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### **A View from the Ground: Competing Discourses on Impoverishment and the Coastal Environment in Belize**

**Dennis A.V.Brown**

#### **Introduction**

Is the recent preoccupation with poverty by the international donor community a sign of its increased humanitarianism, or a function of the increased disparity between the wealthy and the poor of the world? The question of the extent to which increases in relative poverty are associated with the activities of international capital is a moot one. Nonetheless, it leads to considerations of the extent to which the activities of the international donor community facilitates, or retards the growth of this impoverishment. Certainly, one of the outcomes of the focus on poverty in the social research agenda of the international donor community is a neglect of the 'big picture' in which poverty is understood in relation to the systems that produce wealth. Such a seemingly stilted view raises the question of the kinds of interpretations of the world that guide the intervention strategies of these organizations and how might these further the attainment of stated goals, or ensure their frustrations?

In this paper discourse analysis is used to address this issue. Two sets of discourse regarding poverty are examined. The first is an expression of the post World War 2 Development Project. It finds expression in international development circles where the view is that poverty is the outcome of local factors and that it leads to the degradation of the environment and further impoverishment of the poor. The second discourse is that of the poor themselves. It represents an inversion of the first. This viewpoint paints a picture of the ways in which the activities of international capital and its local representatives lead to destruction of local initiative, industry and the natural environment and the consequent impoverishment of the people. In this context it can be argued that the job of the 'Development' agencies becomes not the reduction of poverty, but the facilitation of the process of impoverishment through the institution of measures that serve to ameliorate the pain of deprivation. In a word, the activities of the donor agencies ignore the source of the problem and institute measures that make the ill-effects of the problem more palatable.

The paper draws on the experiences of the poor in the coastal community of Hopkins in the south of the continental Caribbean country, Belize.<sup>1</sup> It suggests that at the level of epistemology recognition of the relationship between power, knowledge and theory might lead to a more socially balanced set of social policies regarding the future use of the marine environment in that country.

### **Theoretical Context**

In theoretical terms, the paper can be located within the context of the critique of the mainstream approaches to the management of social change associated with the Post World War 2 Development Project.<sup>2</sup> It does so however while recognizing the limitations of the post structuralist- post development school that has been the main source of inspiration for this critique.<sup>3</sup> It therefore suggests a marriage of the positives of a not yet exhausted mainstream development and the insights provided by post development theory. Post development theory is a composite comprised of a number of schools of thought. Arguably, the most outstanding of these is the post-modernist genre, which itself provides the basis for a number of more specific critiques of orthodox development thought and the Modernity/Enlightenment project. Three of these inform this paper. The first has as its focus the nature of the 'text' that is used in the representation of the world by Western academics and the disciplines and institutions of which they are a part.<sup>4</sup> The second school of thought specifically questions the veracity of the claims of modernism and highlights the relationship between these claims and Western hegemony in the world.<sup>5</sup> The third school of thought that provides the theoretical underpinning of this paper moves beyond the questioning of Western representations of the world and searches for value in alternative epistemologies.<sup>6</sup> The research begs two questions. Firstly, what is the relative contribution of the poor and the non-poor to the destruction of the natural environment? Secondly, how viable are the prescriptions of the 'Development' project as answers to the problems of poverty as it affects the world today?

### **Issues of epistemology**

Whereas Positivist analysis is concerned to define and measure a reality that is taken to exist independently of the observer, the theoretical genre that informs discourse analysis directs attention to the non-objective, relative quality of knowledge and the ways in which its formation is influenced by a dominant power structure.<sup>7</sup> In this approach to the study of social phenomena, subjectivity rather than being seen as peripheral is deemed to be central to the process of knowledge formation. In basic terms, a discourse is a view of the world that is shared by some collectivity. It shapes the ways in which the group's knowledge of the world is represented. This subjectivity is deemed to be influenced by the position of the group within some larger, structured totality. This results in what is termed 'the articulation of power and knowledge'.<sup>8</sup> 'Knowledge', it is generally held, 'is power', but according to this interpretation 'power is knowledge' since it determines how the world is defined and invests particular people and institutions with the authority to do so.<sup>9</sup>

This position holds far-reaching implications for the ways in which international assistance is administered since this is done on the basis on which the circumstances of the world are interpreted. It also affects the ways in which we study and understand poverty. If knowledge is subjective it means that the observer and his circumstances colour what is observed as well

as the conclusions that are drawn. Rather than trying to understand some ‘objectively’ existing condition of deprivation the concern is now to understand why particular sets of circumstances are defined in the way that they are and what the implications that follow from such a definition are. How did poverty come to be problematized and with what consequences? Is the way in which it is problematized related to processes that sustain its existence even while proclamations of the intent to eradicate it are being made?

Poverty from this perspective ceases to be merely a straightforward question of destitution. It becomes as well what Broch-Due calls, ‘an archetypal thick discourse, encapsulating a vast range of social, political and historical struggles, constantly evolving new values, social identities and material outcomes’.<sup>10</sup> One implication of this is that even while the broader political economic context that provides the basis for the generalizations that may be made about material deprivation is important the sense that is made of this context and its impact is affected by historical and social (or in this case historical, social-geographical) location and experiences. Contrary to the ‘official’ interpretation, the voices of the poor on Belize’s south coast seem to suggest that international processes with their origins in the countries of the First World interact with local postcolonial settings in ways that produce the very destitution for which they are proclaimed to be answers.

### **The Societal Context**

From the standpoint of Development Studies, Belize is a very interesting place. This is so primarily because of the bifurcated nature of its political economy. In the case of one half of the country its state of un-development provides us with a socio-historical laboratory in which to examine the intrusion of global capitalism, its impacts and the ‘official’ discourse that is used to guide its passage. It also provides us with a setting in which concrete expressions of deprivation are interpreted as being produced and maintained in diametrically opposite ways. In a word, the ‘official’ and local discourses on poverty and the coastal environment are at odds with each other.

In terms of historical political economy, Belize can be roughly divided into a northern region stretching from the Mexican Border to Belize City and a southern region from that point to the border with Guatemala. Relative to the north, the southern part of the country has suffered neglect, especially in the areas of economy and social infrastructure. From the early historical period up to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the main forms of economic activity were concentrated in the northern part of the country. A plantation type economic organization facilitated the exploitation of sugar and mahogany from this region. The forms of economic activity, social and infrastructural development and forms of integration into the wider global economy associated with this type of economic development were therefore a feature of the development of the northern section of the country. These included the development of roads, schools and hospitals and the incorporation of the workforce into hierarchically structured occupational and wage relationships. The southern section of the country remained isolated and un-developed for much of this time. This allowed for the continuity of subsistence-type social relationships, organization and nature society relationships well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>11</sup>

Hopkins, the focus of this paper, is a Garifuna community on the southern coast of Belize. Garifuna refugees fleeing political turmoil in Central America established Hopkins in 1940. The historical tradition of the Garifuna, in Belize, though, predates this by at least a century.

The Garifuna, or Black Caribs are originally from the Caribbean island of St. Vincent. They are the descendants of Carib and Arawak Indians and runaway enslaved West Africans. In keeping with the political economy of the southern region and their own cultural traditions, they developed a subsistence, communal type economy and social organization based on the resources of the land and sea.

### **The state of the coastal resources**

Belize's coastal zone is made of a number of rich and diverse ecosystems, which merge and interact together. These ecosystems include sea-grass beds, mangrove forests, numerous cays of sand and mangroves, mangrove forests and lagoons, and estuaries. Within recent years these ecosystems have become increasingly subject to natural and man-made threats. On the one hand, natural forces such as hurricanes and strong winds have caused damage to habitats in the sea grass beds, mangroves and reefs. On the other hand, the effects of man-made actions in the areas of deforestation, housing, tourism, agriculture, industry and unsustainable fishing practices have done their fair share of damage. In an effort to protect these coastal resources twelve marine protected areas have been established throughout the coastal region of Belize.<sup>12</sup>

### **Competing Discourses**

Poverty and the issues associated with it are integral to the 'problem' of 'Development'. Therefore in order to understand how poverty came to be a 'problem' there has to be an understanding of development as discourse. The concept of Development has its basis in eighteenth century European society. It proffered a 'linear theory of progress rooted in Western Capitalist hegemony' as an answer to relative and absolute poverty associated with the emergence and expansion of the market economy.<sup>13</sup> Apart from this archaeological dimension the concept has a genealogical one as well. Since its origins in Europe it has been replicated in a number of theatres in different times and places. What seems to be common to all these situations is that they have been at junctures involving the retreat, or advance of capitalism at some time, or into some new space. For the purposes of this discussion two such occasions are of importance. The first is the period immediately following WWII and the second, the most recent globalized phase of Western capitalist growth.

Development's first appearance in a non-European context was in the immediate post World War 2 era. Once the politico-ideological issues associated with the Second World War had been settled, attention was turned to another set of concerns. In this period the preoccupation with Fascism gave way to the matter of the challenge to Western democracy posed by the newly emerging Communist empire. The potential sphere of influence of these competing powers had been widened by the decolonization of the former colonial territories of the Western European powers. An intense competition to win friends and influence people broke out between the Western democracies and the Communist powers. Development Theory emerged to address the issues related to the gap in living standards between the newly independent countries and their former colonial masters. What were the reasons for these

differentials in standards of living and how could the process of societal change be managed so as to bring about their drastic reduction, or removal? Development theory emerged with a mandate of providing a blueprint for the route out of low levels of economic productivity and consequent poverty for large numbers of these populations. In this context the issue of poverty, both in a relative and an absolute sense, became a global problem.<sup>14</sup>

Prior to this time concerns with poverty had arisen in Europe, but not in relation to the colonial empire. In Europe, concerns with poverty had emerged with the spread of rationality into the economic sphere, industrialism and the growth of the market economy. These signaled the end of what has been termed 'vernacular relations'. The informal social conventions of Medieval and Feudal Europe that had ensured that the meeting of human need was one of the central concerns of economic activity were gradually eroded by the spread of Capitalism and the profit motive. The privatization of property significantly reduced the claim of the general population to a pool of resources that was 'common' and lessened their entitlement to a share in the social product. The relative and absolute deprivation into which significant amounts of the population consequently fell gradually came to be addressed by a system of state welfare. Outside of Europe such concerns and remedial actions never emerged. The inhabitants of the colonies were viewed as being little different from the inanimate factors of production that were used in the production of wealth for the colonialists. This supposedly put them beyond the pale of these considerations. The position was taken that these persons were bereft of any capacity for science and technology, the *sin qua non* of economic growth and development.

The argument is, therefore, that poverty became an issue of global significance because levels of disparity between living conditions in the newly independent countries and the industrial countries provided the grounds for the growth of counter ideologies that represented a significant threat to Western democracy. The answers that emerged from Development Theory to the problem of poverty in the newly independent countries also gave expression to these interests. Development Economics, Modernization Theory and a number of variants on the theme of state-led development practice emerged as the prescriptions to the problems faced by these countries.<sup>15</sup> These theories nearly all attributed the cause of the 'problem' to features of the societies, cultures and economies of the newly independent countries. The prescriptions that were made by the theories can be characterized as making the case for the Westernization of the societies, cultures and economies of these countries as an answer to the underdevelopment, of which poverty was a primary feature.

Among the economists, even the structuralists such as Prebisch who pointed to the nature of the international framework within which trade and production were conducted as a cause of the problem, did so using models that assumed the superiority of Western institutions and patterns of economic growth. In addition, the emphasis on state led-development in the newly-independent countries has also been characterized as being an expression of the commonality of interest between the Western trained elite who controlled the state apparatus and the Western political and economic system. Rather than representing the application of 'universal reason' to the issues of relative and absolute deprivation, the early variants of Development Theory can be deemed to be expressions of a discourse on poverty spawned by the geopolitical and material interests of Western society.

In the realm of theory, these approaches to the 'problem of poverty' in the ex-colonial world eventually led to impasse and stalemate. By the late 1970s economic stagnation and crisis in these countries were accompanied by the concentration of enormous amounts of resources under the control of the economies of the North Atlantic and a few select Asian countries.

These changes in the character of the world were associated with geopolitical and techno-economic changes that signaled a new expression of Western Capitalist hegemony. The fall of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was associated with a new phase in (post) industrial capitalism. In its latest expansionist mode the penetration of virtually every nook and cranny of the globe by Western capital seemed to have become something of an imperative. This was made possible by dramatic developments in the fields of microelectronics and telecommunications technology. Still, in order for this to occur, these peripheral economies had to allow the unimpeded entrance of international capital and the exit of the revenues that accrued from its investment in them. In the realm of Development thought and economic policy, Neoliberalism and its doctrine of the universality of economic processes have now become the acceptable way of understanding economic issues. This doctrine now represents the truth about how trade and production should be conducted at a national as well as an international level.

In this pivotal era in the history of capitalist growth, poverty has once again surfaced as a central issue. In spite of the efforts made over the past five decades, the gap between the rich and the poor of the world has increased at something of an exponential rate. Furthermore, the pressure that has been put on the natural environment by the increased levels of production that has brought this about and has created a real threat to the physical viability of the planet. In keeping with Neoliberalist orthodoxy, poverty is attributed to the inappropriate allocation of resources within the economy that follows on the intrusion into the workings of the market by the state and other politically inspired forces. According to the discourse, this has made these economies moribund, inefficient and uncompetitive and their people poor.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, this poverty has fed on itself and led to further poverty through, for example, degradation of the environment by poor people in the pursuit of natural resource based livelihoods.

In order to correct this the international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have embarked on a global campaign of restructuring the economies of the poor countries of the world along neoliberalist lines. In practical terms this means ensuring fiscal discipline through curtailing the Government's involvement in the economy, save for its investment in public infrastructure, and promoting the role of market forces in the running of the economy. This it is argued will ensure that these economies make rational and efficient use of available resources. They should also develop the capacities to effectively participate in the global market. The factors of production, including capital must be free to move into and out of the local economy as the need and opportunity arise. The eventual outcome of this will be investment and the modernization of the economy and society through the incorporation and transformation of fledgling capitalist and precapitalist elements by a dominant foreign capital. The improved well being of the population and the elimination of poverty will supposedly follow from these circumstances.<sup>17</sup>

Belize is in the midst of the process that has been outlined. The country has recently received the sanction of the International Financial Institutions for its monetarist policies, a *sin qua non* for development assistance from the international community. Foreign capital investment has

been facilitated to the point where foreigners own 93.4 per cent of the privately held land over 100 acres in size in Belize.<sup>18</sup> Foreign capital has also found investment outlets in the tourist industry. The country has therefore taken the development path that follows from the neoliberalist vision of the world.

It is within this context that the international donors operate. Efforts at managing an environment degraded in the main by the activities of the non-poor are a part of this programme. The establishment of marine conservation parks in traditional fishing areas and moving those dependent on the sea for their income and sustenance into alternative forms of livelihood are a part of this programme. The stated objective of DfID's Natural Resources Systems Programme in the land water interface area is to ensure "benefits for poor people in targeted countries generated by application of new knowledge to natural resources management in the land water interface". "The aim of the [research] project", we are told, "is the exploration of feasible alternatives to existing natural resource uses at the land-water interface (for example eco-tourism)". The emphasis is on the identification of new sustainable ways in which to interact with the environment in the pursuit of livelihoods by the poor. In many instances this involves the disruption of traditions involving the use of these resources that are centuries old. According to one voice from Hopkins:

Now they talking about doing handcraft... and other things, but the people here in Hopkins they don't go for that...you going to try and teach a old man carving as a way to make something in life? That is like a stress for that man, you killing that person softly, because what kind of money he going to accumulate at that time to maintain his family?

The subsistence tradition<sup>19</sup> of the Garifuna in the south of Belize informs their worldview in the contemporary period. While external migration and the modernizing impact of gradual integration into the wider Belizean community has significantly altered the original tradition enough of it still remains to signal major differences between the community and the outside world. It stands in some degree of contrast to the 'Development' perspective of the international financial institutions and donor community. It is this perspective that informs their discourse on poverty, the environment and the future. Fishing in Hopkins has been a part of the subsistence tradition of the people. Traditionally, it was purely subsistence in character, pursued on a small-scale basis to meet daily needs rather than as a major business activity with the objective of wealth accumulation. This was supplemented by the growing of cassava and other root crops on the land. In the 1960s this changed somewhat with the introduction of outboard motors that enabled fishers to go further out to sea and do a little more sustained fishing.

In recent times the people of the community have come to depend on remittances more than fishing and farming. Unlike in the northern part of the country the social structure of coastal communities such as Hopkins has not been traditionally shaped by commercialism and the egalitarian distribution of land associated with plantation agriculture. This produced a flat social structure with *relatively* low levels of monetization.<sup>20</sup> It has also meant the persistence of social reciprocities that ensure that those in need are taken care of by the rest of the community. Thus, although there is no abundance of accumulated wealth, there is virtually no poverty in the sense in which the word is understood by the outside world as meaning

hunger, malnutrition and destitution. The twin effect of restricted access to certain areas of the sea and the presence of foreign investment capital (Foreign owned Hotels) in the community seems set to change this situation. According to one resident of Hopkins:

Nothing wrong with the conservation, yuh know, (the problem is) they putting the cart before the mule, from what they plan couple years ago this is the collateral damage because they duh put out the bloody man out ah business and they killing the man.(or they have not put proper plans in place to take care of the fall out from restrictions on fishing). Youngsters used to go out there with their dads and learn the fishing trade from them. But with this new business of diving and tour guiding<sup>21</sup> the son does not have the collateral to get into it and be competitive. If the family puts up its assets as collateral to enable the son to purchase a boat and other equipment, the family could get wipe out completely. The big hotels have their equipment. So you turning an independent man into a wage labourer (since the son will now be forced to work for the big hotel). I believe you suppose to continue with the tradition, where if the man was independent you create an alternative for the person to continue his independence. For example where the fisherman used to use a half of the fish (throwing away the head and the entails) you teach him to use the whole fish. Turn the things that used to be thrown away into by-products –maybe feed for the shrimp farms. Even if there is less fish in the sea, you suppose to teach the fisherman to use the whole fish instead of just half of the fish. In that way he will be able to earn enough to continue to be independent.

The historical record is clear. Mass poverty only emerges where the spread of the market economy has led to the disruption of community arrangements that guaranteed members access to certain common resources.<sup>22</sup> In addition to land, sea and water these include social capital in the form of reciprocities that ensure that a part of the social product is contributed towards the correction of insufficiency among community members. It is important to understand that this is the basis of the emergence of mass poverty in these societies. Anything therefore that furthers this process is going to lead to the emergence of historical figures that have no guaranteed means of subsistence and income.

The emergence of ‘Development’ in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century represents a transfer of these issues from Western Europe to the previously colonized world. The Problematization of the circumstances of the Third World in these terms served to shape its reality and legitimate certain kinds of intervention into it. To speak of development as a discourse is to recognize that this account of underdevelopment and poverty as well as the means of addressing it is a model that has been foisted on the entire world by a core set of institutions located in the Western industrial countries of the world. Rather than understanding social change as being ‘rooted in the interpretation of each society’s history and cultural tradition’<sup>23</sup>, a ‘one size fits all’ notion based on visions of modernity has come to be accepted as the truth by the professionals engaged in Development and the policy makers in the peripheral, or lagging countries of the world. The poverty that is being created by the intensification of capitalist activities on a global scale is deemed to be intrinsic to these societies and the ways in which their people organize themselves, rather than to the expansion of Western capitalism. Furthermore, in the case of the environment and conservation it is people at the community level with the least command of resources that are been asked to bear the burden of measures



necessary to correct the problems that have arisen from these activities. Listen to the voices from Hopkins:

If the fishing reserve is necessary it is because of the destructive effect of trawlers.<sup>24</sup> When the villagers protest the activities of the trawlers to the authorities they are told that their activities will be restricted. In spite of this, they continue to operate in Hopkins Bay just the same way. Some of these trawlers are locally owned but some are from Honduras. Before the trawlers we used to be able to go 100 meters out to sea and be able to catch enough fish to come and feed our family. Now we cannot because the trawlers they come and wreck everything. When we go into meetings they tell us that they are going to stop trawlers from coming here. In the next week two trawlers are parked in our bay on trawling mission. So what are they telling us? The trawlers are the one who are destroying our marine resources, because where they cannot consume they destroy. They are the ones, they even wreck our reef.

[Speaker 2] Well you could ask the other countries where they have struck for them to stop, what kind of equipment they use. If it is scarlars [name of a particular net used to catch shrimp] then you ban that, that's all you have to do. But deh no deh ban the scarlars because it catches the quantity of shrimp that bring them the foreign exchange that dem so hungry for.

It is the poor that bear the burden of the activities of the wealthy. The people of Hopkins tell us:

These days there are very few fishermen in Hopkins because the people who used to be going out there to fish ain't going no more. Why? Because they are very afraid to go out there fishing, because if they go out there and catch a grouper<sup>25</sup> these agencies gone out there and catch them and castrate them, they gonna go to jail because they say you have to catch the grouper of a certain size. Because they zone all the areas, if you notice out there you have a lot of conservation out there. That's why you have some fishermen out there who do not like what our present government is doing because they just blocking off everything. We are not smiling like four years ago....at that time in grouper season the children going to school, they going to high school because their parents could hustle. In those days when you come to Hopkins you smell grouper. You smell fish...fish like dirt (fish so plentiful it is difficult to quantify). With the introduction of conservation measures this has changed over the past five years.<sup>26</sup>

[Speaker 2] If there is less fish, 'stop export the fish'. Use the fish internally; reap just enough fish for the industry [local market] and you make the fisherman transfer to that industry. Instead, you stop the fisherman from fishing, you lock this door and lock that deh door too from the fisherman. They stop the fisherman from selling to the hotels; foreigners control that". He goes on to say, "As a fisherman you can't go fishing as usual because of the conservation areas".

The matter does not end there. Some "Developmentalists" would make the case for the benefits that follow from the investment of foreign capital and the establishment of the tourist industry. On the ground, the people feel that from the standpoint of technology and access to

capital the odds are stacked against them in their efforts to benefit from the activities led by foreign capital. More than this, they convey a sense of confinement brought about by the imposition of global economic imperatives on their traditional social and economic spaces. The speaker continues:

If you use you possession as collateral to allow yuh son to diversify ... into the hotel business (small Guest House), the first thing that faces him is that he has to learn computer technology. That is a intellectual divide. Furthermore, he has no credit available to him. If you decide to send him into the tour guide business, he only has to make one mistake out there to wipe out all of the family savings, if the hotels don't want to give him a job. If he is a independent tour operator he has to compete for business with the hotel. Even the tourists that are brought here by the hotel are brought in as part of an exclusive arrangement that limits the business they can do with the wider community. Your son can no longer be an independent fisher, if he buys a boat he has to beg the hotel to employ him as a tour guide operator for their guests. So padlock deh this side and padlock deh that side.

In similar vein one voice says:

Like me as a businessman in my community. I live in the low lands of my country. We call these the coastal plains of Belize. And I have arguments even with the local authorities, the village council, the town board and the environmentalists. You know why? Because they can tell you every thing that you can't do, but none of them can tell you one thing you can do. If you want to do something over there so, they could tell you, no you cant do this, no you cant do the other, but none of them can tell you one thing whe you could do. Who will develop this coastal plain when yuh no have one person in authority who can tell you what you can do.

The disconnection between the interpretation of the way in which the world works that is offered by development discourse and the dignity and well being of the community is well illustrated in the case of the impact of the tourist industry on the community. Already much of the beachfront property in the community has been alienated into the hands of foreigners. It is now clear that lack of capital and the unregulated entrance of foreign capital into the community will eventually lead to the conversion of the independent, subsistence oriented people of Hopkins into landless wage labourers in the service of foreign business interests. The ultimate outcome of this will be the destruction of the Garifuna community, its culture and way of life in Hopkins.<sup>27</sup>

In these circumstances it is perhaps little wonder that the state is viewed with distrust and as being allied to big business and the furtherance of their interests. According to the voices from the ground, "The government is not really shading our back. We ask the government as a whole to help us....". but nothing changes.

In extension of the point, the voices continue:

All dem big commercial farmers all the run offs (silt and fertilizers and other agricultural chemicals) and things like that, you should stop the (agricultural) bleeding

from destroying the fish stock. But because those guys have a bigger clout they look to stop the small man...the small man ah nuh de problem.  
The big man deh, upstairs. [Meaning he is too big to be touched].

The analysis continues:

Definitely So! When they stop the small man from fishing, or zone off the fishing area that is no part of the solution. I believe if you stop the problem then you do not have to create a solution. Stop the problem! What you want is systems that allow the big man and the small man to co-exist . . . . Because if the small man stop fishing what it is going to do is to create crime. He is going to rob the tourist and collapse the whole industry. Every action have a equivalent reaction.<sup>28</sup>

Political powerlessness and economic oppression are buttressed by cultural differences. The absence of the facility of formal English<sup>29</sup> places the traditional users of the environment at a disadvantage in relation to the external forces that now impose themselves on the community. The theme of disadvantage of the local in relation to the outside culture is once again expressed. The voices from Hopkins assert,

On top of all of that the fisherman does not have the intellect to even defend himself language-wise to explain wha deh happen to him (self). That mean that is a double death.

[Second speaker] kill and kill again.

[1<sup>st</sup> Speaker] He dead two time. If he had this ability to explain himself and what he is going through that would save half of the problem. That mek it even more complicated.

[Speaker 1] The wealthy use the poor because the poor cannot defend himself.

The antagonistic relationship between the local and the global also finds expression in relation to natural resources other than the sea and its environs. In relation to farming and control over land the voices say:

Is not every personnel here in Hopkins own a piece of land. They have persons that lease land... a lot of young generation they come and they ask me about land issues. They have a problem of that through the Lands Department. The Lands Department are not issuing or even reserving land for farmers and that is most of our problem here—not reserving land for youngsters coming out of agricultural school what are the children doing after they graduate from agricultural school? They walking the street, they ‘hanging’ out. They cant go to farm because the government don’t give them a portion of land for them to cultivate or have something to do. When they apply for land they just put their application aside, no land for them... no lands for them. As a part of the village council when I go to the lands dept do you know what they tell us? We don’t have no space for that kind of thing, but later on they have been giving foreigners five or ten acres to farm right in Hopkins.

[2ndSpeaker] They have nobody there with 5 acres, everybody there is a couple hundred [acres] up.

[1<sup>st</sup> Speaker] We don’t have no area here where we have land for ourselves to farm.

[2<sup>nd</sup> Speaker] The land is owned privately by a combination of foreigners and locals who grow citrus on it.

Post development theorists make the point that rather than facilitate economic growth external capital induces poverty through the destruction of local skill, enterprise and initiative.<sup>30</sup> Hopkins' experience seems to bear this out. Listen to the voices:

[Speaker 2] Take baby feed is entirely import when it used to be local. They don't use the local baby feed anymore. As a youngster I grew up on vegetables, milk and so on. Now everything is import.... from the diapers right up. They used to have a baby feed they call Adool, you add water and blend it and you feed the kid. That was local. Now that no deh again. 100% imported, so if you stop that ship from come in look like all the pickney deh dead. There used to be a baby cereal made from rice, peanuts and cashew. Very nutritious. But when the foreign cereal come they no buy that no more. That's the mentality I can't understand. It is all built into the education system.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has drawn on the analysis of discourse to come to an understanding of the relationship between poverty and the activities of the international donor agencies. This approach to the understanding of social reality proceeds from a disaffection with mainstream theorizing informed by recognition that far from being unaffected by each other power and theory are consorts. Furthermore, there are few places where this illicit relationship is more evident than in Western society's view of the relationship between itself, and the historical, societal and cultural traditions of the 'underdeveloped' world. Recognition of the relativity of knowledge leads to the search for alternative discourses. This we found in the voices of the people on the ground in Hopkins, Belize - those toward whom development in this instance targeted its efforts. Their utterances reflect the discontinuity between statement, and the effect of the action to which it lends legitimacy, that seems to be a hallmark of the development project. In its interface with the local reality of Hopkins, hegemonic development discourse imposes what Vandana Shiva calls 'cultural perceptions of poverty' that are quite at variance with the tradition of social reciprocity that has kept hunger and malnutrition at bay in this community.<sup>31</sup> Closely correlated with this is the unimpeded movement of foreign capital into a sphere in which access to common property is increasingly subject to restriction. If the investment of foreign capital leads to the reduction of 'poverty', it also creates proletarians out of independent artisans. The people of Hopkins recognize this and are strident in their condemnation of it especially since on the other side of proletarianism lies hunger and malnutrition.

The answer is not as some post development thinkers have suggested, a rejection of the West, its ways and what its agencies have to offer. To adopt that position would be to call for a return to full scale subsistence. Rather, at the level of precept the answer lies in recognition of the partiality of the mainstream interpretation and acknowledgement of the value of the voices on the ground. Epistemology, as I have tried to demonstrate is quite closely related to policy prescription. If the community of Hopkins is to continue to survive and preserve its cultural traditions and the dignity of its people the state will have to move beyond the mouthing of pro poor sentiments. It will have to begin the formulation and implementation of policies that further, or perhaps balance the interest of the poor relative to the wealthy.

Pro-poor policies in the area of tourism would for example ensure the effective participation of the community in the planning of tourism development in the area. It would also provide community members with access to credit on terms that accord with their social and economic position. More than this however policies that favour the community would facilitate the marketing of the community tourism product internationally.<sup>32</sup> A state and international donor community that has freed themselves from the blinkers of the dominant discourse would also recognize the urgency of putting the infrastructure in place that would allow the tourist to enjoy the basic comforts to which they are accustomed, at the community level. This would allow them to enjoy a new experience. Material deprivation is the product of the conflict between groups of persons with differing interests at the national and international levels.<sup>33</sup> A genuine concern to correct this situation would be best reflected in the role of the state and international donors as umpires or referees rather than as facilitators of the interests of the rich.

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## Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on research conducted by the author as a member of a multidisciplinary team. The team worked under the auspices of the Sustainable Economic Development Unit of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. The research examines the feasibility of livelihood strategies based on non-traditional uses of the environment by the poor in coastal regions of the Caribbean. It makes the presumption that the present uses to which the poor put the environment are unsustainable. The preamble that informs the research is silent on causes of this non-sustainability and therefore leaves room for the interpretation that the poor are the ones responsible for this state of affairs. The research was commissioned by the British Department for International Development and conducted in the northern Mestizo community of Sartenaja and the southern Garifuna village of Hopkins.

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<sup>2</sup> This critique is by now a quite substantial one. Some of the outstanding texts in this regard are Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*: Zed Books, London, 1997; Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Prakash, *Grassroots Postmodernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures*: Zed Books, London, 1998 and Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree (eds) *The Post Development Reader*: Zed Books, London, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> See Stuart Corbridge, 'Beneath the pavement only soil': The poverty of post-development', in *The Journal of Development Studies*, vol.34 Issue 6, PP. 138-148, London, August 1998

<sup>4</sup> John D. Caputo (1997) *Ed Deconstruction in a nutshell: a conversation with Jacques Derrida*: N.Y. Frodham University Press.

<sup>5</sup> See for example the work of Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, *The Subsistence Perspective*: Zed Books, London and New York, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> See for example the work of J. Crush, 'Imagining Development' in J. Crush (ed) *The Power of Development*: Routledge, London and New York, 1995. Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development*

<sup>7</sup> Placing subjectivity at the centre of the analysis raises questions as to its scientific status. The question of mind and its relationship to its object is an issue that lies at the heart of the matter of the nature of the scientific. From very early it spawned debate within Western European cultures, with the French (Descartes) giving preeminence to the mind and the English (Bacon) the object. The German idealism of Kant and Hegel transcended this by placing the mind and its object in an active relationship. This 'debate' reminds us of the fact that 'science' is itself a discourse and that often what is deemed scientific objectivism is an ossified version of 17 Century English empiricism. For a discussion of these epistemological issues see Keith Hart's Foreword in Katherine Perkins, *Production, Distribution and Growth in Transitional Economies*: Praeger, 1988.

<sup>8</sup> A. Escobar, 'The Problematization of Poverty: The Tale of Three Worlds and Development.' In Schech S. Haggis, J. Eds. *Development: A Cultural Studies Reader*

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Crush, 'Imagining Development' in J. Crush (ed) *The Power of Development*

<sup>10</sup> Vigdis Broch-Due, "Poverty-New Explorations in an Old Terrain", in CROP newsletter, vol.10, No.1, March 2003

<sup>11</sup> This type of polarized economic development is not peculiar to Belize. Langdon describes a similar pattern in parts of Africa. See S.Langdon, *Global Poverty Democracy and North South Change*: Garamond Press, Toronto, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Gobin, UWI, marine biologist provided this description. It is a moot point as to the relative contribution of these activities to what is generally acknowledged as a decline in the fish and marine stock available for harvesting in Belizean waters. Furthermore among the man made activities, what is the relative contribution of the rich and the poor to these outcomes? The international pattern seems to suggest that it is the activities of the wealthy, not the poor, that results in the greatest amount of destruction of the natural resources of the planet.

<sup>13</sup> M.Watts, "A New Deal in Emotions: Theory and practice and the crisis of development" in J. Crush, *The Power of Development*: Routledge, London: 1995

<sup>14</sup> This was signaled by President Harry Truman's Speech of 1949

<sup>15</sup> J. Martinussen, *Society, State and the Market*: Zed Books, London: 1997.

<sup>16</sup> For an outline of this position see Deepak Lal, "The poverty of Development Economics", London Institute of Economic Affairs, 1983.

<sup>17</sup> This of course is only one way of treating pre-capitalist social formations in the modernization process. Another way is to allow them to coexist with capitalist elements. In this scenario Development=Westernization is replaced by Development = Traditional + Modern. These arguments are of course central to the Marxist debate on the transition from feudalism to capitalism that took place in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in relation to Russia and its transition. The arguments of Lenin and Kautsky are instructive in this regard.

<sup>18</sup> Belize Country Report, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies identify autonomy, self-sufficiency and self-reliance as three hallmark features of the subsistence orientation. They define subsistence production as "all work that is expended in the creation, recreation and maintenance of immediate life and which has no other purpose". They contrast this with commodity production which has as its aim the production of money, or the accumulation of capital. See Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies, *The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalised Economy*: Zed Books, London and New York, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> This however would have been modified with the more recent establishment of citrus and banana plantations in the areas immediately beyond the community, external migration and the coming of foreign tourist investors.

<sup>21</sup> These are tourist related activities.

<sup>22</sup> Polanyi, K. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Time*: Beacon Press, Boston, 1944. For a consideration of thesis in relation to Globalization see John Gray, *The False Dawn: The Delusions of Global capitalism*: Granta Books, London, 1998

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<sup>23</sup> A. Escobar, "The Problematization of Poverty: The Tale of Three Worlds and Development", in S. Schech and J. Haggis (eds) *Development: A Cultural Studies Reader*: Blackwell Publishers, Oxford: 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Ocean going fishing vessels that use fine nets to catch shrimps. The problem is that they catch every living thing in their path including immature forms of sea life. This of course limits the capacity of species to reproduce themselves.

<sup>25</sup> Local name for Serranidae which is found in Belizean coastal waters.

<sup>26</sup> The local shopkeeper estimates an annual loss of income of US\$7,500-10,000 as a result of the fall in the volume of the catch that that followed on the establishment of the marine reserves.

<sup>27</sup> I. Boxill, A. Pereira and J. Maerk (eds), *Tourism, Natural Resources and Development in the Caribbean*: Plaza y Valdes, S.A de C.V. San Rafael, Mexico: 2002. There are provisions in international trading practices that prohibit the enactment of laws that restrict the sale of land to foreigners.

<sup>28</sup> The very next day a party of American tourists staying at a nearby holiday resort was robbed at gunpoint of a computer, cash and jewellery. The first time this had ever happened in the community. The robber was apprehended shortly after the crime was committed.

<sup>29</sup> The Garifuna speak a traditional language that reflects the various elements of their ancestry and Spanish. They all speak English, the official language of Belize, but their abilities in this regard would vary with their educational levels.

<sup>30</sup> See for example the work of Davin Ramphall . "Postmodernism and the Rewriting of Caribbean Radical Development Thinking", in *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 46, No.1, 1997

<sup>31</sup> Vandana Shiva.1989 "Development, Ecology and Women" in Judith Plant (ed) *Healing the Wounds*: Philadelphia, New Society Publishers,. According to Shiva:

Culturally perceived poverty need not be real material poverty: subsistence economies which serve basic needs through self-provisioning are not poor in the sense of being deprived. Yet the ideology of development declares them so because they don't participate overwhelmingly in the market economy and do not consume commodities provided for and distributed through the market...This cultural perception of prudent subsistence as living poverty has provided the legitimization for the development process as removing poverty. As a culturally biased project, it destroys wholesome and sustainable lifestyles and creates real material poverty or misery...

<sup>32</sup> Ashley, C., Roe, D., and Goodwin, H. 2001. *Pro-Poor Tourism Strategies: Making Tourism Work for the Poor: A Review of Experience*. Overseas Development Institute.

<sup>33</sup> Jordan, Bill, (1996) *A Theory of Poverty and Social Exclusion*: Cambridge Mass, Polity Press.

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