

The Dynamics of Dispossession

La dinámica del despojo

Edward Dommen¹ <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4177-7548>

¹Retired Senior Economist, United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD),
Geneva, Switzerland
edommen1@worldcom.ch



Esta obra está bajo una licencia internacional
Creative Commons Atribución-NoComercial 4.0.

Sent: 2024/05/21
Accepted: 2025/05/07
Published: 2025/06/30

Abstract

This article takes established findings of economic research as its starting point to discuss social justice principles and the dynamics of dispossession that deny many people, as well as entire communities, realization and enjoyment of social justice. Several key themes are identified and analyzed in three sections. The first section presents fundamental principles of social justice, particularly those relevant to economic ethics, and shows that sustainable development embodies these principles. It then distinguishes between individualism, society and community, arguing that community provides the most effective framework within which to apply the identified principles. The second section examines the dynamics of dispossession that underpin virtually any form of economy. The third section describes countermeasures that have been recommended throughout history. The conclusions emphasize the dynamic of most economies that wealth or power, left to their own devices, attract yet more wealth or power at the expense of the poor and powerless. The essential remedy is to defuse the dynamics of dispossession. Conscious collective countermeasures are indispensable in order to restore to the deprived the freedom and prosperity of which these processes deprive them. However, these countermeasures require further elaboration and political action to be put into practice.

Keywords: social justice, sustainable development, cumulative causation, periphery, the poor, poverty, Prebisch-Singer Thesis.

Summary: Introduction, Fundamental Principles of Social Justice, The Inexorable Dynamics of Dispossession, Countermeasures, Conclusions.

How to cite: Dommen, E. (2025). The Dynamics of Dispossession. *Revista Tecnológica - Espol*, 37(1), 44-55. <https://rte.espol.edu.ec/index.php/tecnologica/article/view/1169>

Resumen

Este artículo se origina de los hallazgos de la investigación económica con el fin de analizar los principios de justicia social y las dinámicas de desposesión que niegan a muchas personas, así como a comunidades enteras, la realización y el disfrute de la justicia social. Para este objetivo, se identifican varios temas clave que fueron analizados en tres secciones. En la primera sección se presentan los principios fundamentales de justicia social, relevantes para la ética económica; se evidencia que el desarrollo sostenible los resume. Luego, se diferencia entre individualismo, sociedad y comunidad; esta última proporciona el marco más eficaz para aplicar los principios identificados. En la segunda sección se describen las dinámicas de desposesión que impulsan cualquier forma de economía. Finalmente, en la tercera sección se explican las contramedidas recomendadas a lo largo de la historia. Posterior al análisis, las conclusiones enfatizan la dinámica de la riqueza o el poder de la mayoría de las economías, que por sí mismas, atraen aún más riqueza y poder a expensas de los pobres e indefensos. El remedio esencial es desactivar las dinámicas de desposesión. Por ello, las contramedidas colectivas conscientes son indispensables para restaurar la libertad y la prosperidad que estos procesos privan a los desposeídos. Sin embargo, estas requieren mayor elaboración y acción política para su implementación.

Palabras clave: justicia social, desarrollo sostenible, causalidad acumulativa, periferia, los pobres, pobreza, Tesis de Prebisch-Singer.

Introduction

You are reading a review of technology. Technology is the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes.¹ In that spirit, this article takes established findings of economic research as its starting point. It does not describe new scientific research. Part 2 describes the practical issues to which we want to apply these findings. Part 3 describes the policy measures which need to be taken in the light of Part 2 to achieve the objectives presented in Part 1.

Fundamental Principles of Social Justice

To meet one's own needs without compromising the ability of others to meet theirs is a principle deeply rooted in many of the world's major ethical traditions. It is often traced back to the Hippocratic oath of the third century AD, but even earlier, it is reflected in a Biblical commandment often mistranslated into English as "Thou shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15). The original term more accurately refers to the unjust appropriation of what rightfully belongs to others, specifically actions that compromise others' ability to meet their own needs. As the eighteenth-century North American social thinker and activist John Woolman (1763) observed: "If we trace an unrighteous claim ... proved by sufficient seals and witnesses, this gives not the claimant a right, for that which is opposite to righteousness is wrong".

This essential principle is restated in one of the foundational documents of the French Revolution, *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* (1789), which affirms: "Liberty consists in being able to do anything that does not harm others" (Article 4).

The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), in its report "Our Common Future"² essentially established the concept of sustainable development. Its definition reflects the principle in its opening sentence, though it oddly restricts it to relations between

¹ <https://www.google.com/search?q=technology+definition+english>

² The Report is commonly known as "the Brundtland Report"; that is how we shall refer to it henceforth.

present and future generations. However, the report corrects this in the very next sentence, which highlights "the essential needs of the world's poor³, to which overriding priority should be given". This is indisputably a matter of relations within the present generation, the primary concern of this article.

Society

Some thinkers view society as a mere aggregate of individuals (Rousseau, 1762, chap. 6). This author argued: "The most ancient of all societies, and the only one that is natural, is the family: and even so the children remain attached to the father only so long as they need him for their preservation. As soon as this need ceases, the natural bond is dissolved. The children, released from the obedience they owed to the father, and the father, released from the care he owed his children, returned equally to independence. If they remain united, they continue so no longer naturally, but voluntarily" (Rousseau, 1762, chap. 2).

Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990, was even blunter: "There is no such thing as society", continuing "There are individual men and women and there are families" (Thatcher, 1987). Her statement echoes the ideas of Jeremy Bentham, who asserted (1780, chap.1): "The interest of the community then is, what? — the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it". Bentham, founder of the utilitarian school of economics, championed the slogan "The greatest happiness of the greatest number" (Bentham, 1776, Preface), which implies "Tough luck for the rest." Individualism is still at the base of economics as taught in universities today.

In the Bible, the invitation to "love your neighbour as yourself" appears three times (Leviticus 19.18, Matthew 22.39, Mark 12.31). The word 'as' can be read in two ways. Firstly, it may be understood as "Love your neighbour as much as yourself" or "... in the same way that you love yourself" This interpretation aligns with the individualist perspective described previously.

Community

Alternatively, *as* can be interpreted to mean "Love your neighbour because he is a part of yourself". This is the position of the poet John Donne (1624):

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main... and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

The Bantu concept of 'ubuntu'⁴, "I am because you are", or "I am because we are", encapsulates that notion. "The origins of ubuntu are rooted in a holistic vision, for which human existence only makes sense within the totality of all that is" (Murove, 2011). In this perspective, each of us is shaped by others.

'I am because you are' is another phrase which can be read in two ways:

1. You are the cause of what I am
2. My purpose is to attend to your needs

In the first sense, we all share the same ecosphere; regardless of who you may be, your actions help shape the conditions that shape me. In countless ways, others contribute to the person I have become.

³ We shall return later to the word 'poor'.

⁴ The name varies between languages.

In the second sense, the phrase becomes a call to action. Our vocation, our calling, indeed our very reason for being on earth at all, is to respond to the needs of our neighbour, particularly those who cannot cope without us. That is what the Brundtland definition of sustainable development alludes to when it refers to the overriding priority that must be given to the essential needs of the world's poor. The French version of the definition emphasises the point: instead of using the nondescript word 'poor', it uses 'démuni', i.e. deprived or defenceless.

John Calvin (1509-1564) was a Protestant reformer who paid significant attention to social and economic justice. He stated: "Since God has joined the whole human race into one unit, the aim is that the welfare and conservation of all must be a concern of each one of us. In short, any violence, harm, or trouble that wounds our neighbour is forbidden to us. If we can do something to preserve the life of our neighbour, we must faithfully work at it, either by providing the things which are needed or by avoiding whatever does the opposite. Likewise, if they are in any danger or perplexity, we must help and support⁵ them." (Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.39).

In Sermon 53 on 1Tim 6.17-19, Calvin further speaks of *mon prochain qui a faute de moi*- roughly, I must lend my neighbour a hand inasmuch as I am missing from their toolkit. The essential point is that we are called to help our neighbours meet the needs they themselves consider they have, not, like the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank, to provide for the needs we think they ought to have.

The word 'community' has a vast range of meanings. One key aspect of the concept is the idea of boundaries. Every community draws a line between 'we' and 'they'. 'We', the insiders, are considered right and superior. 'They' are inferior and often morally reprehensible. This pattern recurs throughout history. For example, in the 20th century, right-thinking people considered the unemployed to be idle slackers (Pickard, 1919). Colonialism was built upon the belief that the colonised were savages who needed managing —colonisers, often believing themselves well-meaning, saw it as their duty to "civilise" them. In recent times, Israel has described its Palestinian neighbours as animals.

History is an unending succession of tribal, civil and international wars, including religious persecutions. The Brundtland definition of sustainable development seeks to transcend this mindset. Its emphasis on giving overriding priority to the essential needs of the world's poor carries a profound implication: that the whole of humanity forms a single community. This idea follows in the footsteps of Calvin, who declared, "We must share with each other to uphold the community of the whole human race" (Calvin, 1564, Exodus 22.25).

The call to transcend boundaries is reflected in several incidents recounted in the New Testament. One of its most powerful illustrations is the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37).

Similarly, the Devonshire Declaration, a British document of 1923 signed by the Duke of Devonshire as Colonial Secretary, stated: "His Majesty's Government think it necessary definitely to record their considered opinion that the interests of the African natives must be paramount ..." Although originally intended for a narrow context—namely, to suppress the political claims of Indian and Arab communities in Kenya and preserve colonial dominance—the phrase took on new life. By the mid-20th century, as decolonisation became inevitable,

⁵ Calvin uses the word 'subvenir' which is associated with the classical notion of 'subsidiis' - troops held in reserve until called upon. The concept is embodied politically in the subsidiarity principle.

young colonial officers were taught to treat it as a broad, principled directive: "The interests of the natives are paramount".

Helping the defenceless and the poor must be given priority over everything. By definition, they have no reserves or alternatives to fall back on. Those who are not poor can afford to wait; the poor cannot.

Liberation theology, a movement within Latin American Catholicism, developed in the 1960s driven by this concern. The Catholic institution, however, absorbed the notion into its social teaching in a moderate form, adopting the phrase "preferential option for the poor".⁶

The Inexorable Dynamics of Dispossession

A popular dictum of the time appears several times in the Bible pithily and accurately describing the dynamics of most economic systems (there are exceptions, like the "subsistence affluence"⁷ of traditional South Pacific island economies). The verse reads: "To those who have, more will be given, and they will have more than enough; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away" (Matthew 13.12).

The Jubilee

The biblical concept of the Jubilee, described in Leviticus 25.8-13 and likely written in the middle of the 5th century BC, illustrates this mechanism. It involves three elements:

1. Cancellation of debts
2. Return of the land to its original owners
3. Freedom for the slaves

These measures address a recurring economic cycle in which the poor are stripped of even the little they possess. The Jubilee scenario assumes that a peasant household, which is under normal conditions, can only meet its basic needs. However, disruption such as illness in the family, drought or bad weather can throw this balance into crisis. In order to survive, the family must borrow. However, in good times, the land could produce only enough for subsistence. Now, on top of current needs, the family has to face the extra burden of repaying the debt, so it falls inexorably further into debt. Unable to repay, it must sell some of its land. With even less land now, it no longer has any prospect of breaking even. When the family has consequently lost all its land, its only remaining recourse in the culture of the time was to sell themselves into slavery.

Of course, once the Jubilee has reset the counters to 0, the mechanism starts off again, and sooner or later, the operation will have to be repeated - every 50 years, Leviticus theatrically proclaims.^{8 9}

The mechanism

⁶ "The phrase 'preferential option for the poor' was first used in 1968 by the superior general of the Jesuits, Father Pedro Arrupe, in a letter to his order. The term was later picked up by the Catholic bishops of Latin America." (Dault, 2015)

⁷ The phrase was coined by E.K. Fisk (1962)

⁸ In fact, the Jubilee is a brilliant piece of specious communication. The Jewish elites had been deported to Babylon at the end of the 6th century. Their land had been taken over by the peasants who cultivated and looked after it. When the elites were allowed to return over half a century later, they wanted their land back. They invented this convincing tale to legitimate their claim.

⁹ This section is drawn from Dommen (2003), chap.2.

The divergence between the rich and poor is causally linked. The wealth of the rich increases at the expense of the poor. To illustrate this, consider an area in which everyone is equally prosperous. Due to some catalyst, one place becomes more prosperous than the others. This new wealth attracts various factors of production: capital is drawn to invest, entrepreneurs migrate to exploit new opportunities, and labour follows, attracted by higher wages and better prospects. All this increases income and opportunities that strengthen the appeal of the place. Meanwhile, the brighter, more adventurous people are leaving the periphery to seek their fortune in the new growing hub. People in the periphery with capital to spare see the advantage of investing it in the centre, where the prospects of profit are more promising, so the periphery is starved of new investment. In many economic activities, there are economies of scale, making it increasingly cheaper to expand them. All in all, the centre sucks life out of the periphery.

That illustration is geographical. The same argument can be applied to class or social situations. The children of the rich have access to greater formal and informal educational opportunities; their playmates, classmates and neighbours are similarly advantaged. Thus, they have access to a better network of people who can advise them, offer them jobs or point them toward opportunities. They will not suffer the humiliations of being regarded as inferior, which, in itself, leads them to see themselves as inferior and behave accordingly. Better educated in what makes for good health and better able to afford it, they are likely to be more effective in their work and to live longer.¹⁰

Wheels within wheels: since there is more profit to be made in selling cures for the illnesses of the rich than for those of the poor, pharmaceutical research concentrates on the former. As a result, the health and life expectancy of the rich continue to improve relative to that of the poor since the medicines to treat the latter's illnesses are simply not being developed.

The backwash effects we have just described are mitigated by spread effects that function in an opposite direction. Insofar as people, enterprises, and public authorities spend where they are, a range of activities develops to meet their on-the-spot needs. Prosperity spreads outwards, but more thinly the further it gets from its source. At a certain distance, the spread effects are outweighed by the backwash effects.¹¹

Gunnar Myrdal (1957) sums up how the mechanism works:

My starting point is the assertion that the notion of stable equilibrium is normally a false analogy to choose when constructing the theory to explain the changes in the social system... Behind this idea is another and still more basic assumption, namely that a change will regularly call for a reaction in the system in the form of changes which on the whole go in the opposite direction to the first change.

The idea I want to expound ... is that, on the contrary, in the normal case, there is no such tendency towards automatic self-stabilisation in the social system. The system is by itself not moving towards any sort of balance between forces but is constantly on the move away from such a situation. In the normal case, a change does not call forth countervailing changes but, instead, supporting changes which move the system in the same direction as the first change, but much further. Because of circular causation, a social process tends to become cumulative and often to gather speed at an accelerating rate.¹²

¹⁰ These examples can be found in Myrdal (1944) and Myrdal (1968).

¹¹ The previous paragraphs are drawn from Dommen (2014).

¹² Gunnar Myrdal was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics 1975.

Myrdal generalised a conception of the economy that had been applied to relations between rich and poor countries described as the centre and the periphery of the world economy, and known as dependency theory.

In 1964, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) was created to focus specifically on North-South Trade from this perspective. Raúl Prebisch, an Argentinian economist, was a leading figure in analysing and explaining this kind of economic dynamic. The name "Prebisch-Singer Thesis" was given to an analysis of the particular macro-economic dynamics of trade between a commodity-exporting periphery and a centre importing those commodities since each of them had published a study of the question in 1949, coming to similar conclusions. Hans Singer was working at the time in the United Nations Department of Economic Affairs in New York; his study, therefore, appeared without the author's name, as was UN practice (UN DESA, 1949). In the same year, Raúl Prebisch published his corresponding paper as Executive Director of the freshly founded UN Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) (Prebisch, 1949).¹³

Prebisch was logically appointed the first secretary-general of UNCTAD. Its secretariat was located in Geneva so that it could dialogue constructively with GATT, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which had successfully nurtured the prosperity of developed economies by fostering spread effects through trade among them. The accession of several peripheral countries to independence in the early 1960s made the developed countries (to use the terminology of the time) aware of the issue and, uniquely, willing to explore solutions to it. In the 1960s, dialectics were recognised as a fruitful means of exploring an issue (regrettably for the progress of the social sciences, they went out of fashion after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989).

In 1976, Prebisch published a paper, *"A Critique of Peripheral Capitalism"*, summing up his work over the years. We shall draw on it to outline his thesis. It gives a detailed account of the process of creation of surplus and its primary appropriation by the upper strata through the power derived from their ownership of the means of production and its secondary appropriation by the middle strata (Prebisch, 1976, p.4).

The penetration of the production technology of the centres plays a dominant role in peripheral development. The rise in productivity that accompanies it brings changes in the structure of society [in both the centre and the periphery], in the course of which the upper income strata increase their power by concentrating most of the means of production in their own hands, with the result that they have institutional capacity for primary appropriation of the fruits of technological progress. The middle income strata [in both the centre and the periphery] also strengthen their position as they expand with the development of industry and other related activities, but the lower strata remained largely excluded... The so-called free play of economic forces is in fact subordinated to these power relations and the interests and stimuli which govern them (Ibid, p.12) ...The essential requirement [of vigorous capital formation] is not being met in peripheral capitalism. It would appear to be incompatible with the widespread growth of the consumer society ..., which could not exist without the considerable economic and political power of the upper strata, which insures their primary appropriation of the fruits (Ibid, p.14).

Justine Masika Bihamba, an internationally known human rights activist based in the Eastern Congo, describes the brutal way the process is working in that region: "Eastern Congo has been ravaged by war for three decades. One main reason is that this region, and in particular

¹³ Incidentally, the Wikipedia article 'Latin American liberation theology' describes ECLA, albeit one of the official regional commissions of the United Nations, as a "leftist think tank"!

the province of North Kivu, is rich in raw materials. In particular, there are immense reserves of coltan, an essential mineral for the batteries used in cell phones and electric cars. For our people, this wealth is a curse. More than a hundred armed groups wage war against each other to control these resources, which are then sold to multinationals via neighbouring countries. Western governments turn a blind eye to the origin of these minerals, which are indispensable to their industries. This probably explains why this war remains largely ignored by the international community".¹⁴

Brutality is a widespread feature of the process we are describing. According to local folk memory, the forced labourers who built Oaxaca's Dominican church in the late 16th century were required to bring two eggs to work every day- not to feed themselves but to strengthen the mortar of the building against earthquakes. In the same vein, the interior of the Franciscan church in Quito is richly decorated with gold. In its entryway, there is a painted panel which reads, "But you have made it a den of thieves"¹⁵, showing incidentally that one can joke even about brutal deprivation.

"The ownership of the means of production enables the upper strata to be the first to lay hands on a large part of the fruits... A smaller share then passes to the middle strata." (Prebisch, 1976, p.10). Prebisch stresses the role of power in the appropriation of resources. Myrdal's genteel presentation of the same processes refers to primary and secondary appropriation neutrally as 'backwash' and 'spread effects', avoiding the need to explain that the spread effects keep the fruits of appropriation within the circle of winners.

John Woolman (1720-1772) was born and lived in the British colonies of North America, i.e. the periphery of the world economy of his day. His *Plea for the Poor* foreshadows the arguments Prebisch developed a couple of centuries later (Woolman, 1763). Indeed, its opening paragraph sums them up, including due attention to secondary appropriation: "Wealth desired for its own sake obstructs the increase of virtue, and large possessions in the hands of selfish men have a bad tendency, for by their means too small a number of people are employed in things useful; and therefore they, or some of them, are necessitated to labour too hard, while others would want business to earn their bread were not employments invented which, having no real use, serve only to please the vain mind."

"Oppression in the extreme appears terrible, but oppression in more refined appearances remains to be oppression, and where the smallest degree of it is cherished, it grows stronger and more extensive" (Woolman, 1763, Chap.13). With this, Woolman comments succinctly on the dynamics of cumulative causation¹⁶ described in this paper.

"Three phenomena are typical of the periphery and help to explain the inadequate rate of capital formation. Power relations appear in them all: in the excessive consumption indulged in by the upper strata, which would be inexplicable without the inequitable distribution deriving from those relationships; in the spurious absorption of labour, influenced above all by the power of the middle strata; and in the disproportionate incomes the centres extract through the play of power relations at the international level." (Prebisch, 1976, p.14)

John Woolman stresses the role of power in shaping economic relations: "Wealth is attended with power, by which bargains and proceedings contrary to universal righteousness

¹⁴ Quoted in the Geneva newspaper *Le Courrier*, 8 March 2024.

¹⁵ Luke 19.46

¹⁶ The term is Gunnar Myrdal's.

are supported; and here oppression, carried on with worldly policy and order, clothes itself with the name of justice ..." (Woolman, 1763, Chap.10)

Prebisch follows in Woolman's footsteps when he stresses the role of consumerist aspirations in driving the cumulative process of appropriation at the expense of the dispossessed: "which have their root in self-pleasing, this spirit, thus separating from universal love, seeks help from that power which stands in the separation; and whatever name it hath, it still desires to defend the treasures thus gotten. This is like a chain where the end of one link encloses the end of another. The rising up of a desire to attain wealth is the beginning. This desire being cherished moves to action, and riches thus gotten please self, and while self hath a life in them it desires to have them defended." (Woolman, 1763, Chap.10).

Countermeasures

We have seen that consumption, if not outright consumerism, is a major factor driving the mechanism. Moderating the urge to consume can at least mitigate it. "Were all superfluities and the desire of outward greatness laid aside and the right use of things universally attended to, such a number of people might be employed in things useful that moderate labour with the blessing of heaven would answer all good purposes relating to people and their animals, and a sufficient number have leisure to attend on proper affairs of civil society" (Woolman, 1763, Chap.2). Furthermore, "their example in avoiding superfluities tends to incite others to moderation" (Woolman, 1763, Chap.1).

The Jubilee myth is rooted in the biblical notion of the Sabbath, which involves rest and letting go. On the weekly Sabbath, people do not work. The sabbatical year extends its principle to the marginalised, and not only the human ones: "Six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat" (Exodus 23.10-11).

The urge for economic growth fuels the mechanism, as does consumerism. One response has been the growth of the *décroissance* movement in Europe. The word is often rendered in English as de-growth, but this translation captures only part of its meaning. *Décroissance* is not simply the opposite of growth but rather something different from it (Dommen, B. & Dommen, E., 2016). Policy-makers tend to take the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the primary measure of growth, but it includes only a subset of activities, ignoring several which are invaluable to human welfare (UNDAT, 1974).

When Western Samoa became independent in 1962, it refused to calculate its GDP on the grounds that doing so would distract attention - and human resources - from its own democratically determined priorities. However, it did not stop experts from international organisations from estimating it themselves for their own purposes.

There have been some clumsy efforts to address the shortcomings of GDP, such as UNDP's Human Development Index.¹⁷

We have seen that prioritising the essential needs of the world's most deprived is a key feature of sustainable development. This calls not only for restraint but for redistribution. "Men who have large possessions and live in the spirit of charity, who carefully inspect the circumstance of those who occupy their estates, and regardless of the customs of the times

¹⁷ <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index>

regulate their demands agreeable to universal love, these, by being righteous on principle, do good to the poor without placing it as an act of bounty. While industrious, frugal people are borne down with poverty and oppressed with too much labour in useful things, the way to apply money without promoting pride and vanity remains open to such who truly sympathise with them in their various difficulties" (Woolman, 1763, Chap.1).

Calvin insisted that the rich were ministers to the poor. "All rich people, when they have the means to do good, are clearly there as God's deputies, and they must do their job, which is to help their neighbours to live." (Calvin, Sermon 141 on Deuteronomy 24.19-22.)

Ambrose (339-397), one of the four fathers of the Roman Catholic Church, places his idea in the perspective of the dynamics described in this paper when he says, "If you have two pairs of sandals and your neighbour is barefoot, you should not give him one but return one to him."

In 1996, UNCTAD launched a BioTrade Initiative in line with its founding ideals. Its objectives include the sustainable use of resources, the fair and equitable sharing of benefits, and community empowerment. The initiative is alive and well. (UNCTAD, 2024)

Migration¹⁸

Migration is a natural consequence of the processes of appropriation and dispossession inherent in the functioning of the world economy. When people are deprived of their means of livelihood, it is normal for them to follow them to where they were taken. If countries receiving migration flows do not want them, they could refrain from stripping the source countries of their resources or, failing that, return their means of livelihood to them. Those who migrate could then make good use of their resources at home without leaving their kith and kin in search of them. "Inhabitants of rich and happy countries don't emigrate." (d'Épinay, 1831) Furthermore, migrants tend to be more adventurous and more resilient than their stay-at-home neighbours. Those who arrive at their destination are also likely to be in better health than the average: good health helps to survive the journey. These are precisely the kind of people who stimulate the dynamism of the place where they are. The place from which they emigrate loses that asset; the country of destination acquires it. Thus, migration feeds the dynamic of dispossession. On the other hand, in so far as migrants send remittances home they mitigate the process.

Conclusion

The natural dynamic of most economies is that wealth or power left to their own devices attract yet more at the expense of the poor and powerless. The essential remedy is to defuse the dynamics of dispossession.

The process is systemic. Individual actions may change their style or temper its intensity but not the essence of its operation. Conscious collective countermeasures are indispensable in order to restore to the deprived the freedom and prosperity of which these processes deprive them.

¹⁸ This section may seem lapidary, but migration is but one among the manifestations of the centre-periphery dynamic explained throughout this paper. The essential remedy to them all is to defuse the dynamics of dispossession.

This brief and necessarily schematic summary overview of the dynamics of dispossession identifies several key themes for responses and countermeasures. They of course require further elaboration and and political action if they are to be put into practice.

References

- Bentham, Jeremy (1776). *A Fragment on Government*.
- Bentham, Jeremy (1780). *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*
- Calvin, John (1564). Commentary on the books of Moses
- Calvin, John (1564), Exodus 22.25
- Calvin, John. Institutes of the Christian Religion, numerous editions
- Calvin, John. Sermon 53 on 1 Timothy 6.17-19
- Calvin, John. Sermons on Deuteronomy.
- d'Épinau, Adrien (1831). *Mémoire des colons de l'île Maurice*, 16 février 1831.
- Dommen, Bridget & Dommen, Edouard (2016). *Éloge de la décroissance*, Vevey, Le Cadraatin.
- Dommen, Edward (2003), *How Just is the Market Economy ?* Geneva, World Council of Churches.
- Dommen, Edward (2014). *A Peaceable Economy*. Geneva, World Council of Churches
- Donne, John (1624). Meditation 17.
- Dault, Kira (2015). *What is the preferential option for the poor?* US Catholic, 22 January 2015.
<https://uscatholic.org/articles/201501/what-is-the-preferential-option-for-the-poor/>
- France. National Constituent Assembly (1789). Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Adopted by the National Assembly during its Sessions on August 20, 21, 25 and 26, and Approved by the King. Paris: Mondharre & Jean, 1789. <https://www.elysee.fr/en/french-presidency/the-declaration-of-the-rights-of-man-and-of-the-citizen>
- Fisk, E.K. (1962). *"Planning in a Primitive Economy, Special Problems of Papua - New Guinea"*, Economic Record, December
- Murove, Munyaradzi Felix (2011). « *L'Ubuntu* », Diogène, 3-4 (n° 235-236), p. 44-59. DOI : 10.3917/dio.235.0044. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-diogene-2011-3-page-44.htm>
- Myrdal, Gunnar (1944). *An American Dilemma: the Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, New York, Harper.
- Myrdal, Gunnar (1957). *Economic Theory and Under-Developed Regions*, London, Duckworth.
- Myrdal, Gunnar (1968). *An Asian Drama. An Enquiry into the Poverty of Nations*, New York, Pantheon.
- Pickard, Bertram (1919). *A Reasonable Revolution*, New York, Macmillan.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=osu.32435004629606>
- Prebisch, Raúl (1949). *El desarrollo económico de la América Latina y algunos de sus principales problemas*. Santiago de Chile, CEPAL
- Prebisch, Raúl (1976). *A critique of peripheral capitalism*. CEPAL Review 1/1976.

- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1762). *Du contrat social, ou Principes du droit politique*, Amsterdam, <https://www.rousseauonline.ch/pdf/rousseauonline-0004.pdf>
- Thatcher, Margaret (1987). Interview for Woman's Own ("no such thing [as society]"). 23 September 1987. Journalist: Douglas Keay. <https://www.margarethatcher.org/document/106689>
- UN DESA (1949). Relative prices of exports and imports of under-developed countries. United Nations Department of Economic Affairs (UN DESA).
- UNCTAD (2024). *Advancing shared prosperity through biodiversity-friendly trade*. 27 March 2024. <https://unctad.org/news/advancing-shared-prosperity-through-biodiversity-friendly-trade>
- UNDAT (1974). *Estimating Non-monetary Economic Activities: a Manual for National Accounts Statisticians*. United Nations Development Advisory Team for the South Pacific (UNDAT) .
- Woolman, John (1793). *A plea for the poor or a Word of Remembrance and Caution to the Rich*. (originally published posthumously 1793, but believed to have been written around 1763-64). <http://www.umilta.net/woolmanplea.html>
- World commission on Environment and Development (1987). *Our Common Future*, UN document A/42/427, 4 August 1987. (commonly known as "the Brundtland Report") https://digitallibrary.un.org/naanna/record/139811/files/A_42_427-EN.pdf?withWatermark=0&withMetadata=0&version=1®isterDownload=1