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# Response to Addo

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# Response

H. Quyen Tran

## I. Introduction

With the end of the Cold War, it is evident that global relations are changing politically, economically, and socially. Both the nature and the consequences of such a New World Order, however, remain to be seen. In my opinion, the Macalester International Roundtable provides a setting for different voices and opinions concerning the present nature of the New World Order—and the direction that it should or will take—to be heard. It represents the decentralized global interaction and communication that will be necessary in this monumental and historic time.

Before I begin my response, it is vital that I explain the origins of the thoughts written below. During the spring of 1994, I studied abroad in Guatemala and Colombia, where the perspectives of my instructors were very similar to that of Dr. Herb Addo. Because of a shared orientation, I do not have any major disagreements with him. What I will do here, then, is to touch upon the main points made in the paper and then comment on several of what I consider to be the most important issues.

Dr. Addo asserts that the world as we know it is currently in a “band of transition” between the end of the Cold War Order (CWO) and the beginnings of a nebulous New World Order (NWO). The two important questions that must be asked of this transition are: “Will it result in a NWO that is truly distinct from the CWO?” and “Will there be a valid transformation in the current capitalist world-system, or will there be a ‘self-contained’ change within this system in which it will merely become ‘more conscious of itself . . . to reorganize itself in order to pursue its complete self much more efficiently and vigorously . . .?’”

History seems to suggest that the latter possibility will triumph. For, throughout the five phases in the development of global capitalism (of which the CWO was the fifth phase), each phase has touted the coming of its own NWO. In each supposed NWO, however, the same exploitation of the Third World has continued—the only difference being that the exploitation was

refined into less obvious, less vulgar ways. Instead of pure pillage, plunder, and unequal trade, there came to be import substitution, bottom-up strategies, and other programs designed according to Western models of development. It is, therefore, Dr. Addo's hypothesis that the approaching NWO will not be a true transformation of the capitalist world-system. Using a theoretical framework provided by world-systems theory, he predicts that the capitalist processes of this system will merely be refined to become more efficient and powerful in its continued exploitation of Third World countries.

Dr. Addo proceeds to explore and analyze what he names the four geo-circuits of the capitalist world-system: the West (consisting of Western Europe and the U.S.), the East (Eastern Europe and Russia), Asia (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia), and the South (Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Mainland Asia, the Middle East, and Pacific Islands such as the Philippines and Papua New Guinea). He describes the history and current situation in each circuit and their interlinking relationships, and he makes numerous predictions about what the future holds for each circuit.

Finally, in the conclusion, he calls for "creative pessimism" in the creation of "multiple cultural routes to comparable modernities."

## **II. Development in the Third World: A Critique**

According to Dr. Addo, one bond of commonality that all nations of the South share is the "Third World plight"—that is, the continuously exploited and subordinate character of these nations in relation to the developed centers of the capitalist system. Such subordination has persisted in the South because—unlike the Asian circuit—the countries of the South have not been able to creatively adapt to the changes capitalist culture has wrought on them. In Dr. Addo's perspective, they were not able to adapt because the Cold War, with its propaganda and ideological warfare on capitalism vs. socialism, made them "externally oriented." The South was led to believe that their non-Western economical, political, and social systems were "inferior." In order to improve themselves, they would have to

rid themselves of their “traditional” systems and import the Western way of life.

I agree with this assertion that the South has become “externally oriented,” but I am compelled to note that in Latin America, at least, such an orientation has roots much deeper than that of the Cold War. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, South America was marked by the liberal project of the commercial bourgeoisie, who demanded integration into the international economy. The bourgeoisie faced elite landowners who strongly believed in retaining the self-sufficient ways of the *hacienda* system. The resulting ideological war has manifested itself in various Literatures of the period.

In Argentina, for example, Domingo Sarmiento had already coined the term “Barbarism vs. Civilization” in 1868. He defined Civilization as all that was European, and characterized Barbarism as everything else left over: the ways of life of the *gauchos*, the indigenous people, and the *hacendados*, for example. Believing that a nation could not possibly construct a positive identity from a population consisting of indigenous, African, and *mestizo* peoples, Sarmiento and others like him called for the importation of not only European ways but of European people themselves.

The ideology that Western ways equal “civilization” and all else is “barbaric” and “inferior” can, therefore, be traced back a full century before the Cold War. We must recognize it as a very deep-rooted ideology — powerfully reinforced by the Cold War — which has considerably influenced development strategies in Latin America and other Third World nations. Such development strategies, according to Dr. Addo, are false routes to modernity. I agree. For example, countries that have subscribed to a capitalist model of growth might show an increase in the GNP and other indicators of “growth,” but this does not necessarily mean that poverty, unemployment, and inequality are diminishing. Colombia, for instance, is usually praised because it was the only Latin American country to sustain growth through the debt crisis of the 1980s. This growth, however, measured only the activities within Colombia’s formal economy — an economy that reflects the country’s concentration of wealth and power. The statistics celebrating Colombia’s success do not include the numbers generated by the vast informal economy

that comprises all activities not regulated by the government, from street vendors to small business enterprises. In 1984, this informal sector accounted for 56.6 percent of employment in the urban areas.<sup>1</sup> The low incomes and poverty-level standards of living that are characteristic of the sector do not appear in any of Colombia's economic growth charts. "Prosperous" economies, therefore, can exist simultaneously with widespread impoverishment.

### **III. Alternative Development Toward Sustainable "Modernities"**

At the risk of sounding like some one who has been swept by idealist notions of what development should be, I am going to agree with Dr. Addo's call for "multiple cultural routes to comparable modernities" — modernities that are sustainable and that provide for the basic human needs of people.

Up until very recently, there have been only two models — both of them equally powerful — for social change: capitalism and socialism. It is time that both of these models be jettisoned: capitalism because it promises future affluence while tolerating starvation, and socialism because it promises a humane, egalitarian order while accepting terror. Both of these models condone the sacrifice of generations of people for the promise of a better future. The histories of Brazil and China, respectively, testify to these points.<sup>2</sup>

If both capitalism and socialism are rejected as viable models for social change, what is to take their place? Multiple cultural routes to comparable modernities, under the supervision of what Dr. Addo calls "creative pessimism," seems intelligent. Creative pessimists, according to him, are people who are "fully engaged in the struggle" to improve the human condition but "do not take victory in the struggle for granted and, therefore, are not foolishly optimistic at each and every turn in the long and arduous struggle."

I agree with this idea of "creative pessimism," because, as I interpret it, such an outlook demands that we must be flexible in our search for alternatives to development. Pessimists will realize that there is no single answer to development problems today; new policies and methods, therefore, must be periodi-

cally reevaluated in relation to changing economic, political, and social conditions. Those pessimists who are creative will, furthermore, demand different models of development for different situations. They will recognize that one model will not always work for every set of circumstances.

Where are we going to find the bases for such alternative models for development? The answer already exists in the social movements that have swept through Latin America and other areas of the world in the last decade. While I would not say that such grassroots movements are the panacea for development problems in the South, I do think that they can be very effective in providing for the immediate needs of the people: food, affordable housing and public transportation, potable water, etc.

This opinion is based on firsthand experience. While in Colombia, I did an independent research project on a *jardín infantil* in one of Bogotá's poorer *barrios*, or neighborhoods. The *jardín infantil* — the approximate equivalent of a daycare or preschool — had been created by neighborhood women under the supervision of Dimensión Educativa, a Colombian non-governmental organization dedicated to education. The women, who took care of the children's basic physical needs, had also been trained to facilitate children's development in five main areas: socio-affective, intellectual/cognitive, language, fine motor skills, and gross motor skills.

Although this particular *jardín infantil* is partially state-funded, it is an example of the efficacy of a program created by the people for the people. Before the *jardín infantil* had been created, children with parents or single mothers who worked were locked in their homes alone. These children went hungry and unsupervised throughout the day until their parents or mother returned from work. The *jardín infantil* provides affordable daycare and supervision while ensuring adequate development in the basic social, cognitive, and physical skills of children.

It is important, however, that the fruits of such grassroots work or similar social movements do not distort the true situation in these nations. That is, there is a risk that by improving social problems, grassroots work may draw attention away from fundamental structural problems at the root of poor social conditions.<sup>3</sup> Grassroots work must be viewed as a *temporary* solu-

tion until sustainable development policies can provide for the basic human needs of the people.

#### IV. Development and the “Trialectical Approach”

This approach does not merely point out changes throughout history; it also examines the nature and extent of these changes and *who they will affect*. Such an approach will be revolutionary when applied to development alternatives.

For too long, the deleterious effects of “development” policies have been dismissed as something that will gradually disappear as such policies have time to take root. Under both the capitalist and socialist models of change, the sacrifice of many generations of people is accepted for promises of a better tomorrow. As impoverishment has continued to exist — or worsen — new “improved” policies must be instituted. It is time that the improvement of poor social conditions be the stated goal of development policies—not just a hoped-for byproduct of development policy. This is the only way that the vast majority of the people of the South will welcome the emergence of a new world order. Dr. Addo’s meditations are courageous in an atmosphere of either triumphalism or paralyzing defeat.

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#### Notes

1. Jenny Pearce, *Colombia: Inside the Labyrinth* (London: Latin America Bureau Ltd., 1990).
2. Peter Berger, *Pyramids of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Anchor Press, 1976).
3. Kathy McAfee, *Storm Signals: Structural Adjustment and Development Alternatives in the Caribbean* (Boston: South End Press in association with Oxfam America, 1991).