



REVIEWS

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JOEL F. ARIATE JR.

After reading the volume on the environment of the three-tome *Development and Security in Southeast Asia* (DSSEA), and chapter after chapter of policy recommendations, one starts to wonder whether these recommendations are for real or just snake oil slathered on the pages of this book.

DSSEA claims that it “has at its core the question of the relationship between government and civil society in their efforts to define and to pursue security, broadly defined” (3). This three-volume work also “posits a tension between how government and its instruments understand and pursue security and how people and the communities that they comprise understand and seek their own particular security interests” (3).

For this volume on the environment “each of the chapters examines the environment, development, and security linkages...These include the overlap of human security and development, the environmental crisis as ‘slow-motion’ security threat, the differing perceptions of such ‘slow-motion’ threats, and the different uses of the environment and security linkage by different actors” (21). Eight case studies focusing on Indonesia and the Philippines with the Southeast Asia as the broader context comprise this volume. These case studies

deal with the following topics: hazardous waste and human security in Southeast Asia, state responses to environmental insecurity in Southeast Asian forests, a Philippine community's perspective on development and (in)security, human and ecological security in the context of mining disputes in the Philippines, food production and environmental security in Indonesia, state capacity and industrial pollution in the Philippines, the textile industry in Indonesia, and climate change and security. Besides probing the environment, development and security linkages, these case studies were also meant to address DSSEA's two other goals. One of which is "developing enhanced theoretical and conceptual understanding of these complex linkages to further our knowledge and to improve our abilities to develop practical instruments in support of improved human well being [*sic*]" (3). The other one is to use this "acquired knowledge and information for empowerment and change" (3).

In sum, the book argues this: have enough social capital, enhance the state's capacity to deal with environmental problems that threaten it and endanger human security, aim for sustainable development, then everything will be all right with the world. How tenable is this proposition?

Much of the weakness of this book is a result of its uncritical deployment of particular concepts like sustainable development, social capital, and human security. The Brundtland Commission's articulation of sustainable development and Robert Putnam's definition of social capital were repeatedly quoted in the book's different chapters as if they were part of a papal encyclical that should be uttered, obeyed, and never questioned by the faithful. These instances raise serious doubt on DSSEA's goal of coming up with an enhanced theoretical and conceptual understanding involving the environment-security-development nexus.

In the introductory chapter it is stated that for "the DSSEA program, development makes sense only when understood in terms of sustainable development, a comprehensive concept with ecological, economic, social, and political dimensions" (10). And precisely what is sustainable development? To answer this, the book falls back to the original Brundtland Commission formulation: "a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, direction of investments, orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 9). Then the

book tried to improve on this definition by saying that sustainable development “encompasses the creation of domestic and inter-state institutions that have the specialized knowledge and skills to regulate, to manage, and to facilitate stable political pluralism, economic development, and social equity” (7). It added that “unsustainable and mismanaged economic activities which degrade the environment, aggravate human relations, and exacerbate intra-state as well as inter-state relations can lead to social upheaval, challenging the security of the individual, of the community, of the country, and potentially the region” (8). Superficially, this makes perfect sense; it is as convincing as a glib slogan. And there lies the problem, for as one author asserts: “The Brundtland definition is not really a definition; it is a slogan, and slogan, however pretty, do not make theory” (Banerjee 2003, 151-152).

The sustainable development articulated by DSSEA and subscribed into by the various case studies is part of the current discourses of sustainable development which “despite highlighting issues of poverty and equity... do not criticize the structural conditions that characterize the increasing intrusion of capital into the domain of nature, which results in the capitalization, expropriation, commodification, and homogenization of nature” (Banerjee 2003, 160). In its policy recommendations, the most that this volume has done concerning the issue of capital is to say that “there is a need to recognize the environmental and security implications of global economic linkages” (29). After recognizing it, what now? The volume did not explore this issue. How different indeed is sustainable development from plain development? The volume did not even pose this question. It simply said that “the model of development on which rapid economic expansion of SEA has been articulated is not sustainable because it involves dynamics of social and political inequality bound to cause its demise over the long term” (4). It failed to provide any powerful critique of sustainable development. Its silence validates this critical assessment of this particular concept:

The main shortcoming of the mainstream approach to sustainable development is that it is driven by the rapid accumulation requirements of the capitalist economy, which means that it is about sustaining development rather than developing sustainability in the ecological sense. The priority is to ensure that environmental conditions are managed so as to ensure maximum long-term capital accumulation (which necessitates rapid economic growth). In this respect, neoclassical environmental

economics gravitates toward a weak sustainability hypothesis at best. Here it is assumed that in most cases, human-made capital can substitute for natural capital, so that in all but few cases, there are no real limitations to expansion imposed by the environment. Market mechanisms can be adjusted to ensure that environmental factors are taken account of, with no real alteration in the fundamental character of the capitalist economy. (Castro 2004, 220)

Social capital was another concept used in this book that was not critically engaged. The concept of social capital runs throughout all the specific projects pursued within this research program (3). Yet nothing was done besides quoting Robert Putnam's definition of social capital and its slight variations from other authors. In this volume, social capital is defined as "a type of social connectedness that facilitates the development of trust, cooperation, identifications, and norms of interaction, which in turn are crucial for decisive action—such as promoting economic growth or managing environmental resources" (63). Again, nothing seems to be wrong with this—not until one starts to question social capital's basic assumptions and the implications of its usage in policy formulation.

Here is an incisive critique of social capital:

Whether it concerns a social or a spatial category, in some applications of social capital there is a tendency towards blaming the victim. Individuals, neighbourhoods, villages, regions, countries are underdeveloped because supposedly they do not have the 'right' kind of social capital.... The victim-blaming approach also has to do with neoliberal triumphalism. The West/North was right after all, wasn't it? Modernity did bring the right kind of social capital and trust, didn't it? But what about path-dependence then? Following social capital's own logic, wouldn't path-dependence point to a responsibility of the former colonial powers for the plight of the Third World? Well, not necessarily, as one might go back way before the beginning of colonialism towards the 'real' traditional cultural roots which have survived (resisted) the colonial impacts [*sic*] and are the real culprits for the present stagnation. Following this line of reasoning colonialism and imperialism are relegated to the sideline in explaining the current plight of the Third World in exchange for a path-dependent explanation which goes back to the precolonial times. (Schuurman 2003, 1000)

This limitation definitely showed in the case studies. The chapter that dealt with hazardous waste and human security in Southeast Asia was mum on the toxic legacy of American military bases in the Philippines. Except for the chapter on mining, all the other case studies

just gave a wink and a nod to the colonial and neocolonial context of ecological degradation in the region. This is of course perfectly in line with the DSSEA's thrust: to strengthen social capital in order to stave off any environmental crisis in the region which could imperil sustainable development. Why blame the colonial masters for the current mess when it is easy to heap all the responsibility on the poor, undisciplined native?

More perceptive and critical authors have also raised the issue that the stress on social capital is linked to the neoliberal's continuing attempt to emasculate the state (Fernando 2003, Schuurman 2003). The book did not bother with this issue as made evident by two of its policy recommendations. One policy recommendation reads: "State capacity needs to be enhanced to deal with environmental threats to human security" (28). The next one states: "Support for NGO and community activities needs to be enhanced" (28). Is there a contradiction in this? The current dominant discourse on sustainable development also affects how social capital will be deployed. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), an integral part of civil society—"an arena that both reflects and shapes social capital" (63)—is now being viewed in a different light:

The current positioning of NGOs in sustainable development coincides with the withdrawal of the state from its conventional role in social development and its replacement by the private sector. It was widely believed that the NGOs were capable of effectively responding to the weaknesses of the state and the private sector. Contrary to expectations, investments by NGOs have by no means compensated for what society has lost due to the withdrawal of the state from social development, nor have they shielded social development from the negative consequences of private sector-led development. Instead, NGOs have evolved as institutions that discipline social order to function according to the dictates of neoliberal institutions. In this process, NGO activities have contributed toward the decapitation of the state in areas where it has historically performed well, particularly for the marginalized segments of the population. (Fernando 2003, 18)

The book espouses the view that in strengthening the social capital the state will also be strengthened. This is a perspective that did not factor-in capitalism's and neoliberalism's uncanny ability to hold hostage both the state and the social capital. As mentioned above, the ploy to strengthen social capital can be linked to efforts to weaken the state. Hence, "the challenge is not to abandon the state as irrelevant but

to liberate its power from being determined by the dictates of capital” (Fernando 2003, 23). For if capital remains supreme, “sustainable development [will be] managed in the same way development was managed: through ethnocentric, capitalist notions of managerial efficiency that simply reproduce earlier articulations of decentralized capitalism in the guise of ‘sustainable capitalism’” (Banerjee 2003, 173). However, how do you exactly liberate the state from the clutches of capital in order to save the environment and give human security to the people? Again, the book never bothered with such a question.

Consistent with the book’s stance not to interrogate a concept when it can pass it off as something new, this book brandished human security the same way it does with sustainable development and social capital—uncritically. In this book, human security is defined as “human well being [*sic*] and the attainment of basic needs such as access to sustainable livelihoods, health, food, shelter, and human rights” (34). Human security, the book qualifies, “overlaps significantly with current popular broader definition of ‘human development’” (34). To demonstrate this overlap, the same phrase used to define human security was used to mean human development (21). Such is not a case of overlap but of interchangeability. If one concept can stand for another, why bother to use the two of them?

However, more important than the question of using the precise term is the question of how human security was put into use in delineating the breadth and depth of the book’s arguments and recommendations. As mentioned before, in its list of overall policy recommendations, the book calls for enhancing the state’s capacity to deal with environmental threats to human security. But in its definition it says that human security is concerned with the human well-being and its attainment of basic needs; therefore, human security is not just for particular subjects of certain states, it is for all. If the state will remain the main actor in providing human security, then the state will be ensuring only the human security of the people within its borders even with the “pressure and participation from the global community and local communities” (28). To say that human security can still be achieved if only the states will simultaneously pursue human security is to go beyond what can be realistically expected.

The book has clearly shown that environmental threats transcend national boundaries as in the case of global climate change, thus it follows that cooperation at transnational and international levels is needed. Human security calls for “reconceptualizing the nature of

international co-operation” (Ney 1999, 20). Did the book tackle this crucial issue? It did not. If human security in the context of environmental threats will simply be dependent on the state, should it even be called *human security*?

By not thoroughly working on the assumptions that underpin the concepts used in framing the study, the book ended up with incoherent policy recommendations. The conceptual tools used by the book ended up blunt and conventional thus reducing any sense of novelty that could be had from the case studies. And by being blunt and conventional, this volume managed only to scratch the surface of a highly complex issue. ❁

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JOEL F. ARIATE JR. is University Research Associate at the Third World Studies Center and an MA History student at the Department of History, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines-Diliman.