committee acknowledged no moral or legal distinction between physical violence and cultural violence. In fact, Lemkin used the terms *genocide* and *ethnocide* (which he also coined) interchangeably. He viewed them as synonymous.

Lemkin's committee submitted its draft to the UN's Economic and Security Council (ECOSOC) in November of 1947. From there, it was sent for review to a seven member ad hoc committee. Given the imperial intent of development as defined in this article, it comes as no surprise that the US delegate who chaired that committee would have successfully worked to eliminate the category of *cultural genocide* from what would be adopted in 1948 by the General Assembly as the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. What is "development," after all, if not the eradication of a culture through the imposition of an alien national pattern – the very essence of cultural genocide? Neither should it be a surprise that the United States, also in light of its imperial intent, refused to fully ratify this *Convention*, even in its diluted form, until 1996. When the US finally submitted its ratification with the UN in 1998, it used a perverse form of self-proclaimed, international executive privilege known as the "Sovereignty Package" to effectively exempt itself from compliance.

In order to fully understand the connections between imperialism, development, and cultural genocide it is necessary to examine the nature of the "alien national pattern" that development seeks to impose on targeted populations. Prior to that, however, it is vital to recognize that the practice of imposing an alien national pattern on targeted

populations under some ruse of benevolence has always functioned as part of imperial strategies. Even the Roman Empire did not expand its sphere of domination through brute military force alone. Beginning in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the Romans established settlements known as *colonia*, from which the word *colonialism* is derived. The *colonia* served many functions, none more important to considerations of cultural genocide than their status as showcases of Roman culture and examples of the Roman way of life. Such examples demonstrated to the targeted native populations of the provinces – those referred to by the Romans as *barbarians* (the “underdeveloped” of the age!) how they were expected to live. Once members of the barbarian population proved that they had satisfactorily internalized the alien, Roman national pattern, the emperor promoted the settlement to the status of *colonia civium Romanorum*, bestowing on its targets full citizen rights and dedicated a temple to the so-called Capitoline triad: Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, the deities venerated in the temple of “Jupiter Best and Biggest” on the Capitol in Rome.

The cultural genocide initiated under the Romanization of Europe would continue through its later “Christianization.” Though Christianity became the official state religion of the Roman Empire – formally outlawing the practice of all other religions – during the reign of Theodosius I (379-395 CE ), the Christianization of Northern and Western Europe did not begin in earnest until the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. While space prohibits a full accounting of their significance, the histories of these two processes – Romanization and Christianization – mark a crucial starting point from which to begin expanding current understandings of the contemporary patterns of cultural genocide perpetrated in the name of contemporary “development.” Typically, scholars associate those patterns solely with atrocities committed by European and American governments against non-European peoples. While those associations cannot be denied, they frustrate efforts to build stronger networks of grassroots solidarity by unnecessarily putting people of European ancestry on the defensive by characterizing them as members of a victimizing class. In tracing the origins of the cultural genocide perpetrated under the banner of development back to the forces of imperial domination that destroyed the indigenous cultures of Europe, a basis is provided for strengthening possible networks of solidarity by situating those of European ancestry in a more paradoxical position – as victimizers and victims. While the nation states under which they live have victimized peoples outside of Europe, those same nation states took their current form through their participation in similar imperial patterns of cultural genocide against the various indigenous cultures of Europe. The vestiges of those indigenous cultures of Europe, which survived the genocidal activities of Roman and Holy Roman Empires, would later be destroyed by the same alien pattern associated with development.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

**David Gabbard** grew up in a working class family who'd migrated to southwestern Ohio from rural Appalachia during the Great Depression. His politicization occurred while serving in the US Army during the Reagan administration. It was at this time that he began questioning the professed benevolence of governments and their allied institutions, particularly schools. He went on to complete his doctoral studies in the Department of Educational Foundations at the University of Cincinnati. He later completed post-doctoral studies in the Science, Society, and Technology Program at the Pennsylvania State University where he met Ivan Illich, whose influence left an immeasurable impact on his thinking.