

Analytical piece of persistent poverty by beckford and levitt



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Beckford and Levitt. “ Persistent Poverty: Possibilities for Change and Development. ” In The George Beckford Papers, edited by Beckford and Levitt The article “ Possibilities for change and development” begins by stating that the persistence of underdevelopment in the plantation economies derives basically from the nature of the plantation system itself.

Distinct features of the plantation society presented by Beckford such as the prevalence of mono-crop cultivation, dependency on foreign aid and investors, demand for foreign products and social stratification all contributed to the current state most Third World Nations (Beckford, 1972). According to Beckford, the plantation system was a total economic institution where the internal and external dimensions of the plantation system dominate the countries’ economic social and political structure and their relation with the rest of the world.

The persistence of poverty in Third World countries is not one dimensional that is, focusing on an economic standpoint but they also show how the plantation system had a ripple effect into other aspects of society. Because this system has become so engrained in society and its legacy is prevalent even in contemporary society, the problem arises how these countries would overcome this problem. Beckford and Levitt state that these changes are bound to be difficult and sacrifices would have to be made in order to secure development for the long term.

Moreover, these transformations would not solely take place in the economic arena, but also in the socio cultural and political sectors of society. The issue

of persistent poverty is both important and pressing. The plantation system creates underdevelopment by creating a legacy of dependency because decision making concerning fundamental economic issues still reside outside the plantation society. Furthermore there is a lack of motivation toward development efforts because of this. These characteristics are prevalent even in contemporary society where there is a dependency on MNCs.

The structure of our politics/ policies and even infrastructure is developed to accommodate foreign corporations. Additionally, the belief that ‘ foreign is better’ prevails in these societies and because of this, not only is demand of foreign goods high, but it creates tough competition for local entrepreneurs and this hinders growth and development of local markets and perpetuate dependency. In order for these Third World nations to develop, it is imperative that they move away from the “ plantation mindset” and a structure of dependency that binds any possibility of advancement.

Unless this system, its legacy and its ideologies is destroyed, according to Beckford and Levitt, economic, social, political and psychological development may be unattainable. It is evident that the main motivation for writing the article was to present reasons for the persistence of underdevelopment and poverty and furthermore possible solutions to overcome problems emerging from its persistence. The Third World experience, particularly that of the Caribbean is unique to that of First World Nations.

The colonization process and its effects which lasted over four centuries cannot simply be eradicated, thus prescriptive measures that First World

theorists try to impose on these countries are not always effective as these nations are not starting on a level playing field as the developed nations may have initially begun. It was crucial to understand the underlying historical factors that lead to the prevalence of the plantation system and the development of dependency and underdevelopment and then create a model that would offer a solution to the unique problems faced by Third World Nations.

It can be noted that plantation theory emerged from a dependency perspective. Generally dependency theory argues that the economic activity in the richer countries often led to serious economic problems in the poorer countries. Earlier theories focused on economic growth being beneficial to all and presented models that failed to take into consideration historical factors for the inability to develop. Dependency theory was viewed as a possible way of explaining the persistent poverty of poorer countries.

The traditional neoclassical approach said virtually nothing on this question except to assert that the poorer countries were late in coming to solid economic practices and that as soon as they learned the techniques of modern economic, then the poverty would be able to subside. However, Marxist theorists (the dependency school emerged) viewed the persistent poverty as a consequence of capitalist exploitation. Underdevelopment is not a condition; it is an active process of impoverishment linked to development. This is evidently the theoretical undercurrents of plantation theory and furthermore emphasizes the argument presented in the article.

Considering the dependency perspective, it can be seen how exploitation of resources by developed countries contributed to self development while simultaneously producing underdevelopment in other nations. Apart from showcasing the distinct features of plantation society this article also gave insight into overcoming obstacles to development. Beckford and Levitt state that the plantation economy is too open for development to take place and measures to bring about some degree of closure must be taken into consideration.

Furthermore, other obstacles such as securing the linkages from plantation activity, land reform, income redistribution, resource use adjustments, technological change and appropriate restructuring of economic institutions must be all overcome in order for development to take place. This perspective is quite effective in explaining the Third World, particularly the Caribbean experience. Other theories such as those from modernization schools does not account for the underdeveloped state of many of these nations, and the persistence of underdevelopment is generally not solely at the fault of these nations.

The failure to bring about economic and social transformations in these societies also stems from the fact that they try to adopt (wholesale) the development models from these first world nations. These theories were developed mainly on economic understandings and also from metropolitan experience and reality and it does not fit in plantation society. Theories such as those presented by Beckford and other plantation theorists take into account the historical factors and consider this with respect to creating change in both economic and social spheres in society.

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This theory is ultimately more in sync with the reality of the Third World and is able to offer solutions that would address the problems faced there and not further propel these nations into further underdevelopment and poverty. The issues dealt with in the article contributed greatly for an understanding of persistent poverty and underdevelopment in the Third World. New economic, political and social ideologies need to emerge and the theories presented by Caribbean scholars such as Beckford, Best and Levitt and Girvan is still relevant in explaining the perpetuation of plantation society and “ mentality”.

Historical legacies matter for development and this article certainly emphasizes the impact of the historical context and furthermore how this will inevitably affect the chance of growth and development for the future.

Bibliography • Beckford, George and Kari Levitt. “ Persistent Poverty: Possibilities for Change and Development”. In The George Beckford Papers, ed. Beckford and Levitt. Kingston: Canoe Press 2000. Websites • www.infochangeindia.org • www.mona-uw.edu/economics/notices/Elliott.pdf • <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/depend.htm>