

Social Contract Two: Revisiting Social Development

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A perennial quest for justice is the road toward progress. Continued inequality and injustice have demeaned the ethos of our civilization. A broken society manifestly reminds us about the perils of a vanishing social contract (SC). It appears to be a romantic fallacy to achieve global wellbeing in the context of contemporary social development (SD). It is argued that the fissures of “social contract” warrant the examination of society’s evolutionary trajectories of development.

Keywords: social contract, institutional meltdown, counter-development, identity crisis, new social development

From primitive to agrarian to modern-industrial to post-material development, the process of multilinearity has been defined by the varied measures of human conditions and social structures. Human needs, endeavors, circumstances of living, quality of life, and production and distribution of life-sustaining materials that determine the legitimacy of social order and governance shape the levels and patterns of human–social development.¹

Our social contract (SC) at work ought to be functionally valid. If not, what has happened to the social institutions that sustained the social order that embodied constitutional democracy and its boons? The day of January 6, 2021 raised many questions challenging all claims of living in a civil society. In other words, institutional meltdown is a threat to human decency and survival.

“My mother gave birth to twins: myself and fear,” Thomas Hobbes famously said when he heard of the Spanish armada’s invasion. His view of the human condition without a political order defined the “the state of order” where all human actions are guided by “power” and “conscience.” “*War of all against all*” because

¹This article reflects how I personally envision Social Development’s past, present, and future. It does not represent ICSD’s or SDI’s goals and/or policies.

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“life is short, brutish and nasty”(Hobbes, 1651) called for a political order. His blasphemous atheism and brutal secularism nearly got him killed and much vilified. John Locke (1689) and Immanuel Kant (1797) studied the ethos of political authority to save men from themselves. This give-and-take (of certain freedom to achieve protection) seems to be the initial premise of social contract, as we know. All this happened at the outset of the Age of Enlightenment. Law and order thus emerged as social constructs. This basic premise of social contract is crucial to think of innovative and progressive social development (SD) in the future.

Horizontally and vertically, we find societies and cultures established as a continuum stratified by the layers of inequality that have formulated expedient scales and structures labeled as “developing” and “advanced,” “poor” and “rich,” and “eastern” and “western” societies ravaged by the forces of individual attributes and historical epoch, and further confounded by race, identity, gender, and class. Outcomes of such dichotomies have generated false and divisive categories. Models of social contract, as developed by people in different societies and countries, determine the models of social development.

To paraphrase Shanti Khinduka’s expression: *Social development*, like social work, “is like a Mona Lisa smile.” The only difference is Mona Lisas of the poor, and globally southern-eastern countries have either been stolen or looted by rapacious invaders and cunning colonial rulers. Thus, any discussion about the theory and practice without contextualizing this dynamic is fallacious and unscientific and, therefore, invalid.

Definitions and Dimensions

Social welfare “means conditions of living in which human can fare well, conditions in which their bodies and minds are free to develop through all stages of maturation unto death” (Gil, 1985, p. 15). Likewise, *Social development* simply implies development of society inclusive of its structure, institutions, and culture. These constructs without human beings—their needs, work, aspirations, existential conditions, history, and quality of life—mean nothing.

There is no perfect definition of social development. Incomplete and insinuated conceptions abound literature. Broadly, social development has been defined and understood from two divergent perspectives: Individual–behavioral cognitions and socioeconomic–ethnic status with a dualist emphasis on both micro and macro systems.

McLeod (2018) sums up Vygotsky’s (1962, 1978, [1934] 1987) sociocultural theory, which

views human development as a socially mediated process in which children acquire their cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society. Vygotsky’s theory is comprised of [sic] concepts such as culture-specific tools, private speech, and the Zone of Proximal Development.

Social interaction in a community plays a key role in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978) which facilitates the process of driving “meanings.” In other social sciences, social development is centrally focused on macro-analysis. I believe, there is a symbiotic relationship between “human” and “social”—ontogenesis and phylogenesis—of development (Mohan, 1993, pp. 22–33).

New directions, as Schuurman ([1962] 1993) explains in his *Beyond the Impasse*, emphasize that social development is intertwined in post-developmental phases encompassing modernism, Marxism, neo-Marxism, and post-imperialism. It's not my intent to record that development here. However, this merited a mention in the context. As I said at the outset, social development is fraught with ambiguous meanings, interpretations, underpinnings, and ramifications. Simon (2019) enlists fifty thinkers on social development who have contributed to the theory and practice in this field. His assemblage includes the following:

- Modernizers like Kindleberger and Rostow
- Dependency theorists such as Frank, Cardoso, and Amin
- Progressives like Hirschman, Prebisch, Helleiner, and Streeten
- Political leaders enunciating radical alternative visions of development, such as Mao, Nkrumah, and Nyerere
- Progenitors of religiously or spiritually inspired development, such as Gandhi and Ariyaratne
- Development–environment thinkers like Blaikie, Brookfield, and Shiva²

Environmentalists' emphasis on sustainability and eco-friendly green projects deserve credit to enrich this field in an otherwise endangered planet under the shadows of climate change. These contributors encompass a wide spectrum on the micro–macro axis. The summary illustrated above is neither exhaustive nor complete. If Mao Zedong is a developmental thinker, names of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Arundhati Roy also merit due attention. I strongly believe that focus on individual (human) and social (structural) dimensions need not be stretched to unhinge symbiosis of human–social development. However, these strands continue due to ideological predilections and interests of peoples around the globe.

Ideological Streams

Theories on social contract evolved as a consequence of the Enlightenment. Our ideological streams thus emanate from old and new conceptions of human nature, individual rights and obligations, normative structures, and social values that define equality, justice, and freedom. While capitalism and socialism promote

²*Fifty Key Thinkers on Development*. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/244175139_Fifty_Key_Thinkers_on_Development (accessed February 12, 2021).

liberal, utilitarian, pragmatic, conservative, and radical transformation, authoritarianism and populism redesign ideological hybrids. *Trumpism* is one example. The case of Chinese economy—state capitalism—stands out as a class. India's mixed economy and massive Five-Year Plans, following Russian experiments, failed to produce much. The latest farmers' movement showed how this conflict erupted between Punjab and New Delhi.

Designs of social structure are ingrained in the labyrinths of faith, traditions, and aspirations of people and their culture. From *Manusmriti* to Plato's *Republic* to Marx's *Manifesto* to Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, politico-economic systems have evolved in harmony with the currents of time. The changes that followed defined the contents and contours of social development. Of interest in the context are the post-war reactions that propelled the western nations to fashion their colonies that have attained freedom from the yoke of imperialist pillage and exploitation. The "developing nations" were identified as the Third World—a group of uncivilized, poor, and colored people who required both material help and leadership to move to higher level of existence: socially, economically, and educationally. The kitsch of contemporary social development theory and practice is centered around this pretentious formulation.

Ideologically, national and regional models of social development are broadly located on liberal–capitalist, democratic–socialist, and/or socialist–authoritarian axes. I am painfully aware of the rawness of this classificatory system since many other entities, both old and new, are in existence. To achieve this objective, I will attempt to critique two important books that underscore my *a priori* assumptions. Implicit here is a basic distinction between social and natural sciences. In social sciences, in spite of claims of increasing empirical objectivity, we see phenomenon through the lenses of experiences—ours or theirs—and tend to foreground gender, age, and sexuality as the source of inequality and injustice. A physicist or mathematician does not enjoy this luxury of subjective interpretation.

Having attained "independence", post-colonial societies with fledgling democracies and "identity crisis" and ethno-cultural conflicts muddle through various political systems. Black and brown people in the United States, Chechens in Russia, Uyghurs and other Muslim *minorities*, and Kachin, Karen, Kayah (Karenni), Shan, Chin, Mon, and Rakhine (Arakan) in Myanmar (Burma), Buddhists in China-occupied Tibet, Hindus in Pakistan, and Muslims in India suffer as marginalized people. Brexit is the latest development in the European Union. The insurrection of Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021 violently demonstrated how "White-trash" extremists could shake the foundations of the world's most stable democracy. What I called "new tribalism" about two decades ago (Mohan, 1993), is the new normal in developmental culture across the nations. To ignore this fact would be a violence against the logic of reason.

I was once invited to review Richard Estes' book *Trends in World Social Development: Progress of Nations 1970–1987* (Mohan, 1991). I postulated then, and reiterate, that social development is an integral part of transforming oppressed people to attain freedom. However, this transformative process is fraught with

human and societal proclivities that sustain structural anomalies that thwart “bioglobalism” (Mohan, 1986).

Banalization of Identity

When reason is lynched on the altar of identity politics, welfare and development take back seats. Populism and tribal passions further erode communitarian objectives. The Great Replacement, also known as the Replacement Theory (Camus, 2011), is a White nationalist far-right conspiracy theory which states that, with the complicity or cooperation of “replacist” elites, the white French population—as well as white European population at large—is being progressively replaced with non-European peoples—specifically Arab, Berber, and sub-Saharan Muslim populations from Africa and the Middle East—through mass migration, demographic growth, and a European drop in the birth rate. Camus believes that migration invasion is an attack on White culture. Donald Trump did not denounce White racist violence. After Charlottesville, Virginia mayhem, he applauded them as “very fine people on both sides.”

In a polarized nation—like the United States and India—a new civil war simmers on issues of identity while pandemic and populism ravage civil society. The day of January 6, 2021 marks the end of balance of power that sustains democratic institutions.

Identity strife is a product of liberal and illiberal politics. Culture wars inflame violent conflict at the expense of social cohesiveness and civility. I brought this identity-tribalism into this discussion to emphasize the fragility of democratic societies, especially those that became free after colonial oppression. The whole “Third World,” as compared to western democracies, is mired in age-old scourges in spite of nuclear and material power. Africa’s disease and development are alarming: “The pandemic threatens to undercut the poorest continent’s precarious progress,” (*The Economist*, February 6, 2021, p. 12). Africa’s “Covid-induced calamity” has implications for rest of the “underdeveloped” world: “Africa’s cries for help—whether in the form of jobs or loans—risk being lost amid the tumult of a truly global crisis. However, the fragility of African economies and societies is a reason to act swiftly: “It is also in outsiders’ interest to help” (*The Economist*, February 6, 2021, p. 12).

As I write this (on February 17, 2021), Rush Limbaugh, a White racist in his own right, passed away. A BBC announcement credited him with five rightwing achievements which helped Donald Trump to become the 45th President. His vitriol sought to demonize feminists as *Femi Nazis*, and Bill and Hillary Clinton in unspeakable terms. It’s generally believed that Limbaugh’s poisonous radio attacks against all liberal causes and people sent an unfit to White House. Trump repaid his debt by awarding him a Presidential Medal of Freedom, an absolute travesty of truth and honesty. Our Fairness Doctrine was repealed in 1987. It required a balanced approach by all media channels. His war against liberal, democratic, feminist, and secular issues practically destroyed civility and American

decency. Racism gained mainstream legitimacy with uncanny meanness toward Blacks, Latinos, and Asians. Freedom without Rousseauian “chains” brings Hobbesian state of jungle and violates Lockean promises.

Institutional–individual mendacity is not uncommon when knowledge becomes a commodity. Davies (2021, p. 13) writes the following about some “new-found tribes”:

There are two types of people: professional social scientists and amateur social scientists. To put that another way, a central problem of social science is that, unlike natural science, your objects of study have their own account of who they are and what they are doing.

He further comments:

Marx was no stranger to this dilemma. Co-opting Hegel’s language, he drew a distinction between people being a class “in themselves,” when they are seen to act in their objective material interests, and becoming a class “for themselves,” when they self-consciously recognize themselves as belonging to a collective. (Davies, 2021, p. 13)

This raises two noteworthy concerns for social development as an interdisciplinary field and a group of “experts” who act on both sides. I have been lecturing and writing about a “new social contract” for decades. Now VIP institutions, such as London School of Economics (LSE), and famous people, such as Amartya Sen, locate this attractive topic as if a new wheel is being invented.³

Foner (2021) said recently: “History is not determinism.” I concur. Intellectuals, professionals, and academics—overlapping each other—ought to visualize *social development* beyond the shadows of the 20th century mindset. Instead of dealing with our subjects horizontally, it’s important to examine social development issues vertically. Why is Chicago the murder capital in the United States? Why a “basket of deplorables” continue to support a man who has been impeached twice? Why farmers in India continue to commit suicide in spite of India’s claim to be the world’s largest democracy? It’s not enough to be a Democrat; it’s more important to practice democracy as an experiment in progress.⁴

³“What we owe each other: A new social contract.”—LSE Festival Event at The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Online, Mar 1, 2021, 12:00 Noon–1:15 PM (your local time) Registration link <https://www.lse.ac.uk/Events/LSE-Festival/Post-Covid-World/Events/20200301/contract> 14 attendees (retrieved February 18, 2021).

⁴Digital democracy of Taiwan is being replicated in Italy under the prime ministership of Mario Draghi, a technocrat. Noama Magazine comments: “With such an ideological spread, governing won’t be easy. But the idea of a technocratic, non-partisan prime minister endorsed through a direct online vote by members of an anti-establishment movement rooted in citizen

Regarding ideological stands, my focus is on Collier (2018) and Piketty (2020). An examination of this dualist spectrum at this juncture—anarchic-populism in a culture of conspiracy and untruths—may be called *the age of falsification*. Beliefs regardless of their quality become weapons of civil war in countries polarized by sordid interests without any commitment to society and its wellbeing. This broken society is neither capitalist nor socialist: it's a hybrid of selfishness, avarice, and neo-tribal politics of power.

In *The Future of Capitalism*, Collier (2018) is concerned about “new anxieties” caused by the rise of economic men, global divides, anger, resentment, and the loss of obligation to others which had led to post-war democracies now in decline. Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill helped develop utilitarianism followed by social paternalism at the expense of communitarianism. “Armed with Utilitarian calculous, economics rapidly infiltrated public policy” (Collier, 2018, p. 11). The “result was toxic ... [I]t jeopardized communities that actually gave meaning to people's lives” (Collier, 2018, p. 11).

Jonathan Haidt's recent research has identified seven fundamental values: loyalty, fairness, liberty, hierarch, care, and sanctity. Collier (2018, pp. 13–14) makes brilliant comment on this finding:

The reciprocal obligations built by co-operative movement had drawn on values of loyalty and fairness. The paternalism of the Utilitarian vanguard in the contest between economic technocrats and lawyers, the balance of power initially lay with the economists: the promise of delivering “the greatest well-being of the greatest number” appeal to vote-seeking politicians. But gradually the balance of power shifted to the lawyers, wielding the nuclear weapon of the courts.

The Future of Capitalism (Collier, 2018) was written before January 6, 2021, the day the 45th POTUS instigated and called for a violent mob to attack on the world's beacon of constitutional democracy. Collier's conclusions mainly include restoration of inclusive society and politics by “breaking the extremes.” It is rather impossible to achieving these objectives within the structural framework that deepens the gulf between the rich and the poor. It looks like a passionate naivete to think of ethical groups (state, firm, family, and world) in a chaotic atmosphere. People are starved for the reality of truth.

Piketty (2014) became a household name when his earlier book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* became a household name. *Capital and Ideology* (Piketty, 2020) has answers to many of the issues that western economists and their Nobel laureates have not been able to provide. The ghost of Karl Marx, in spite of

engagement—instead of delegating that choice to horse-trading party apparatchiks—is a significant new wrinkle in the practice of parliamentary democracy.” Retrieved from: <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ogbl#inbox/FMfcgxwLsdBjKCrCkVhQsjNprVrJCSfl> (accessed February 20, 2021).

Marxists' own fault lines, has haunted western thinkers and politicians. After 150 years, Piketty's prodigious research underscores Marx's inevitable imminence in the 21st century.

Economy is not a natural construct: From slavery to colonialism to hyper-capitalism, an evil structure perpetuates. This 1,093-page book situates societal evolution along with birth of inequality. The ideological base "refers to a set of a priori plausible ideas and discourses describing how society should be structured" (Piketty, 2020, p. 3). In a vastly polarized world confounded by the perils of a deadly pandemic, paramountcy of restructuring societies cannot be overstated. However, there cannot be a cookie-cutter model for a civil society. Piketty's analysis of studying societies in the context of historical inequalities may offer a pragmatic framework for the future of social development.

Toward New Social Development

The idea of New Social Development (NSD) emanates from continued "poverty of culture" (Mohan, 2011) which sustains dysfunctional structures. Rise of inequality in this century is an outcome of this legacy. Much of social development as practiced and discussed today is a post-war guilt of the advanced nations who invented the notion of the Third World as "White man's burden." The 45th President of the United States tastelessly called these "developing" nations as "shithole countries." Developmentalists, from Amartya Sen to A, B, and C, have followed this mindset in theory and practice. New social development posits the human condition at the center of analytical critiques beyond regional and post-colonial contours of *status quo*. Social development as we know has an oxymoronic quality. How can "social" be "developed" in isolation from the human psyche and its politico-cultural reality? (2018). Three decades ago, *The Logic of Social Welfare* (Mohan, 1986) alerted the world community about the negative impact that Thatcher–Reagan policies would have: The 21st-century global inequality is an unfortunate outcome.

A holistic view of human conditions beyond postcolonial trappings and traditional academic narratives is called for on the basis of the following three fundamental value bases:

1. Human–social reality is a phenomenal experience of joy and suffering. The human condition is a consequence of this universal experience.
2. Inequality and inhuman exclusions, ideologically, should constitute the central unit of analytical discourse about climate, economy, and justice. Inequality regimes in history, as Piketty (2020) has shown, difunctionally structured various societies.
3. Global wellbeing rests on post-structural transformations of institutions which are in a state of disarray because of unjust cultures. Institutional meltdown is an indicator of developmental decay and civil regression manifested by anti-egalitarian populism and governmentally gloomy nihilist developments.

Piketty's (2020) analyses have a sound and pragmatic quality that can justly restructure broken and unequal societies. Social development's eclectic nature helps synergize a wide range of strategic approaches that make society impervious to its contradictions. Piketty (2020) concludes:

...that the great driver of human progress over the centuries has been the struggle for equality and education and not, as often argued, the sacralization of property rights or the pursuit of stability. The new era of extreme inequality that has derailed that progress since 1980s, ... is partly a reaction against communism, but it is also the fruit of ignorance, intellectual specialization, and our drift toward the dead-end politics of identity.

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