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30st September 2017

Chapter 1: Key Players and Conflicting Goals in the Development Trajectory

The Treadmill of Production Theory (TOP) was developed by Allan Schnaiberg following World War II as a “political economic approach for understanding environmental ecological disorganization, environmental destruction and harm” (Lynch, 2014, para.1). The key actors in the treadmill are corporations, the state and citizen workers. Corporations favor economic growth because their main goal is profit. Corporations replace labor with energy in production, which results in increasing ecological harm and decreasing social benefits. The state prefers growth so it can accumulate tax revenues from corporations and workers. The state also needs economic growth to provide jobs for those displaced by corporations’ investments in labor-saving technologies. The state legitimates its role by providing protections for its citizens, such as protection from unhealthy drinking water – environmental regulations – and protection from unsafe working conditions – labor regulations. Citizen workers need jobs for material well-being. They also need clean water and healthy work places. Citizen workers also have the potential to be the change-makers, such as pushing the state toward managed scarcity and ecological synthesis. Transnational funders can have considerable effect on citizen-actors’ decision. They focus on the distribution of material resources from the outside of a country into a country.

Citizen workers can then be divided into subcategories of Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and social movement actors (SMAs). NGOs are aided by allies abroad: international bilateral aid organizations, and nongovernmental/transnational social movement organizations. They can vary in terms of their strengths and their agenda. SMAs are sometimes organized into GNOs, and sometimes not. They have a boarder environmental agenda that includes social issues and therefore they differ from environmental GNOs in their resources base. Their strength is from their volunteer power, activists’ commitment to the mission, and their willingness to act. SMAs perhaps best express the concerns and desires of the Ecuadorian people.

Schnaiberg describes the relationship between production expansion and ecological limits as “socioenvironmental dialectic” and he outlined three types of syntheses that could resolve the tension between the two. First is the *economic synthesis* where there are barely any state impediments to accessing the environment and there is unregulated and unlimited expanding production. However, this causes expanding environmental problems and assumes that resources are infinite. Unrestrained oil drilling is a representation in Ecuador of economic synthesis. The second is *managed scarcity* which involves the state creating and enforcing regulations, such as, reduced access and impact on the environment. Oil drilling with environmental rules limiting where, in what matter, and how much oil can be drilled is a form of managed scarcity. Finally, there is the *ecological synthesis* where the state limits producers’ access to the environment based on scientifically determined biophysical limits of what is environmentally sustainable. Keeping the oil in the soil through Yasuní-ITT is an example of ecological scarcity.

Sustainable development can be defined as having three pillars, environmental protection, economic development and social justice – which has its own two facets: meaningful social participation in the choices that are made about the uses of natural resources and the equitable distribution of environmental goods and bads.

From 2009 to 2013 during President Rafael Correa's first term as part of the "citizen's revolution" a National Plan for Good Living was developed. The plan does two things: first it rejects the traditional development paradigm – which has not succeeded and it presents an alternative vision for the country future: *buen vivir/sumak kawsay* or "good living." The concept includes aspects of what we would consider sustainable development, but it goes well beyond sustainable development to deeply consider quality of life.

"Triple Bottom Line" (TBL) is a phrase that refers to companies attempting to prepare three different and separate bottom lines ("Triple Bottom Line," 2009). The first measure is of the corporate profit – "the 'bottom line' of the profit and loss account" ("Triple Bottom Line," 2009). The second is the bottom line of the company's "people account" – measure of how socially responsible a company is throughout its operations ("Triple Bottom Line," 2009). The company's "planet" account is the third bottom line which is a measure of how environmentally responsible it has been ("Triple Bottom Line," 2009). The TBL is important because it forces a company to pay attention to those measures (profits, people and planet) and only when companies measure their social and environmental impact will they become socially and environmentally responsible organizations.

The TBL relates to *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay* in that both are not trying to stop development but want to consider people and the planet when development is going on – hence the term sustainable development is used.

Reflection

In 2007, President Correa presented a concrete proposal, seemingly influenced by *Sumak kawsay*: the Ishpingo, Tambocoha, and Tipuntini (ITT) Initiative to leave the oil in the soil in Yasuní National Park. It was of particular interest because the park contains 20 percent of the country's known oil reserves, some 850 million barrels. The proposal was that "the country would forgo half of these oil revenues – at the time worth \$3.6 billion – if it received the other half through international compensation based on donations placed in a UN administered trust" (Puig, 2013). Ecuador takes the battle against climate change very seriously – it was even the first country in the world to recognize legally enforceable rights of nature in its new constitution that was passed in 2008. The Yasuní-ITT proposal was based on the principle of co-responsibility in that fight against climate change. In the end however, despite the deadline for pledges being extended several times, Ecuador was not able to secure funding. Then, in August 2013, Correa signed the documents that ended the experimental proposal and allowed the area to be exploited for oil.

If I was an Ecuadorian, of course I would have supported the Yasuní-ITT proposal. The proposal, if successful, would have done two things that could have benefited all Ecuadorian people. The first, would have been that the money generated from the international compensation donations placed in the UN administered trust could have been used to tackle poverty and underdevelopment. Ecuador needed those "revenues to help the transition of its economy away from commodity exploitation and to a more diversified and high-value one based on knowledge, including bio-knowledge" (Puig, 2013). The second thing that the proposal would have done is a bit more obvious – it would have protected the Yasuní National Park, which is home to a high level of biodiversity and to many indigenous groups.

The Yasuní-ITT proposal failed because of a lack of international political will to give the financial support. “Just 0.37% of the target was provided by international donors and this made the scheme unworkable” (Puig, 2013). Ecuador, a developing country and a marginal polluter, was proposing a plan that would share in its responsibility to the planet. However, governments in other countries that are developed and more polluting, did not contribute to this responsibility and that is ultimately why the Yasuní-ITT proposal failed.

Ecuador seems like an interesting country to study environmental issues because of the biodiversity and politics. The high biodiversity of the country is a very popular reason – from the Amazon to the Galapagos Islands, there is an immense number of animal and plant species. To me, the geography, specifically the altitude changes throughout the country seems interesting as well – from the parts of the Andes Mountains being over 14,000 feet high to the Galapagos Islands at sea level. The politics in Ecuador seem noteworthy because Ecuador is a country where the national government’s environmental protection goals are constantly at odds with its economic growth goals. Also in the scheme of politics is the incredible fact that no other constitution anywhere has granted nature rights to the level of that of Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution.

Bibliography:

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