

STORIES THAT HAVEN'T CHANGED THE WORLD: NARRATIVES AND COUNTERNARRATIVES IN THE CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the arguments of six contemporary development experts who have sought and proposed solutions to extreme poverty. The paper argues, through the application of Emery Roe's narrative policy analysis, that though these solutions appear varied and innovative, they continue to be couched in mid-twentieth century evolutionist models of development. Two experts are singled out as offering original approaches to the "problem" of development: William Easterly and Amartya Sen.

INTRODUCTION

The international development community has been working to find solutions to poverty and improve the developing world's living standards for now over half a century. A panoply of "eureka" schemes designed by experts to eradicate poverty once and for all have emerged during this period, each one claiming to have learned from the errors committed by their predecessors to uncover the "real" solution to global (economic) inequality. The illusion created by this influx of development theories and approaches is that the mainstream development community is making progress and moving closer to the ideal scenario where poor countries, which represent one sixth of the world's population, will some day catch up economically to the richest countries. Simply put, this is not the case. Many of the ideas that are presented as new are merely

slight variations on old ideas rehashed to make them look refreshing. An analysis of a variety of texts representing the most recent attempts to overhaul the system reveals the increasingly visible predicament of an industry that has repeatedly failed to deliver on promises to eradicate poverty and global suffering. Development experts such as Jeffrey Sachs, Robert Calderisi, Paul Collier, and Gregory Clark are representative members of this "eureka-scheme clique," having followed the mantra of development-as-economic-growth in their attempts to fix the industry. Significantly, the schemes that seem most promising are not schemes at all, but suggested alternatives that move beyond the clichés and outdated principles evinced by the former. Amartya Sen and William Easterly are renegades in their field, having proposed unconventional approaches to development that move away from the outdated and often deleterious

assumptions that pervade mainstream development theory.

Following Emery Roe's (1999) concept of counternarrative, I argue that the conventional solutions proposed by most economic practitioners continue to fail because despite being disguised as subversive, they are founded on tried and tired premises that have failed in the past. Meanwhile, the approaches that have actually proposed a radical break from the mainstream are still rather new and have yet to be popularized in the milieu and therefore, lack the authoritative weight to yet make a significant impact. The risk in this standpoint is of course the possibility that these alternative approaches will also prove fruitless in the future, but the fact that they represent a break from hackneyed economic panaceas gives some measure of hope.

This essay applies Roe's approach of using contemporary literary theory to examine development discourse in order to guide policy more effectively. At the same time it turns the approach back on itself to reveal a possible complicity in the perpetuation of a particular "teleological metanarrative" (Ferguson 1999:15) of development that touts *intervention* as the unique solution to economic backwardness. That Roe proposes a method of studying various (faulty) narratives to generate alternatives by guiding policy in a new direction makes the fundamental assumption that outside intervention is necessary and vital to improving the well-being of humanity worldwide. It is clear that without this assumption the inter-

national development community would not exist. Let me posit, therefore, that Easterly takes the most compelling approach to development by making light of the failures of big-push interventionist programs that have ruled development theory and practice in the past. Of the sample of development theorists I have examined, he is the only one who departs from the axiomatic view that an outside (white) hand is crucial to the betterment of the human condition. Sen (2000), on the other hand, makes the most compelling and original arguments from within the interventionist camp for changing the way we view development.

WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT?

Before addressing the various development approaches, it is necessary to examine what development means. Development, both academically and colloquially, is often conceptualized as a linear, forward process of change, both on a local and a global scale, favouring economic growth or other avenues (such as foreign aid) for attaining a highly desired status of material, social, and personal well-being. Development is often seen as both a process and a state, especially at the country level, whereby developing nations are seen as lacking certain elements present in developed nations, while taking steps to gain those desired elements (i.e. high GDP per capita, low death rates, industrialization, high employment rates, etc).

Other popular definitions view development as "the end of poverty"

(Sachs 2005), modernization through economic growth (Rostow 1960), catching-up to the world's richest economies by increasing income (Clark 2007), etc. Unconventional definitions include viewing development as freedom (Sen 2000) and development as home-grown, non-interventionist solutions to poverty (Easterly 2006). The first set of preliminary definitions has emerged approximately in the last decade with the exception of Rostow. Yet their focus on economy, wealth, and income has its origins in 1940s economic development discourse and 1960s modernization theory.

The idea that poor countries suffer from some sort of affliction preventing them from climbing the ladder of prosperity or evolving past the universal primordial stage of poverty stems from a long tradition in the West of understanding social change from a teleological point of view. Anthropology has been good at pointing the finger at its own 19th century forefathers such as Spencer for erroneously applying Darwin's evolutionary principles to the study of societies. Yet these principles had a firm grip even up to the 1960s when Walt Rostow penned his *Stages of Economic Growth* (1959), which took an evolutionary approach to development and modernization. "For Rostow, the main thing is to move from tradition to modernity" (Rist 1997:96). From this point of view, society becomes developed when it has moved through the five stages of economic growth through which it acquires the necessary skills and technologies to sustain a level of

economic growth that allows it to attain the desired final stage of "high-consumption" (Rist 1997:98). Modernization, then is a "nakedly evolutionist narrative" (Ferguson 1999:16) that views development as the shedding of the primitiveness and backwardness of tradition to don the high-speed progressiveness of modernity through economic growth.

According to Rist, the principles of modernization theory started to bud in politics on January 20th, 1949 at President Truman's Inaugural Address. In one speech Truman simultaneously started his presidential career and a half-century of development discourse that continues to permeate the international community today (Rist 1997:71-72). During his address he framed development in terms of economic growth and the improvement of material living standards for the world's most destitute, creating a platform on which subsequent development economists (like Rostow) would spring forth to propose action plans for boosting economic growth where it had been reduced to a trickle. The uncertainty that emerged as a result of attempting to apply a grand and simple solution to a highly complex issue was almost immediate. Failed attempts led to more earnest efforts at the same breed of solution, yet experts were always perplexed at the reasons for these disappointments.

There has been little divergence in the mainstream development community from this early conception of development. Those who deviate are a minority, but the force of their arg-

uments reveals a debate in the theories and practices surrounding development. The two counternarratives in this debate, I argue (using Roe's analytical framework), will serve the development community in generating a triangulated and synthesized conclusion. Triangulation occurs when divergent approaches, such as the ones mentioned above, converge (Roe 1999:41-44). I argue that the conclusion one must arrive at after scrutinizing the narratives of most modern development theorists is that structure-oriented, big-push approaches are ineffectual and should be replaced by the less popular agent-oriented, home-grown approaches foregrounded by Sen and Easterly.

NARRATIVES AND COUTNERNARRATIVES

This leads me to a brief but crucial discussion of Roe's analytical framework for understanding rural development programs, as I will be applying it to a number of development alternatives proposed in recent years. Roe proposes that the key to successful development requires a "politics of complexity" that is non-existent in the crisis scenarios or narratives that have guided policy to date (1999:4). Roe explains that when faced with highly complex and uncertain development scenarios, practitioners are often obliged to come up with a narrative or story that will stabilize policy-making. Evidence is often conflicting, contradictory, or sparse in these situations, which complicates decision-making. Crisis scenarios emerge as a solution to these conditions when they ignore the complex-

ity of a situation and simplify the factors to make way for quick and (apparently) easy solutions. The desertification scenario, for example, proposes the "insidious, spreading process that is turning many of the world's marginal fields and pastures into barren wastelands" (Roe 1999:4-5). Where the development community has insisted for years that desertification is a major threat on the African continent, and that the problem is worsening each year, more recent studies suggest there is no evidence to support the claim. So why do we continue to act as if desertification is a major priority? Crisis scenarios and other narratives of the sort persist because no alternatives have emerged to replace them. Roe explains that simply criticizing the narrative by appealing to empirical evidence does nothing for policy; what is needed is a counternarrative, or a "rival hypothesis or set of hypotheses that could plausibly reverse what appears to be the case, where the reversal in question, even if it proved factually not to be the case, nonetheless provides a possible policy option for future attention because of its very plausibility" (1999:9).

If we follow Roe, then, in his application of literary theory to extremely difficult public policy issues such as development, it becomes evident that what is needed is not only a fastidious critique of the existing development narratives, but an alternative narrative that can act as a plausible solution to the repeated failures of previous development approaches (1994:1). Let me take it one step further in suggesting that a simple alt-

ernative is not sufficient in this sense; what is necessary is an alternative that breaks far enough away from the norm to escape the oft invisible and pernicious premises from which these narratives have sprung. And this is where my argument comes in: Sen and Easterly, in my view, have *actually* developed the counternarratives to which other authors have laid claim.

What will follow is a discussion of the various development approaches propounded by each author interspersed with a discussion of the various theoretical and axiomatic premises which have locked development approaches into a circular path of failure, and then, more cheerfully, the reasons why the “renegades” have a better chance of success.

THE PROBLEM

Though the concept of development appears simple, concrete, and certain in its concern with bringing the poor up to par with the wealthier segment of the human population, the concept itself is rife with uncertainty, complexity, and change. In the simplest terms, one would expect that the problem that development seeks to fix is poverty and that the solution to that poverty would be an injection of money. Yet a cursory examination of the development literature reveals that there are as many definitions of the problem as there are writers on the topic. The corollary, of course, is that there are just as many solutions to the problem as definitions (despite being variations on the same theme of economic growth).

James Ferguson’s conceptualization of wealth and poverty provides a good illustration. Whereas most, as mentioned above, characterize poverty as largely the result of a lack of income, Ferguson argues that “the question of wealth cannot be separated from the wider sociocultural context within which different categories of wealth acquire their meaning” (1992:55). The “assumption of universal exchange,” which pervades Western conceptualizations of wealth, is the belief that different forms of wealth, such as income, housing, labour power, clothing, etc, can be converted into each other to form a common currency (Ferguson 1992:56). What is often ignored, Ferguson explains, is that different goods mean different things in different contexts. In Lesotho, for example, he found it impossible to rank the various households in a village according to their levels of wealth because each had a combination of goods which were often nonconvertible and could not be transformed into a universal currency for evaluation. If one household had nice clothing but lived in a mud hut, while another wore rags while living in a lavish home that was inherited but could not be sold, how was the author to establish which was the wealthiest? This one example gives a sense of the complexity involved in understanding poverty itself, let alone attempting to understand what development is supposed to entail.

Just as Roe (1999) suggests, in the face of high complexity and uncertainty in development scenarios, stories emerge from the development experts to help stabilize policy making.

Each of the experts I examine has his own story about why such a large proportion of humanity remains underdeveloped, yet often with overlapping themes rooted in outdated philosophical assumptions.

Poverty Traps

For Jeffrey Sachs, it is “our task to help [the poor] onto the ladder of development” (2005:2). In *The End of Poverty* (2005), he tells the story of how the world’s poor came to be, and still remain poor. He shares the view with many other experts that global poverty is a structural problem stemming from factors external to the agents who suffer its consequences. Sachs tells a story that seems aimed at refuting the notion (still popular in some spheres) that the poor are poor because they are lazy and undisciplined, or because their governments are corrupt, so all they need to do is be like “us” and they will prosper (Sachs 2005:56). He argues “the poor face structural challenges that keep them from getting even their first foot on the ladder of development” (Sachs 2005:226). He refers to these structural challenges as “poverty traps.” Eight reasons (poverty traps) are listed for why there remains a growing gap between the rich and the poor: poverty as a cause for economic stagnation, physical geography, fiscal traps, governance failures, cultural barriers, geopolitics, lack of innovation, and demographics. Without going into too much detail, this story can be analyzed from two angles, the first having already been mentioned in suggesting that Sachs is seeking an alternative to the common

instinct to blame the poor for their own poverty. The second angle reveals the underlying assumption permeating the entire book: the double-edged belief that extreme poverty results from a lack of economic growth, and that if a way to stimulate economic growth can be found, poverty will end. Currently, however, structural constraints such as geography, where some countries suffer economic stagnation due to high transportation costs accrued through being landlocked, or where poor countries cannot offer a market for their own technological innovations – resulting in an innovation gap between rich and poor countries – lie in the way of these countries achieving the necessary growth for them to get a foot on the development ladder so they can pull themselves out of poverty (Sachs 2005).

Sachs’ approach is refreshing in two ways. First, it takes into account a variety of factors leading to the economic stagnation of the world’s poorest countries, which adds an element of complexity to what could have easily been construed as a one-variable problem. Second, it recognizes the weakness in common development approaches that search for the magic-bullet solution. From this view, he argues it is necessary to invest in six types of capital rather than relying on the easy policy solution of looking for one “decisive investment that will turn the tide” (Sachs 2005:255). Sachs also proposes as a general solution that the development community should attack the eight poverty traps with solutions tailored to each in order to overcome global poverty.

From Roe's perspective, this would be an adequate counternarrative to the magic-bullet experts who seek a one-dimensional answer to a complex problem construed to be simpler than it is. The reason for this is that Sachs offers answers that are conducive to policy making; in fact, he even lays out a strategy for ending extreme poverty by 2025 by following the aforementioned advice (Sachs 2005:227). The problem, in my opinion, is that this same breed of solution has been tried before. Even though he differs in some minor respects in his approach, the basis of his argument is cemented in the hegemonic belief that economic growth is *the* answer to poverty.

Chutes and Ladders

Paul Collier wrote *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can be Done About it* (2007) to address why one billion people have failed to achieve economic growth that would bring them to the level of the five billion who have escaped extreme poverty. He draws on Jeffrey Sachs' concept of poverty traps and focuses on those traps which he deems to have received the least attention: the conflict trap, the natural resources trap, the trap of being landlocked, and the bad governance trap. Much like Sachs, Collier tells a story of how one small part of the world missed out on the wealth and riches that the rest of the world enjoys because of obstacles that got in the way. He advises the reader to "think [...] of development as chutes and ladders," where the rich countries have managed to climb

the ladders of growth while some unlucky poor countries have fallen down the chutes. He equates the reality of the poor folk with a 14th century reality, characterized by "civil war, plague, ignorance" coexisting with the 21st century, tacking the idea of social evolution to that of economic growth (Collier 2007:3-5).

Collier shares with Sachs a number of assumptions about poverty and how to eradicate it. First, because he takes the poverty trap approach, he believes there are structural constraints preventing the poorest countries from achieving the same levels of wealth as the rest of the world. Second, he believes economic growth is an important factor in the recovery of these countries from the brink of despair. According to Collier, "growth is not a cure-all, but the lack of growth is a kill-all" (2007: 190). And finally, he is a proponent of big-push strategies geared toward intervention schemes for attacking the obstacles to economic growth (Collier 2007:184). Where he diverges from Sachs is in his insistence on focusing not only on investment or aid to achieve these goals, but also on security, policy and charters, and trade. To break the conflict trap, for example, post-conflict countries need foreign military intervention to keep the peace, as well as long-term aid to help them get back on their feet after conflict (Collier 2007:177). And since "there is no world government [...] remedying the problems of the bottom billion is a global public good," which means the world needs to find ways to legislate these big-push strategies and impose condition-

ality on aid in order to ensure they work (Collier 2007:183-184).

Collier, along with the critics who awarded him the Lionel Gelber Prize for his book, seem to find something innovative in this approach, despite the fact that it draws on the concept of the poverty trap, which he himself admits is an in-vogue approach to development discourse. He even claims that the global inequality that exists today will persist unless “we radically change our approach” (Collier 2007:5). To him, the poverty trap approach is the answer to that challenge. Yet again, Collier comes up against many of the same limitations as Sachs in his focus on economics and intervention. His solutions smack of the same assumptions and errors committed by the Breton Woods institutions that imposed strong conditionality on governments for loans in the 1980s, and which did virtually nothing to improve the living conditions of the poorest. These concepts have been tried repeatedly and have failed repeatedly, yet they continue to be recycled by economists like Sachs and Collier for lack of an alternative (counternarrative) that seems more effective.

Malthus-Resurrected

Gregory Clark also writes of traps when attempting to negotiate the reasons behind the current global income gap, but rather than a poverty trap he refers to a Malthusian trap. Clark traces the growing gap between rich and poor to the industrial revolution. Fundamentally, he believes that “there is ample evidence that wealth

– and wealth alone – is the crucial determinant of lifestyles, both within and between societies” (Clark 2007:3). He claims that while the industrial revolution “reduced income inequalities *within* societies, it has increased them *between* societies,” a process which he refers to as the “*Great Divergence*” (Clark 2007:3, emphasis in original). In response to the question - why are some countries richer than others? - Clark appeals to two main factors: technology and demographics. In his view, all societies were poor until the Industrial Revolution, after which an exponential increase in technological innovation in the West created a process whereby these countries experienced a rise in incomes while the rest saw a decrease.

Clark claims technological efficiency is a major factor in producing the income gap. The success of countries like England are attributed to “accidents of institutional stability and demography,” where a combination of slow population growth and the fertility of the rich meant an increase in the “embedding of bourgeois values” into the culture, and even perhaps, he argues, the genes of the population. A low-population society permeated by values conducive to economic growth such as “hard work, patience, honesty, rationality, curiosity, and learning” meant that labourers were able to use innovative technologies efficiently because they had the know-how and the discipline to do so (Clark 2007:11). The same technologies transported to countries that were lacking these values with high population growth suffered from

poor productivity because the same machines needed a greater number of labourers to make up for their inefficiencies, which meant a lower return on labour (Clark 2007:334-35). Clark manages to inject a social and cultural dimension into the type of narrative common to the “poverty trap” theorists – that all of mankind shared in the existence of poverty but that some structural constraint, be it geography, conflict, demography or culture prevented one unlucky portion of the population from digging itself out of its own misery. Clark’s story differs from the others in its ending; rather than proposing a big-push scheme or even a small-scale solution, Clark offers no solution at all:

History shows [...] that the West has no model of economic development to offer the still-poor countries of the world. There is no simple economic medicine that will guarantee growth, and even complicated economic surgery offers no clear prospect of relief for societies afflicted with poverty. Even direct gifts of aid have proved ineffective in stimulating growth (2007:373).

Though this approach diverges from the others, it hardly qualifies as a useful counternarrative given its lack of policy relevance. It offers an explanation (although not necessarily a new one, given its reliance on Thomas Malthus’ 200 year old ideas) for why some parts of the world remain poor, but fails to offer an alternative for the development community. At this point we are caught between two extremes. If we follow the big-push schemes that promote direct foreign intervention from a top-down, gov-

ernmental level, which will impose constraints and limitations on underdeveloped countries, we risk the same mistakes as the infamous Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). But if we follow Clark’s point of view, we sit back on our haunches and cross our fingers, hoping for the best – not a viable option, especially from Roe’s perspective

Blaming the Poor

Robert Calderisi is a former spokesperson on Africa for the World Bank. He wrote *The Trouble with Africa: Why Foreign Aid Isn’t Working* (2006) as a critique of the popular assumption that the West is to blame for Africa’s lack of development. The problem, according to Calderisi, is that the international community is suffering from white guilt and continues to blame Africa’s problems on colonialism and neo-imperialist policy that has designed flopped programs like the SAPs. Because of this, rich countries continue to prescribe an increase in monetary aid to both ease their consciences and help the poor. Calderisi tells the story of a continent that has been independent now for forty years and has already overcome its biggest obstacles to development. It is now time to “throw the spotlight back on Africa” because “Africa is now responsible for its own problems” (Calderisi 2006:7). More aid, he believes, will not help Africa. The issue is not a lack of funds, but improper management of funds. He points out that “half of the world’s aid has been reserved for Africa” in recent years and yet the development reports show no progress

in economic growth or living standards (Calderisi 2006:15).

The obstacles to growth then, are not poverty traps or Malthusian traps, structural problems stemming from external constraints, but rather are internal to the continent. Africa is poor because of “culture, corruption, and political correctness” (Calderisi 2006:77). In short, Africans share certain cultural traits like a desire to share, familial values, and respect for elders that predispose them to accepting bad governance, which would not happen in a region where individualism and rationality are dominant values (Calderisi 2006:77-99). Corruption prevents foreign aid from reaching its targets and thus impedes the development projects for which it was intended. And finally, because foreigners feel guilty for colonialism and racism, they feel obligated to compensate Africa for its misdeeds. Calderisi argues that corrupt Africans benefit from this “guilt-mongering” as it permits them to avoid taking responsibility for their own development (2006:92).

However counter-intuitive, Calderisi (2006:209) seems to advocate a strong alternative in proposing to reduce foreign aid by half instead of increasing it, as other prominent spokespersons like Stephen Lewis (2005) have recommended. The logic behind this is that countries receiving less aid are more likely to budget wisely and send the funds where they are really needed. Problematic in this approach is the conditionality that accompanies the aid as Calderisi proposes that foreign aid have strings

attached. Countries receiving aid should be monitored for transparency and democracy, much like in the SAP era. So despite the appeal of a story with a different ending and strongly radical roots, the solutions have themes common to failed programs. Calderisi is also another proponent of the interventionist approach. He argues that development should not be left to a *laissez-faire* economy but that good public policy is crucial because it will “put young girls in school, provide clean water, and fight HIV/AIDS ruthlessly” (Calderisi 2006:9).

THE RENEGADES

Amartya Sen and William Easterly offer, in my opinion, the most interesting counternarratives to the dominant teleological metanarrative of interventionist development. They tell two completely different stories about what development is and what it should be. By “reversing old patterns of thinking” (Roe 1999:8) and taking as the starting point the failures of other approaches, Sen and Easterly have mastered the art of counternarrativizing. Yet their policy relevance remains questionable. One of the main facets of Roe’s argument is that counternarratives should be geared toward producing alternatives that will promote plausible policy options to replace former ineffective ones. As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the assumption that policy, and by extension external intervention, are necessary for the achievement of development may be somewhat problematic. Clark seems to take this view in his refusal to of-

fer concrete solutions to the problem of global poverty. But his approach reeks of defeat since he believes there simply *is no* solution, which gets us nowhere. Where Sen and Easterly depart from this continuum of extremes (from defeatist inaction to top-down policy intervention) is their ability to come up with novel ways both of conceptualizing and remedying the problem of development. Sen is unique in his conceptualization of development as a path towards increasing individual freedom, and Easterly in his formulation of alternatives for solving economic and material inequalities that lead to extreme poverty.

Capability Deprivation

Whereas Clark and the other development experts cited above make it clear that they believe “wealth – and wealth alone” is the determinant to consider in order to gauge the well-being of a population, Sen voices a different opinion. He believes that a focus on integrating poor economies into the global market to help improve the lives of the destitute misses the point (Sen 2007:3). It is too narrow of a perspective that ignores the other crucial elements that also have an impact on the quality of life. Sen zones in on freedom as a major determinant for assessing well-being. He argues this approach is broader and more inclusive because it takes “a view of development as an integrated process of expansion of substantive freedoms that connect with one another,” so that “economic, social and political considerations” are integrated (Sen 2000:8). So rather

than ghettoizing his field of investigation only into a market-oriented approach, he expands his gaze by using a determinant that acts as an explanatory umbrella for multiple spheres that affect development. Aristotle qualified this when he said: “wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else” (Sen 2000:14).

To summarize briefly his argument, Sen asserts that poverty is not simply the lack of economic resources, but occurs when an individual’s elementary capabilities are deprived (2000: 20). By contrast to the poverty trap theorists who take a structural perspective on development, Sen focuses on the “agency aspect” of the individual; greater freedom means individual actors can help themselves and influence the world (2000:18). Sen argues, then, that “Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive states” (2000:18).

Sen admits that income is indeed important to the development of personal well-being, but it does not trump the importance of the individual’s capacity to help himself. He gives the example of Kerala, a large and populous province in India that benefited from the government’s prioritizing of social services such as health care and education. Though personal income did not rise during this time, life expectancy rose to lev-

els higher than in richer countries like Brazil and South Africa (Sen 2000:46). What is more, this approach breaks away in a sense from the modernization metanarrative that describes development as a teleological process of economic accumulation for personal well-being. Development is no longer viewed as a means for obtaining income/wealth, but as a means for improving quality of life.

Sen's strength in argument is effectively his greatest weakness in terms of policy relevance. An approach this nuanced and thorough risks either being ignored by development practitioners who cannot fathom a way to incorporate all of the variables into an effective and plausible policy for action, or it risks being atrophied into a policy that has streamlined the complexity of the narrative in order to zone in on one or two seemingly approachable factors that would fit nicely into a development report. Where Sen's weakness leaves off, however, Easterly's strength begins.

Planners Vs. Searchers

Easterly has written an eloquent rebuttal to Sachs' end of poverty approach in his book *The White Man's Burden* (2006). He takes the position that there are two kinds of development specialists: those who take the blueprint approach by proposing big plans to solve world poverty, to whom he refers as "planners," and those who believe development should take place case by case from within the community that is concerned, referred to as "searchers."

He would also sorely disagree with Calderisi's assertion that Africa, and by extension other post-colonial developing countries, are to blame for their backward slide into extreme poverty. In fact he blames colonization, and what he calls "white mischief" for the development problems faced by these countries today (Easterly 2006:347). He believes that decolonization left most developing countries - in Africa especially - in cultural and economic ruin, and that the combination of white man's guilt and superiority complex encouraged him to muddle in the affairs of these countries in order to help them: "Long-standing Western enthusiasm for bringing the Middle-Kingdom into the modern world has included the use of White Man's Burden brew of Christianity, civilization, and commerce" (Easterly 2006:351). More recent interventions by the West have focused on modern development programs based on big-push itineraries such as massive aid and loan programs run by the World Bank and IMF.

Easterly insists that it is time to stop with big, sweeping goals to change governments abroad. More productive would be to aim to help individuals achieve some level of security so that they can help themselves, much like Sen argues (Easterly 2006:368). Big plans like the ones developed by the West do not work, he explains, because they are too broad and infeasible. Specialists make their plans but do not have the manpower or resources to know, for example, just how many children have malaria in one town and how many doses

of medication they need (Easterly 2006:6). There are too many extraneous factors that outsiders could never predict which dooms these programs to failure. Those who take the “searchers” approach, however, are more likely to be successful because they are, of necessity, insiders (Easterly 2006:15). They know what is happening on the ground and understand the issue inside-out. “Homegrown development” (Easterly 2006:34), Easterly believes, is a more realistic way of approaching development. He proposes a decentralized, market-place style approach to development where there are no sweeping blueprints for ending poverty, but carefully chosen projects aimed at addressing specific issues in particular locales (Easterly 2006:377). “The only Big Answer is that there is no Big Answer,” he states (Easterly 2006:382).

Easterly’s most brilliant suggestion, in my opinion, which also has policy relevance, is to take Dennis Whittle and Mari Kuraishi’s idea to make development act like a free market:

They suggest a marketplace instead of central planning, a kind of eBay meets foreign aid. They see three types of actors: (1) social entrepreneurs close to the poor who propose projects to meet their needs; (2) individuals and institutions with technical and practical knowledge, and (3) donors who have funds they want to give away [they] envision [...] a decentralized market in which each category has many players who seek out players in the other categories and spontaneously form matches (another possible metaphor: aid’s version of an online dating service) (Easterly 2006:376).

This is one of many examples he

proposes as an alternative to the blueprint syndrome from which the development community presently suffers. The home-grown, bottom-up perspective appears to hold more water than its alternative, he explains, because “even when the West fails to ‘develop’ the Rest, the Rest develops itself” (Easterly 2006:363). He gives the examples of Hong Kong and Singapore, two countries that never received aid or loans from the IMF and yet represent major success stories of development (Easterly 2006:349). In addition, much like in Sen’s proposal, Easterly supports a view that moves away from the teleology of development schemes that seek to bring the “medieval” world into the “modern” world. Development is viewed as a personalized, case-specific endeavour to remedy specific issues on the ground without the grand-schemes associated with major development programs. Moreover, policy intervention in this case is relegated to the task of changing the nature of the development industry itself, rather than policies directed toward development programs per se. This means that Easterly’s approach challenges even Roe’s belief that development narratives need to be geared toward effective policy guidance, which in my opinion, is the ultimate counter-narrative.

CONCLUSION

The development narratives/theories/scenarios I have examined each seem at first glance to offer alternatives to the failed development schemes that have been floating around since the 1940s. They offer rebuttals and have

entered a debate in the community about what is the actual problem that needs fixing in order to achieve development. Most agree that development consists of economic growth, the hope being that an increase in income per capita is the “tide to lift all boats” so that extreme poverty can be eradicated. Each narrative appears to give *the* solution to *the* problem of poverty via some form of big-push (eureka) scheme. Yet taken together, all of these conventional approaches reveal an almost dogmatic adherence to assumptions dating back to 19th century evolutionism, which hinders the development community’s ability to move beyond the narrow focus on the economy and attend to the other crucial determinants affecting human well-being, including social, political, and cultural aspects.

The real counternarratives that have emerged are the marginal views espoused by Sen and Easterly, who establish new ways of conceptualizing poverty and development, and new ways of approaching their resolution. Emery Roe’s application of literary theory to policy analysis makes it possible to gauge each approach in terms of their merit regarding policy applicability. The theorists more geared toward economic growth fail to offer any real alternatives, while the renegades manage to stir at least a little bit of sediment in development discourse, by challenging even the presumption that development requires 1) policy, and 2) intervention from the West. By themselves, each approach offers a discrete and palpable solution, yet taken together, the uncertainty and complexity that

is hidden behind a singular argument becomes blatant. When six development specialists come out with six (apparently) different ways of explaining what needs to be done, while adhering to the same evolutionist principles of the 1950s, it becomes patently obvious that the solution needs to come from somewhere new.

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