

South to South across the Pacific: Ernest E. Neal and Community Development Efforts in the American South and the Philippines¹

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I

In the literature of America's encounters with Asia, and vice versa, historians on the either shore of the Pacific have more or less habitually used the term "across the Pacific" to connote human ventures headed for a very distant as well as *different* society, in reference to tragedies caused by mutual misunderstanding, ignorance, and distrust, and also to great endeavors to overcome, understand, or tolerate such differences.² Recently historians have certainly become more careful in discussing distinctions between Western and non-Western people since the time that Said's *Orientalism*³ and postcolonial studies made their impact on academic communities, many having turned the spotlight on the cultural and social anatomy of differentiation, arguing that knowledge and power have become intertwined and discovering Asia as America's distant other, and vice versa.

My concern here, however, is that such recent efforts to deconstruct with all the best intentions Orientalist notions of otherness only tend to reproduce or even strengthen the narrative of dualism, which might even narrow and simplify the landscape of U.S.-Asia Pacific history, as such

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endeavors tend to portray people as preoccupied with finding otherness and difference in whatever and whomever they encounter across the Pacific. Admittedly, the cultural politics of differentiation might be a useful concept for historians, especially if one focuses on the culture of imperialism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,⁴ but such is not always the case. In this article, I would like to present a case in which a person with particular “domestic” social experiences in the United States found himself surrounded by things familiar to him in such distant countries as India and the Philippines. Ernest E. Neal (1911–1972) was one of the first African American foreign aid officers to work for the U.S. Agency for International Development (hereafter USAID) and devoted his life to social enterprises sponsored under the name of “community development” in various agrarian communities at home and abroad. Exploring his experiences may open our eyes to at least one alternative way to explore transpacific experiences between peoples “across the Pacific.”

II

During the 1950s and early 1960s, the “gospel of community development”⁵ or “an attempt to marry Western doctrines of behavior on to a somewhat romantic or idealized notion of Asian village society”⁶ spread among U.S. foreign-aid programs aimed at Asia’s developing countries, which were at that time considered new battlegrounds for America’s Cold War to win the hearts and minds of local peoples. Ernest E. Neal was an American recruited from the Deep South’s “Heart of Dixie” state of Alabama to win this new kind of war against communism.

Before going into detail about Neal’s experiences, it might be helpful to look back over the historical origins of community development (hereafter CD); that is, its trends and practices as experienced in the United States. In terms of social enterprises geared to the problem of mass poverty, one source of CD was the settlement house movement, which originated in Britain during the late nineteenth century and was then widely popularized in the United States. Many present day CD enterprises have their historical foundations in the urban settlement houses movement at the turn of the previous century. These ventures, however, were at that time considered not so much a part of a social reform *movement*, but rather as educational opportunities for young men and women of affluent families to mingle among the urban poor and discover how they lived,

which amounted to nothing more than philanthropic ventures, by no means free from paternalistic as well as racist biases.⁷

On the other hand, the twentieth century notion of CD has been defined as a social enterprise for improving living conditions in local communities, not as charity but through active *participation* and *self-help* on the part of community members themselves. CD also appears more like a social reform *movement* in its aspirations for change and the mobilization of local communities. It is, however, mostly local and national governments that initiate and organize CD ventures and it is also mostly professionals coming from outside the communities in question that exercise leadership over such ventures.⁸ The following United Nation's definition of CD published in 1959 may well summarize such features.

Community Development means the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities, . . . The distinctive features of community development programmes are the participation by the people themselves in efforts to improve their level of living with reliance as much as possible on their own initiative: and the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiative, self-help and mutual help and make them more effective.⁹

The concept underlying the above definition is "aided self-help," a method to encourage the recipients of government assistance to become as self-reliant as they could be, with technical and minimum material assistance from the government, provided on the condition of maximum self-help exercised by the recipients. One of its conceptual origins is the "aided self-help housing" policy, which was conceived as a practical solution to serious shortages of housing and manpower for housing in Europe after World War I. The idea was developed and spread to many kinds of government projects, including those in the USSR and British India. In the United States, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which was established in 1934 as a part of the New Deal, launched a major "aided self-help housing" project in 1939 for an urban slum resettlement project in Puerto Rico. After World War II, Jacob Crane, who had been in charge of the Puerto Rico project, lobbied for the establishment of a housing and planning section at the United Nations. This eventually led to the introduction of "aided self-help" into the broader arena of United Nations' development assistance programs.¹⁰

The concept was then incorporated into the basic doctrine of U.S. foreign development assistance as shown in John F. Kennedy's 1961

inaugural address, “to those peoples in the huts and villages across the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts *to help them help themselves* [italics added].”¹¹ It is no wonder that the concept became closely related to the presumed American tradition of self-respect, agrarian democracy and citizenry, while becoming extremely convenient for the Kennedy Administration in gaining Congressional support, as it could be used as a proof of the government’s willingness to restrain federal expenditures for foreign assistance. The 1961 Foreign Assistance Act declared, “Assistance from the United States shall be used in support of, rather than substitution for, the *self-help* efforts that are essential to successful development programs and shall be concentrated in those countries that take positive steps to *help themselves* [italics added].”¹² The Act was designed to integrate then scattered federal agencies for foreign economic assistance, and established USAID.

While the “aided self-help” concept was adopted as the basic principle of U.S. foreign development assistance, it was federal and local government programs and efforts of “agricultural extension” that provided the ways and means, as well as the personnel for related programs. The origin of agricultural extension also dates back to the late nineteenth century, when various rural reconstruction efforts were spreading around the world in order to address the agrarian crisis brought about by the forces of capitalist industrialization and colonialism. In the United States, Congress enacted a series of laws to establish land-grant universities, whose departments of agriculture and agricultural experimental stations would work with federal, state, and local governments to improve productivity, farming methods, farm business management, etc. in the interest of local communities.¹³ During the New Deal years, the Resettlement Administration was established in 1935 and then incorporated into the Department of Agriculture in 1937 as the Farm Security Administration (FSA), which further expanded agricultural extension enterprises to help poor farmers and sharecroppers who had been displaced by the Great Depression and the structural transformation of the agrarian economy.¹⁴

The important thing for the present discussion is that in practice agricultural extension had to go beyond the mere improvement of farming methods, since programs inevitably had to face various interrelated problems in CD, such as sanitation, health care, nutrition, and housing. This was especially the case with the FSA farm resettlement project, in which

displaced farmers and sharecroppers would be resettled on farms purchased by the FSA from landlords who wanted to sell them, as such ventures would entail building a new physical and social environment for the resettled farmers. Those in charge of agricultural extension ventures, mainly land-grant university teachers and federal and state government employees, thus became community work professionals of sorts, who had to acquire skills and experience in working together with the local people to discover issues, think out their solutions, and communicate and negotiate with outside government agencies to carry out their plans. "Community development" gradually came into use as a more appropriate generic term for this sort of social work and rapidly spread after World War II. Ernest Neal was one among such self-made CD professionals of the New Deal years.

III

Ernest E. Neal was born in 1911 to a poor African-American farm family near Chattanooga, Tennessee. From his "narrative report of technical assistance experiences," we can see how strongly Neal's entire career was influenced by the fact that he had spent his boyhood on a small poor farm, having personally experienced the pain and sorrow of "the wretched of the earth."¹⁵ Neal himself, however, was competent and fortunate enough to escape the misery, going on to Knoxville College (B.A.) and to the prestigious Fisk University, where he obtained a master's degree in sociology. Then he started a teaching career in 1939 at Texas College, a small black liberal arts teachers college in the city of Tyler. After initial failures to impress his students, he thought of using Tyler "as a sociological laboratory" to stimulate them. This led him to become involved in the city's community projects, including building a public library and putting in street paving for the local black community, marking his first involvement with anything related to CD. In 1946, he went to teach at Bishop College in Marshall, Texas, where he joined the agricultural extension work going on at Sabine Farms, Texas' only FSA resettlement project for black farmers, which had resettled some 120 black families in 1937. The farms were de-federalized in 1946, and Bishop College acquired a 19-acre center there, which included a community center "as a laboratory for applied education," as the successor to the federal agricultural extension project.¹⁶ Then in 1948, Tuskegee Institute offered Neal the directorship of its Rural Life Council. The offer

from “the capstone of rural development in the South”¹⁷ showed how widely Neal had become acknowledged as a rural CD specialist by then.

What Neal witnessed after his arrival in Alabama, however, was an ongoing agricultural revolution in the South affecting the fate of the rural black population, which even the prestigious Tuskegee Institute could not control. Baldwin Farms, which had been granted to Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) to assist graduates of the Institute’s Agricultural Department in becoming successful farmers, had been mostly abandoned before Neal’s first visit there. On Colonel McLemore’s 2,000-acre cotton plantation, which was located 20 miles west of Tuskegee, continuing radical mechanization had forced 180 out of its original 200 sharecropper families to leave by the time Neal first visited there. Then McLemore decided to change from mechanized cotton production to livestock raising, reducing the number of black families living on his plantation to only 5. The uprooted families all moved to the cities to compete for jobs, without much prospect of success.¹⁸

Such scenes are indicative of what was occurring all over the agrarian states of the South on a tremendous scale: that is, the demise of the traditional cotton plantation economy causing mass unemployment of black sharecroppers and their exodus to the cities, Southern as well as Northern.¹⁹ Realizing that the situation was going to “get worse” and that the problem was not going to be solved by the Tuskegee Institute, Neal and his colleagues decided to pour their efforts into creating “national awareness of what the revolution was doing to black farmers” by testifying at Congressional hearings, organizing national seminars and conferences, and urging the national media to direct their attention to the problem. A few articles did appear in the major newspapers of the time mentioning Neal as a spokesperson for Southern black farmers and urging the nation to address the problem of the agricultural revolution and the mass evacuation of black farmers to the cities as unskilled, low-paid workers.²⁰

Apart from national awareness-raising activities, Neal thought it was equally important to take care of the old people and small children who would remain on subsistence farms after the working-age people left for the cities. The Rural Life Council initiated a project to select a few small subsistence farm communities on an experimental basis to study ways of improving their living conditions. It was at this point that Neal and Tuskegee put the “aided self-help” concept into full swing, especially targeting low-cost housing and backyard equipment, teaching local peo-

ple how to make concrete blocks and lay them for housing and how to cultivate better gardens. They organized community councils to find out what the real problems were in each community and to sort out the ways in which the Tuskegee Institute could help them. They also sent a cultural anthropologist to live in one community to study customs related to health care, promoted cultivating gardens year-round for better nutrition, and worked with home economists, vocational agricultural economists, and church ministers to meet the needs of local communities.

Notwithstanding their efforts, which certainly improved “the morale if not the economics” of rural communities, Neal dispassionately recalls in his memoirs that “The impersonal laws of agronomy and economics are stronger than the magic of the greatest charismatic leaders or well-intentioned reformers.”²¹ The problem could only have been solved if it had gained national attention, thus providing huge federal government resources. Such was not the case. The ventures initiated by Neal and his colleagues amount to only a few drops in the bucket. One could even say that “aided self-help” for the black subsistence farmers contributed not so much to the eradication of their poverty as their adaptation to it. Neal knew these limitations too well to believe in “the magic,” which could make the life of local communities “a little better” but could never change it. Neal then believed, “the work had a better chance for success” in CD enterprises in India and the Philippines, “because it was supported by the governments of the both countries and the United States.”²²

IV

Neal does not explain in his memoirs the exact reasons why he decided to pursue a new career as a foreign aid officer; however, it was inevitable that the agricultural revolution occurring in the South would radically reduce its rural black population, the very objects of CD, and that sooner or later CD professionals would have to find new arenas of activity. Rapidly expanding urban black communities could certainly have been one of those arenas. Another opportunity was development aid, which was just starting up when Neal was at Tuskegee. He became more and more interested in the latter option, since he believed that “The acceptance of Negroes as full citizens is dependent upon their ability to become the proponents of a cause bigger than themselves,”²³ and hoped that “American Negroes” would point “the way to underprivileged people all over the world, as to how they can lift themselves up.”²⁴ In other words,

he believed African Americans should go beyond their own “internal” issues and become role models for peoples of the developing world in order to prove they were worthy of the full-fledged U.S. citizenship that had been denied to them so long.

Neal might also have been influenced and encouraged in his decision to switch careers by his colleagues. Jacob Crane, a proponent of “aided self-help housing,” had sent a few people from developing countries to Tuskegee Institute to see the “small” rural experiments then led by Neal;²⁵ and Neal’s long time colleague Arthur F. Raper, a prominent sociologist known for his brave and pioneering criticism of lynching, sharecropping and tenancy in the South, became involved in rural development problems on a global scale after he visited Japan in 1947 at the invitation of SCAP (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) to study agrarian reform there. Raper helped Neal get security clearance as a government employee, for which the latter expressed his gratitude in his memoir, saying, “Without Arthur’s help for security clearance during the era of Senator Joseph McCarthy, there would have been no foreign aid career for me.”²⁶

In February 1954, Neal was appointed director of community development for the U.S. Technical Assistance Mission to India. By then CD had become one of the most highlighted fields in U.S. foreign development assistance programs.²⁷ It was then considered the most effective, visible, as well as “cheap” countermeasure against the threat of communist revolution in the developing countries, and it was hoped that it would prove effective in reforming “feudal” agrarian societies through such western democratic processes as participation, self-help, and mutual help, not through the collectivist means propagated by the socialist blocs. It was also expected to be a wildcard for increased food production and general improvement of living conditions in rural societies.

India was the first recipient country of U.S. aid for CD, initiated in 1952. Mostly because it was at odds with the U.S. over non-alliance diplomacy, India was considered one of the most important targets of U.S. aid, while CD was considered an ideal field in which the two countries could work together, away from any discord in international affairs. Two joint objectives were set: to achieve increases in food production and to implement social reform based on the principle of citizen participation and democracy. Then several pilot villages were selected where “panchayats (village councils)” were set up. One village level aid worker with 18 months training was assigned to live in each village. The pro-

gram was soon expanded and eventually spread to all the villages in India by the mid-1960s.²⁸ Though the U.S. aid mission sent a few American specialists to reside in rural India as agricultural supervisors, the project as a whole was carried out through the initiative and manpower of the Indian government, while the U.S. mission provided such material assistance as jeeps, farm equipment, educational materials for agricultural schools, medical equipment and drugs for health care centers.

Though impressed with the huge scale and enthusiasm of the overall CD endeavors in India, Neal came to notice during 3 months of intensive traveling around rural India that the village people were working harder on schools, health centers, and community wells than on “hard economic problems,” because they did not own the land they cultivated. He also found “untouchables” were for the most part not included in community-wide projects. These things reminded him of the early days of rural development sponsored by Tuskegee.

Community Projects tended to be projects that did not upset traditional ways but were concentrated on building schools, community centers, and community wells. The problem posed by the exploitative moneylenders, tenancy, marketing, and agricultural productivity, resisted the efforts of community development. These were national problems that could not be solved by village-level workers.²⁹

This observation expressed in his memoir probably reflects afterthoughts about CD from later years. During the mid 1950s, CD was still a shining mantra spreading to all the developing countries. India offered a huge training ground for U.S. foreign aid officers, who fanned out across the globe from South Asia. In 1956, Neal was assigned to the Philippines, where CD enterprises flourished as a strange by-product of the Cold War.

V

While U.S. aid to CD in India was welcomed due to its relative independence from the distance between the two countries over international politics, CD programs in the Philippines were from the very beginning openly declared part of the allied “warfare” against communist insurgency. Behind the aid was the compound shadow of the Huk rebellion, which had originated out of the leftist peasant movement that had begun in the 1930s in the breadbasket provinces of Central Luzon, and a bloody election fraud crisis that was badly damaging the legitimacy of Elpidio

Quirino's presidency and the Liberal Party government with claims of corruption and financial mismanagement.

The U.S. government responded to these problems in the midst of Asia's Cold War by strengthening military assistance to suppress the Huk insurgency, while clandestinely staging a drama to oust the unpopular Quirino in favor of "the guy," Ramon Magsaysay, and the Nacionalista Party in the name of "free and honest" elections. One important means to this latter end was the National Movement for Free Elections (hereafter NAMFREL), which was established in August 1951 with Gabriel L. Kaplan, an election law expert and experienced civic organizer from New York City, as the organization's *de facto* chief advisor. The organization was financed by the CIA and Kaplan himself later turned out to be a CIA agent, although he was more of an organizer who used the CIA as a cover for his aspirations to organize civic movements regardless of their whereabouts.³⁰

Kaplan initiated CD programs in the Philippines in a rather peculiar way by using NAMFREL as the base organization. Having secured financial support from U.S. based companies, NAMFREL started to build Philippine Community Centers, the first two being inaugurated in February 1953 in Mabalacat, Pampanga Province, which was at the heart of the Huk rebellion, and in Marbel, Cotabato Province on Mindanao. Kaplan declared that these centers were "not established with the idea of fighting communism, but rather to eradicate the conditions under which communism thrives, namely poverty, ill health, ignorance and lack of opportunity for citizen participation in community affairs."³¹ Eight more NAMFREL Community Centers were to be inaugurated by 1956, when the Philippine government took over CD enterprises from NAMFREL. Chino Roces, a respected journalist and the owner of the *Manila Times*, worked closely with Kaplan and promoted CD projects in his newspapers "as if it had been a major social reform movement."³²

Ramon Binamira (1927–2004), the young NAMFREL director of Cebu City who had been discovered as a talented young law student by Kaplan in 1951, was made director of NAMFREL CD enterprises 2 years later. In 1956 Binamira was appointed by President Magsaysay to the newly created cabinet post of Presidential Assistant of Community Development (hereafter PACD) and thereafter led the Philippine CD enterprises during their pioneer days until 1961. Though Binamira himself rejected a contract offer with the CIA, it could not have been possible for him to exercise leadership over the CD projects without both open

and covert assistance from Kaplan and various U.S. agencies, as he had to face a serious challenge from the Philippines Rural Reconstruction Movement under the leadership of Y. C. James Yen, an internationally acknowledged figure in the field, and Secretary of Agriculture Salvador Araneta, one of the most respected senior intellectuals and politicians in the Philippines, who wanted to gain control of rural development projects supported by U.S. aid. Only with the eleventh-hour strong endorsement for Binamira's plan from the U.S. Embassy and foreign aid agencies did Magsaysay withdraw his support for Yen and Araneta and adopt Binamira's 5-year national plan for community development, establishing PACD in April 1956.³³ 4 months later, Earnest Neal arrived in the Philippines as the chief advisor to PACD and special assistant for rural development to the director of United States Operations Missions (USOM) in the Philippines.³⁴

VI

Upon his arrival in the Philippines, Neal found that the PACD office consisted of Binamira and "six other bright young lawyers" already feverishly working on drafting the organization program to implement community development. An essential part of the program was training, which was to produce "multi-purpose" CD workers (hereafter PACD workers) who would live in rural communities, and plan and carry out the grants-in-aid programs to be supported by the government. Though their role was essentially similar to that of village-level workers in India, the Filipino trainees were required to be college graduates and were selected through a special civil service examination and interview process, with an only 8% pass rate. Coming from such fields as agronomy, sociology, social welfare, public sanitation, civil engineering, and education, they would receive training for 6 months without pay at the brand-new community development training facility at the University of the Philippines Los Baños, which had been granted by U.S. aid. After graduation, they would be assigned to barrios (i.e., rural villages) where they would live with the local people as "a stimulator and organizer of self-help barrio activities, an aide and a connecting link between the barrio people and the government." The "aided self-help" concept was incorporated into the PACD grants-in-aid programs in the following way. The barrios applying for the grants should offer locally available human and material resources as much as they could, while the government

would provide such materials and equipment as cement and motorcycles, so that the burden would be shared “fifty-fifty” between the two. Cash grants were firmly rejected.³⁵

The PACD enterprise thus started in late 1956 with the first 320 graduates from the CD training facility, 90% of whom had worked as teachers, lawyers and government employees before joining PACD. As more new graduates were hired, PACD expanded its personnel to 1,200 members by 1959, taking care of more than 6,000 barrios (out of some 20,000 barrios in the country) and 21,000 grants-in-aid programs, while sponsoring short-term leadership training programs around the country for more than 26,000 barrio leaders.³⁶ The total cash worth of the “self-help” projects came to almost 26 million pesos (13 million dollars) by 1959, 53% of which was presumably borne by the local barrio communities. Nearly one third (8,460 thousand pesos) of the total expense was directed to the construction of “barrio self-help roads,” which were extended to 1,316 km, followed by 2,350 thousand pesos to 417 irrigation projects. Other major projects included 10,000 hectares of forestation, pest extermination campaigns, the distribution of seed, seedlings and fertilizer, and the construction of community centers.³⁷ To evaluate the programs, the University of the Philippines was funded to establish a community development research and evaluation council to act as an independent third party.³⁸

Manila Times reports about PACD projects, which may have been exaggerated due to Chino Roces’ collaboration with Kaplan, tell of an enthusiasm to the point of evangelism during the early years over the work being done. The keyword in the reporting was always “self-help.” One of the first PACD trainees stated:

[B]e it in the mountain fastness of northern Luzon or in the wilderness of Mindanao, we will be writing history. Of course, the success of our mission depends on us—and their resistance to our crusade: Self-Help.³⁹

“Crusade for self-help” in their terminology meant an effort to make barrio people realize “they cannot be totally dependent upon the government” and “if they want their community to be progressive, the initiative must come from them.”⁴⁰ Once they could stimulate the communities into helping themselves, “the rest of the job would be comparatively smooth.”⁴¹ For example, on Bohol island, the *Manila Times* reported, “Prodded on only by technical advice and occasional grants-in-aid, they have realized that they can do so many things if they only pool their

efforts to solve common problems,” putting up health centers and community centers.⁴²

Neal apparently felt much more comfortable in the Philippines, where “a harmonious and productive team”⁴³ could develop before long, than in India, which he felt was “not an easy country” for a technical advisor, because the Indian elite of the civil service were educated in England, were “perfectly competent,” and were thus too proud to be enthusiastic about foreign technical assistance.⁴⁴ After all, Neal was working for something he could not even have dreamt of in the American South, even though it might have been made possible as a part of “psychological warfare” against communism. The PACD enterprises were far and away larger in scale and gained far more national attention than the Tuskegee rural development programs. No wonder, he thought, that “the work had a better chance for success” abroad than in his homeland.

VII

The initial euphoria, however, soon gave way to reality, and Neal eventually came to doubt the very notion of CD, which had become “an article of faith” in the rural development aid programs carried on by the United Nations and the United States. The first blow came in the plane crash in March 1957 that killed President Magsaysay, whose platform had been deeply committed to the cause of rural development and on whose popularity the PACD enterprises had so much relied. PACD nevertheless continued to operate, and Ramon Binamira, who was from the same Bohol province as succeeding President Carlos P. Garcia, stayed as its head.

What triggered Neal’s doubts was Garcia’s decision not to support additional funding to increase the number of PACD workers, which made it impossible to extend the projects to all the 20,000 barrios around the country. Neal recalls that this presidential decision “forced something to the forefront of my mind that I had pushed into the background over the past three years.” It was the very necessity of a national government agency with personnel extending to the village level that Neal doubted. Having known that rural schoolteachers, rural public health nurses and ministers in Texas and Alabama were doing almost the same kind of work that the CD workers were doing in India and the Philippines, he wondered if it was really desirable for professionals from the outside to be in charge of self-help projects. Then Neal and the American staff

drafted a “think paper” proposing to pull all the PACD workers out of the barrios and place them in municipalities and provinces as aides to the governors and mayors and as training officers for local public servants and elected officials working with barrio people. Binamira strongly opposed the proposal, so Neal had to drop the idea.⁴⁵

Though Neal touches upon the difference of opinion only casually in his memoir, the argument was serious enough to question the foundation of CD and its “aided self-help” concept. While Neal thought PACD should cover all the barrios around the country, Binamira argued they should limit the recipients of the grants-in-aid only within communities where “aided self-help” could be productive. This meant that the grants-in-aid would go to only those “relatively resourceful barrios” that could meet the conditions under the “fifty-fifty” principle, while “the poorest of the poor” would be excluded from being recipients of this particular program. Binamira thought the poorest communities should be given relief in other ways. Binamira strongly disagreed with Neal’s proposal to pull PACD workers out of barrios, because he believed the most important mission of PACD workers was to go deep into the barrio communities and directly initiate the people into the spirit of self-help and participation.⁴⁶

It was quite understandable for Binamira, who was in charge of such a huge national project, to insist on the “fifty-fifty” principle in order to secure tangible results. This, however, meant that CD would amount to nothing more than helping those who could help themselves, which is a far cry from the social revolution it was being advertised as. One could even say that the “fifty-fifty” formula functioned to help minimize the amount of public resources earmarked for stabilizing a discontented rural society, enabling the government to use more public funds for state-building in the form of industrialization and urban infrastructures. This is exactly what happened during the years of martial law regime (1972–1986) of President Ferdinand E. Marcos, whose development policy was severely criticized for its neglect of rural social improvement by the United Nation’s research and recommendations on rural development published in 1985.⁴⁷

Binamira’s assertion concerning the necessity for professionally trained CD workers to be assigned directly to the barrio communities was overwhelmingly more popular among CD advocates at the time than Neal’s counter-assertion that multi-purpose CD works could be borne by local leaders. We cannot, however, ignore the fact that the former

could very likely result in portraying aid recipients as dependent and problematic *others*, since CD workers could only go into CD-earmarked communities after presuming local people's ignorance and lack of understanding about, and even possible opposition to, the notion of self-help, as shown in the words of the PACD trainee quote above, who was bracing himself for "resistance to our crusade." Within this formula, PACD projects, which were originally designed to try and create self-help attitudes and participatory democracy among the people, could very well turn into activities perpetuating the preconception of the poor as dependent and selfish.

VIII

Despite his disagreement with Binamira, Neal was entitled to be happy about what he had achieved in the Philippines when he left in 1958 for his new assignment in Africa. At that time, however, the PACD projects were already losing the momentum they had enjoyed during the early days. Several PACD workers were even charged with corruption and suspended during the election year of 1961.⁴⁸ Binamira himself was charged with collusion between his family business and PACD enterprises.⁴⁹ After he tendered his resignation following Garcia's defeat by Diosdado Macapagal in November 1961, the General Auditing Office discovered a 1,240,000 pesos loss incurred by PACD as the result of overpricing supplies.⁵⁰ These incidents were definite signs that PACD projects were already sinking into the greed of the special interest politics of the country. The office of PACD continued on, however, and came under the directorship of Ernest Maceda in 1965, soon after Ferdinand Marcos was sworn into office. From that time on PACD was deftly incorporated by the two into the Marcos political machine, to the chagrin of its founder, Binamira.⁵¹

In August 1964 Ernest Neal returned to the Philippines from his assignments in Liberia and Sierra Leone, this time as deputy director of the USAID Mission there. Neal recalls, "I had the feeling that I had never left the Philippines," since he was hearing the same problems and solutions being discussed and proposed that had been current 8 years previous. The rural development problem seemed not to have change one iota.⁵²

Around the same time, the U.S. international policy focus on CD had rapidly begun to fade. By 1963 USAID had withdrawn its support from

India's CD programs, and the CD Division in USAID itself was liquidated.⁵³ It was not only in the United States that the concept of CD was being diagnosed as faulty, for in India, as well, an influential government research report published as early as in 1957 had already pointed out that CD programs had been diverted into officially controlled "bricks and mortar" public works programs "devoid of almost any popular dynamic."⁵⁴ British scholar Hugh Tinker, in a 1960 comparative study of CD programs in Southeast Asia, pointed out the existence of "strange disharmonies between theory and practice" in Thailand and the Philippines, while in Malaya the entire theory of self-help and participation had been abandoned in favor of a mixed state-private sector policy to raise income levels.⁵⁵

It was the "Green Revolution" that, of course, quickly replaced the gospel of self-help during the late 1960s under the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, as the spotlight was again back on the Philippines as the host of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), which developed the first "high yielding varieties" of IR-8, now a "laboratory," instead of a battleground, to prove the triumph of western democracy, this time through science and technology and free market economy.⁵⁶ As deputy director of the USAID Mission, Neal became a significant by-player in the Philippine version of the Green Revolution. Neal confessed in his memoir, however, that his involvement in the Green Revolution was rather a passive one:

I was convinced that there was little, if anything, the Mission could do for the urban unemployment or the subsistence farmers. It was not that my interest in and concern about these people had lessened; I just did not know what the Mission could do about these problems. Therefore, I concentrated on the sector of the agricultural economy that offered the best potential – the irrigated rice growing areas.⁵⁷

The Mission concentrated its efforts on two provinces, Laguna and Pampanga, in the vicinity of Manila, with relatively high rice productivity potentials, in much the same way as Binamira's PACD had insisted on limiting grants to the more resourceful barrios previously. In Pampanga, the very ambitious young governor by the name Benigno Aquino, Jr. went crazy over the Green Revolution and threw his full support behind the Mission, effectively mobilizing the province in the manner of a true revolutionary army general.⁵⁸ During Neal's second assignment, the Philippines achieved dramatic increases in rice production, which led to fulfillment of the long cherished dream of self-suffi-

ciency (albeit only temporary), and it even became a rice-exporting country (albeit symbolically).⁵⁹

The Green Revolution, however, was not the panacea it was portrayed as in terms of solving rural development problems in the Philippines. While it achieved a long-awaited improvement in low rice productivity, it came under criticism as having no advantage for farmers, who had to bear new expenses for the seed, irrigation facility maintenance, and mechanized equipment necessary for “high yield” rice.⁶⁰ Neal adds:

Under the more efficient system of cultivation, the little security that the landless laborers had was taken away. I was learning how delicate the balance is in an agricultural area where most of the people are poor and under-employed and the social consequences when this balance is upset.⁶¹

What Neal “was learning” reminds one of the experiences of black farmers in the American South, where their rural problems were ultimately solved not by reform, but by the dissolution of their communities. Sabine Farms, for African American farming families in eastern Texas, which once had been a bastion of the civil rights movement, is today a completely deserted village, with only the remnants remaining.⁶² This reality is certainly different, but not all that far from what the Philippine society faces today, a vast rural population with nearly one-tenth of the national population seeking jobs overseas.⁶³

IX

After completing his second assignment in the Philippines, Neal was again assigned to Africa in 1969 as a regional population officer stationed in Accra, Ghana. There, however, he contracted amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (commonly known as Lou Gehrig’s disease). When he discovered his life was quickly drawing to an end, he decided to concentrate on writing his “narrative report” as his last assignment for USAID. In the memoir, in which he strictly limited the topics to his public life, Neal does not disclose any thoughts about his daughter Kathleen, who at the time was pursuing life as a black revolutionary,⁶⁴ in sharp contrast to his life devoted to more modest social enterprises. We can gather from his words in the memoir that he might, however, not have been all that bitter towards his daughter, as he frankly questioned the basic concept of CD while humbly admitting the rather futile efforts he and his colleagues had made to improve “the quality of life of the people in traditional societies.”⁶⁵ The memoir is indeed a rare document, giving us many clues to

the similarities and interactions between social work in the American South and U.S. aid to developing countries.

During his entire career, Neal strove to help “subsistence farmers,” who were “displaced people” muscled out during the restructuring process of agrarian society under capitalist industrialization and socio-economic modernization. While he applauded people with skill and competence, who would be able to solve their problems themselves by getting out of the poor villages of their birth, headed for the industrialized cities or commercial farming, his own life would be concerned with “the wretched,” unable to leave their home villages, forced to derive a livelihood from local “traditional economies.” His basic theory of community development was that rural people could solve their economic problems through “aided self-help.” Having striven for decades to help them help themselves, however, Neal discovered the concept to be “too simplistic to cope with the magnitude and complexity” of village society under all the varieties of pressure to modernize.⁶⁶ What Neal found time and again in his experiences in the American South, India, and the Philippines was a pattern in which CD projects became concentrated on community roads, buildings, wells and irrigation, thus leaving the more basic economic problems intact.

Why did such projects continue to follow such a similar pattern from the Heart of Dixie all the way across the Pacific Ocean? Firstly, the CD concept itself assumed the village as a viable economic unit, which could become self-sufficient by means of aided self-help activities on the part of “the subsistence farmers,” but the modern rural village in fact was not the Robinson Crusoe’s island it was presumed to be, and was not, nor ever could be, completely isolated from outside industrialized commercial sectors.

Secondly, the so-called “subsistence” families living in rural communities were already self-supportive in the various ways available to them, living on limited resources whether located within or outside the community. The basic formula of CD, “aided self-help,” would become attractive to them not because it would instruct them in ways to help themselves, since they already presumed they knew pretty well how to do that, but because they could draw on outside resources, which they chose to access by accommodating CD missionaries preaching the bible of self-help. Neal stresses that CD in developing countries, despite its failure to underpin economic development programs, had some merit in gaining the “allegiance of the villagers to the new independent governments.”⁶⁷ If one may paraphrase, through CD rural society found that it

could become dependent on the state in exchange for not rising up in revolt. If this is what we can draw from Neal's statement, it would seem then that CD is attractive only as long as its recipients are able to depend on it; in other words, CD will remain as long as it continues to *betray* the notion of self-help.

Thirdly and most importantly, CD was not designed to directly address the basic economic problems accounting for rural poverty, such as tenancy, usurious farm credit, and marketing. Though it is too simplistic to argue that the kind of postwar land reform implemented in Japan could have been carried out successfully in India or the Philippines, the failure of genuine and timely land reform certainly carried on being an important cause of continued mass poverty in their rural societies and many more in the developing countries. Saying this, one is also reminded that, ironically enough, with respect to the southern regions of the very country that made CD such a crucial part of its postwar determination to decommunize and democratize the rest of the world, that country's federal government refused to allow Earnest Neal's colleague, Arthur Raper, to work for land redistribution in favor of African American cultivators, despite assigning him to the task of land reform programs around the world.⁶⁸

In the 1960s, the CD "movement" was re-imported into "the War on Poverty" in America's urban slums, especially those of racial minorities, with its non-institutional approach and utopian notion of self-help intact. These notions and approaches were then exported to U.S. foreign development assistance programs during the 1970s. Then, as one would expect, criticism concerning CD soon followed. As early as the mid-1970s, one sociologist published a critical analysis of New York City's CD activities directed at its poor youth regarding their "professionalization of reform," stating, "What develops is an 'institutionalized revolution' primarily aiming at diverting public attention from immediate social problems and pacifying dissidents."⁶⁹ The same criticism continues to be heard today with respect to urban CD movements, which "cannot possibly radically transform distressed neighborhoods" and "is helpless in face of the powerful economic, political, and social forces that continually reproduce distressed communities and their colored and poor white populations."⁷⁰ Thus, it may well be said that the gospel of self-help, and the subsequent backlash over the veracity of the doctrine has been going back and forth across the Pacific, like ripples in a pond or an echo through the hills throughout the era of the welfare state Pax Americana-style.

What is lacking, whether intentionally or not, in Ernest Neal's

memoirs are all of the paternalistic instincts and irritations, which occupied the minds of so many foreign aid officials at the time. In the soberness and calmness with which Neal reflects upon his failures and helplessness, one finds both the depths of despair as well as a ray of hope or two, which could only be uttered by a man who had experienced pain and sorrow under colonial situations existing on both sides of the Pacific.

NOTES

¹ An earlier version of this article in Japanese was published as Nakano Satoshi, "Karera no Jijo wo Tasukeru Tameni [To Help Them Help Themselves]," in Endo Yasuo and Yui Daizaburo, eds., *Henbo suru Amerika Taiheiyō Sekai [Changing World of America and the Pacific]*, Vol. 1, (Sai'ryusha, 2004), 109–131.

² Such usage of the term "across the Pacific" can be found in numerous book titles including the following: Akira Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967); Kang Liao, *Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural Bridge Across the Pacific* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997); William R. Nester, *Power Across the Pacific: A Diplomatic History of American Relations With Japan* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

⁴ See Vicente L. Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Yoshihara Mari, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵ "Rural Workers Quit Soft Jobs, Take to Hard and Simple Life," *Manila Times*, 24 October 1956.

⁶ Hugh Tinker, "Community Development: A New Philosopher's Stone?" *International Affairs* 37, Issue 3 (July 1961): 322.

⁷ Judith Ann Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change: From the Settlement House Movement to Neighborhood Centers, 1886 to Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

⁸ John B. Hawley, "The Professional Status of Community Development in the United States," *Community Development Journal* 4, No.3 (July 1969): 124–132; Clyde Mitchell-Weaver, "Community Development in North America: Survey and Prospect for the 1990s," *Community Development Journal* 25, No.4 (October 1990): 345–355.

⁹ Tinker, "Community Development," 309.

¹⁰ Richard Harris, "The Silence of the Experts: 'Aided Self-Help Housing' 1939–1954," *Habitat International* 22, No.2 (1998): 165–189.

¹¹ John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1961.

¹² The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, Public law 87–195 [S.1983], 75 Stat. 424, approved September 4, 1961, Sec. 2151–1.

¹³ Gwyn E. Jones & Chris Garforth, "The History, Development, and Future of Agricultural Extension," Burton E. Swanson, et. al., eds., *Improving Agricultural Extension. A Reference Manual* (Rome: FAO/UN, 1997).

¹⁴ Kubo Fumiaki, *New Deal to America Mishusei* [New Deal and American Democracy] (Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1988).

¹⁵ Ernest E. Neal, *The Hope for the Wretched: A Narrative Report of Technical Assistance Experiences* (Washington, D.C.: Agency for International Development, 1972), 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18–22.

¹⁹ Fujioka Jun, *America Nanbu no Henbo* [The Transformation of American South] (Aoki Shoten, 1985).

²⁰ “Brannan Asks Social Security for Farms”; *Washington Post*, 6 December 1949; “South Acts to Aid the Negro Farmer: Conference on Rural Life at Tuskegee Urges Greater Acreage and Training.” *New York Times*, 21 June 1950.

²¹ Neal, *The Hope for the Wretched*, 27.

²² *Ibid.*, 122.

²³ Ernest Neal, “A Positive Approach to Race Relations in the South,” *Social Forces* 26, No.4 (May 1948): 467.

²⁴ Ernest Neal, “Two Negro Problems Instead of One: A Challenge to Negro Colleges,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 21, No.2 (Spring 1952): 166.

²⁵ Harris, “Silence,” 12.

²⁶ Neal, *The Hope for the Wretched*, ix.

²⁷ Louis Miniclier, “Community Development as a Vehicle of U.S. Foreign Aid,” *Community Development Journal* 4, No.1 (January 1969): 8.

²⁸ Garvin Karunaratne, “The Failure of the Community Development Programme in India,” *Community Development Journal* 11, No.2 (April 1976): 95.

²⁹ Neal, *The Hope for the Wretched*, 38.

³⁰ Nakano Satoshi, “Gabriel L. Kaplan and U.S. Involvement in Philippine Electoral Democracy: A Tale of Two Democracies,” *Philippine Studies* (Ateneo de Manila University Press) 52, No.2 (2004), 149–178.

³¹ “NAMFREL officials name sub-leaders,” *Manila Times*, 4 February 1953.

³² Ramon Binamira, interview with the author, Cebu City, Philippines, September 6, 2003.

³³ Jose V. Abueva, *Focus on the Barrio: The Story behind the Birth of the Philippine Community Development Program under President Ramon Magsaysay* (Manila: University of the Philippines, 1959), 300–383.

³⁴ Neal, *The Hope for the Wretched*, 43.

³⁵ “Community Development Workers,” *Manila Times*, 31 May 1957.

³⁶ Ramon P. Binamira, “It Has Taken Root: Program Successful, Says Reply from PACD,” *Manila Times*, 25 December 1959.

³⁷ Ramon P. Binamira, “Rural Progress Reviewed,” *Manila Times*, 29 December 1959.

³⁸ Neal, *The Hope for the Wretched*, 47–48.

³⁹ “Rural workers quit soft jobs, take to hard and simple life,” *Manila Times*, 24 October 1956.

⁴⁰ “Community Development Workers,” *Manila Times*, 31 May 1957.

⁴¹ “173 More Shoulders Ready for Rural Uplift’s Wheels,” *Manila Times*, 23 July 1957.

⁴² “Cebu and Self-help: Barrio Folk Discovering the Pleasures of Doing it Alone,” *Manila Times*, 24 June 1957.

⁴³ Neal, *The Hope for the Wretched*, 44.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁶ Binamira, interview with the author.

- ⁴⁷ R. P. Misra, *Rural Development: Capitalist and Socialist Paths, Volume One: Overview* (United Nations Centre for Regional Development, 1985), 65.
- ⁴⁸ "2 PACD Brass Suspended," *Daily Mirror*, 15 December 1961.
- ⁴⁹ Roland Villacorte, "Reply to Binamira," *Evening News*, 11 January 1962.
- ⁵⁰ "GAO bares P1-M loss at PACD," *Manila Times*, 8 January 1962.
- ⁵¹ Binamira, interview with the author.
- ⁵² Neal, *The Hope for the Wretched*, 81.
- ⁵³ Miniclier, "Community Development as a Vehicle," 10–11.
- ⁵⁴ Hugh Tinker, "Authority and Community in Village India," *Journal of African Administration* 12, No.4 (October 1960): 201.
- ⁵⁵ Tinker, "Community Development," 322.
- ⁵⁶ Nick Cullather, "Miracles of Modernization: The Green Revolution and Apotheosis of Technology," *Diplomatic History* 28, No.2 (April 2004): 227–254.
- ⁵⁷ Neal, *The Hope for the Wretched*, 125.
- ⁵⁸ Robert Shaplen, "Letter from Manila," *New Yorker*, 15 January 1966: 100–102.
- ⁵⁹ Neal, *The Hope for the Wretched*, 81–100.
- ⁶⁰ Umehara Hiromitsu, "Firipin ni okeru 'Midori no Kakumei' to Nomin [The Green Revolution and Peasants in the Philippines]." *Ajia Keizai* 19, No.9 (September 1978): 26–40.
- ⁶¹ Neal, *The Hope for the Wretched*, 125.
- ⁶² "Sabine Farms Left Its Mark in Harrison County," *Marshall News Messenger*, 31 August 2002.
- ⁶³ Commission on Filipinos Overseas, *Handbook for Filipinos Overseas: Fifth Edition* (Manila, 2000), 21.
- ⁶⁴ Neal's daughter Kathleen, who had been in the Philippines with him during his first assignment as a grade school girl, grew up to become a radical black power student activist in the United States. She dropped out of college and joined the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1966. Then she met Eldridge Cleaver of the Black Panther Party in 1967 and married him the same year, bringing her to national attention as the only female executive of the most radical black revolutionary party at the time. The Cleavers even had to live "in exile" in Algeria, North Korea and in France after Eldridge's shootout with police in 1968, though Kathleen with two children returned to the United States for a few months before Neal's death in January 1972 (The Cleavers finally returned to the United States in 1975). Jessie Carney Smith, ed., *Notable Black American Women, Book II* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995), 101–103. Kathleen Neal Cleaver, interview with the author, New Haven, Conn., November 16, 2003.
- ⁶⁵ Neal, *The Hope for the Wretched*, 122, 126.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.
- ⁶⁸ Akimoto Ei'ichi, *New Deal to America Shihon Shugi* [New Deal and the American Capitalism] (Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1989), 404.
- ⁶⁹ Joseph Helfgot, "Professional Reform Organization and the Symbolic Representation of the Poor," *American Sociological Review* 39, No.4 (August 1974): 490.
- ⁷⁰ Henry Louis Taylor Jr., "Building a Bridge between Community Development and School Reform." July 19, 2004. [<http://uumin.org/Taylor-2002.htm>] (September 3, 2004)].