Exploring Post-development
Theory and practice, problems and perspectives

Edited by
Aram Ziai
Exploring Post-development

The post-development school claims that it is time to think about alternatives to development instead of alternative ways of reaching development in the Third World. Instead of relentlessly pursuing economic growth, industrialization and modernization, post-development argues that the promise of development has been misleading and provokes us to look beyond the era of development in the decades after the Second World War. Local alternatives to the Western ways of looking at politics, economics and science are not only possible, but existent.

The scholars assembled here explore the possibilities and limits of post-development theory and practice, neither uncritically embracing nor arrogantly dismissing its radical claims. Based on empirical studies of movements and communities in several continents, Exploring Post-development advances what is arguably one of the most important debates in North–South relations in the twenty-first century. It provides ways of thinking about social change beyond Eurocentric development discourse and engages with the strategies of those excluded by the Western model of development.

By confronting the flaws of post-development like homogenization and essentialism, the book manages to separate the wheat from the chaff. It identifies those elements in post-development useful and even crucial for a liberating critique of development and the construction of new livelihoods through radical democracy and international solidarity while avoiding those that are dangerously close to a misplaced nostalgia for pre-modern times and right-wing populism. Consequently, Exploring Post-Development is of utmost interest to scholars and practitioners of development alike.

Aram Ziai has studied political science/international relations and sociology in Aachen, Dublin and Hamburg. Currently, he is a research fellow at the University of Amsterdam. His main areas of research include North–South relations and development policy, critical theories of international relations, migration and social movements.
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Notes on contributors

Ana Agostino has written her PhD thesis on post-development and is a Research Fellow with the Department of Development Studies at UNISA (University of South Africa).

Arturo Escobar is Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

J. K. Gibson-Graham is the pen name of Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham, feminist economic geographers at the Australian National University and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, respectively. Their work focuses on rethinking economy and performing economic alternatives in the US, Australia and the Philippines.

Friederike Habermann holds degrees in economics and history, is an affiliate of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation and active within the global network People’s Global Action (PGA).

Martina Kaller-Dietrich is Associate Professor at the Institute of History at the University of Vienna/Austria, and Programme Director of the MA in Latin American Studies in cooperation with the Austrian Institute for Latin America.

Trevor King, PhD, teaches ‘People and the Environment’ at post-graduate level at the International Pacific College in New Zealand. He has research and rural project interests in Fiji, especially in Navosa.

Jon Harald Sande Lie is a Research Fellow and PhD candidate at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen, Norway.

Susan Maiava, PhD, has been teaching development studies at post-graduate level at several different universities in New Zealand and in the Pacific, and is currently working with The Leprosy Mission in a governance role.

Sally Matthews is a lecturer at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa (in the Department of Political and International Studies) and currently completing her PhD at the Centre for West African Studies, University of Birmingham, UK, where she holds a Commonwealth Scholarship.
Yoshihiro Nakano is a DPhil Candidate in Development Studies (final year) at the School of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies, University of Sussex.

Knut G. Nustad is Associate Professor at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences. He works in the Department for International Environment and Development Studies (Noragric).

K. Ravi Raman is Hallsworth Research Fellow in the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester.

Luciole Sauviat is a PhD candidate at Humboldt University, Berlin and working on migration in Southeast Asia.

Aram Ziai is Research Fellow at the University of Amsterdam and Lecturer at the Universities of Aachen, Kassel and Magdeburg.
Acknowledgements


Part I

Introduction
1 Development discourse and its critics
An introduction to post-development

Aram Ziai

In order to realize the most significant shift in development theory in the last decade of the twentieth century, one only needs to compare two editions of what may be the most widespread and influential textbook on the topic. In the 1992 edition, the first sentence reads ‘This book is about development in what has become known as the “Third World”’, and the introduction goes on to explain that ‘Third World’ is a synonym for the poorer, ‘less developed’ countries, and that alternative meanings of ‘development’ are ‘hotly contested’ (Thomas 1992: 1). The revised edition of 2000 starts with nearly the same statement, but then adds the following:

the very idea of development is under challenge to an extent not foreseen even a few years ago. Voices from the ‘post-development’ school claim that, at best, development has failed, or at worst it was always a ‘hoax’, designed to cover up violent damage being done to the so-called ‘developing’ world and its people.

(Thomas 2000: 3)

A whole new chapter solely dedicated to discuss and repudiate this criticism has been added to the new edition. Obviously, the ‘post-development school’ and its radical, and at first sight, irritating or at least strange claims seem to have had serious impact on the academic discussion during the 1990s. This book sets out to explore this school of thought. It is not the first one to do so, but, as will hopefully become clear, it attempts to do so in a distinct manner.

Although this is not the place for an extensive discussion of post-development (see Ziai 2004), a brief overview on its history and central ideas is provided here, followed by an equally brief overview on the main arguments raised by critics.

Post-development: an overview

Already, during the 1980s, some scholars and activists were articulating dissatisfaction with the concept and practice of ‘development’ that was explicitly not calling for a better, alternative version of it, but dismissing it altogether (Escobar
1985, 1987, 1988; Esteva 1985, 1987; Rahnema 1985; Latouche 1986; Rist and Sabeli 1986). Inspired by the works of Ivan Illich, but also by Foucault, Gandhi, Polanyi and others, a group of authors collaborated to produce the first among three major works most frequently seen as representative of post-development: the Development Dictionary (Sachs 1992a). The 17 authors (a significant part of them from the South) had all become disillusioned with development policy, and the introduction proclaims that the ‘last 40 years can be called the age of development. This epoch is coming to an end. The time is ripe to write its obituary’ (Sachs 1992b: 1). The reasons given were that the industrial model of society could no longer be conceived as ahead in the evolutionary scale in the light of the ecological predicament, that the project of development which had been an instrument in the Cold War was bound to exhaust itself after 1989, that the development era had not led to a process of catching up for most of the ‘developing world’ but to a widening gap between rich and poor countries, and finally that ‘development’ was a ‘misconceived enterprise’ in that it implicitly aimed at eliminating cultural diversity through the universalizing of Western institutions (ibid.: 2–4).

Often, the post-development critics referred to the ‘invention of underdevelopment’ by US-President Truman’s ‘bold new program’ announced on January 20, 1949, which defined Africa, Asia and Latin America as ‘underdeveloped areas’ in need of ‘development’:

On that day, two billion people became underdeveloped . . . from that time on, they ceased being what they were, in all their diversity, and were transmogrified into an inverted mirror of other’s reality: a mirror that belittles them and sends them to the end of the queue, a mirror that defines their identity, which is really that of a heterogeneous and diverse majority, simply in the terms of a homogenizing and narrow minority.

(Esteva 1992: 7)

The second major work was Escobar’s monograph Encountering Development, in which he put forward the view that ‘the development discourse . . . has created an extremely efficient apparatus for producing knowledge about, and the exercise of power over, the Third World’ (Escobar 1995: 9). In this discourse, he claims, forms of knowledge and of subjectivity were linked to a system of power, and even many alternative approaches to development formulated their criticism of mainstream development policy only within the limits of this discourse. Escobar also outlined the common features of what was later to be referred to as the post-development school of thought:

they are interested not in development alternatives but in alternatives to development, . . . [they share] an interest in local culture and knowledge; a critical stance towards established scientific discourses; and the defense and promotion of localized, pluralistic grassroots movements.

(Escobar 1995: 215)
The third work to be mentioned as of great importance for the process of ‘school formation’ was *The Post-Development Reader* (Rahnema with Bawtree 1997). Here, development was analysed, following Illich, as ‘a threat to people’s autonomy’ (Rahnema 1997a: 9). The editor’s main claim (referring to the Cold War origin of development aid) was that
devolution, as it imposed itself on its ‘target populations’ was basically the wrong answer to their needs and aspirations. It was an ideology that was born and refined in the North, mainly to meet the needs of the dominant powers in search of a more ‘appropriate’ tool for their economic and geopolitical expansion . . . the ideology helped a dying and obsolete colonialism to transform itself into an aggressive – even sometimes an attractive – instrument able to recapture new ground. . . . The hidden – yet clear – message that every development project has carried to the people at the grassroots has been that their traditional modes of living, thinking and doing have doomed them to a subhuman condition . . .

(Rahnema 1997b: 384, 397)

The coming era of post-development therefore had to be based on a new rationale, which could draw inspiration from ‘vernacular societies’, although no return to a static ‘state of nature’ was envisioned:

The end of development should not be seen as an end to the search for new possibilities of change. . . . It should only mean that the binary, the mechanistic, the reductionist, the inhumane and the ultimately self-destructive approach to change is over.

(Rahnema 1997b: 391)

The ‘alternatives to development’ put forward by the post-development authors are located in grassroots movements, urban and rural local communities and the informal sector. As a reaction to the failure of development, they claim, new social structures were in the making based on different conceptions of the economy (solidarity and reciprocity instead of homo oeconomicus and the world market), of politics (direct democracy instead of centralized authorities), and of knowledge (traditional knowledge systems instead of modern science). Frequently, ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ elements would be mixed or ‘hybridized’ (Escobar 1995: 51, 96, 217ff).

However, as the reader was compiled of contributions of 46 different authors, a certain heterogeneity in theoretical perspectives cannot be denied. There were also, of course, many other authors and books that could (according to Escobar’s definition cited above) be grouped under the heading of post-development (e.g. Nandy 1988, 1992, 1994; Shiva 1989; Apffel-Marglin and Marglin 1990, 1996; Rahnema 1990; Alvares 1992; Rist *et al.* 1992; Kothari 1993; Latouche 1993; Ferguson 1994; Perrot *et al.* 1994; Rist 1994, 1997; Sachs 1995, 1999; Esteva and Prakash 1998; see also DuBois 1991; Manzo 1991; Hobart 1993;

*Critiques of post-development: an overview*

Apart from that, numerous publications appeared in the 1990s dealing with development discourse from a critical perspective, inspired by the post-development school, but sometimes insisting on a more nuanced and academic approach (e.g. Crush 1995; Moore and Schmitz 1995; Apthorpe and Gasper 1996; Cowen and Shenton 1996; Cooper and Packard 1997; Marcussen and Arnfred 1998). Within the debate on gender and development, we find a whole range of works dealing with similar questions, stretching from eco-feminism to decidedly post-modern approaches (Shiva 1989; Mies and Shiva 1993; Marchand and Parpart 1995; Saunders 2002).

The post-development ideas were widely discussed and often heavily criticized by countless authors from political economy, neo- or post-marxist (e.g. Berger 1995; Corbridge 1998; Kiely 1999; Peet with Hartwick 1999, chapter 5; Brass 2000; Brett 2000; Storey 2000; Watts 2000; Rapley 2004, 2006), sociological and geographical (Knippenberg and Schuurman 1994; Nederveen Pieterse 1996, 2000; Lehmann 1997; Eriksson Baaz 1999; Khondker 1999; Blaikie 2000; Curry 2003; Simon 2006), anthropological and actor-oriented (Little and Painter 1995; Gow 1996; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Crewe and Harrison 1998; Ausdal 2001; Robins 2003), historical (Grischow and McKnight 2003) or Foucauldian and de-constructivist perspectives (Brigg 2002; Parfitt 2002).

Although there is not sufficient space for a thorough discussion of the numerous points of criticism raised against the post-development authors – some of which are addressed in the following chapters – three of the most typical and often-quoted critiques are briefly reviewed.

One of the sharpest rebuttals of post-development comes from Stuart Corbridge, who claims that, beneath the pavement of modernity, there is only the hard soil of pre-modern times to be found, not the progressive beach imagined by post-development. Although he admits that post-development correctly points out certain prejudices and failures, he maintains:

Proponents of post-development too often trade in non-sequiturs (the failure of dev. project A, B or C condemns dev. in all its manifestations), in unhelpful binaries (Modernity is bad, anti-modernity is good), in false deductions (the problems of poor countries are always and everywhere the result of a surfeit of capitalism or development and not their relative absence), in wobbly romanticism (only the rich get lonely, only the poor live hospitably and harmoniously), in self-righteousness (only the simple life is a good life), or in implausible politics (we can all live like the Mahatma, or would want to).

(Corbridge 1998: 139)
Corbridge charges the post-development authors with neglecting the positive aspects of modernity, development, science, technology and substituting the diversity within both the ‘West’ and the ‘Rest’ for essentialized accounts. He also notes that ‘the view that poverty is mainly definitional is thumpingly convenient for the rich and powerful, even if it is bang up to date with postmodernist conceits’ (Corbridge 1998: 141).

Kiely agrees that faced with high infant mortality respect for cultural differences would be misplaced: ‘A position that in this case rejects any movement for development in the name of respect for cultural difference expresses the view not of the consistent multiculturalist, but of the patronising tourist’ (Kiely 1999: 47). In general, he maintains a more nuanced view regarding the merits and flaws of post-development, but nevertheless points to certain weaknesses such as methodological inconsistencies (on the one hand, there is an all-pervasive discourse, while on the other, the social movements referred to are somehow outside this discourse), an inconsistent anti-essentialism (the heterogeneity of cultures and worldviews is forcefully asserted, while there is little regard for the heterogeneity of development projects), and especially the problem of relativism. In merely supporting grassroots movements and local communities resisting development, he argues, ‘post-development writers espouse a new openness in politics, but this position is so open-ended and vague that it effectively washes its hands of politics’ (Kiely 1999: 46) – leading to what he terms ‘Pontius-Pilate-politics’ ignoring the hierarchies and exploitation within these contexts. Normative criteria and materialist analysis must not be dispensed with, Kiely warns, and argues for a historically grounded universalism.

Discussing the example of India, Meera Nanda finds that post-development ideas have reduced the distance between leftist new social movements and anti-modernist Hindu fundamentalism:

The post-development critique of modernity in the Third World as mimetic, culturally alien and elitist helps to displace class/caste distinctions in favor of a shared cultural victimhood of the entire village ‘community’ at the hands of the Westernized urban-industrial interests which are allied with Western capitalists.

(Nanda 1999: 20)

Thus, the defence of the local community would take on nationalistic connotations, and Nanda concludes that

without intending to, the postmodern-influenced critiques of modern science and modernization are laying the foundations of a neo-populist movement that seeks to subordinate modernization to the anti-modernist and patriarchal values of the traditional elites.

(Nanda 1999: 7)

Post-development, she claims, ‘has come to serve as a mobilizing ideology’ not
for the most excluded, but for ‘relatively well-to-do rural beneficiaries of development’ (ibid.).

These and other points of criticism have been raised again and again, and, at times, post-development protagonists have responded to them (Escobar 2000). While some of these criticisms are rooted in superficial readings and misunderstandings and others simply in differing (meta-)theoretical perspectives, there are a few which are not entirely unfounded. Some of the following chapters deal in detail with aspects of them.

However, the fierce criticism voiced in opposition to post-development has obscured the fact that two of the most significant hypotheses of this school of thought are usually implicitly accepted by the critics. While the total failure of the project of development in the South seems to be a controversial claim in the light of UN statistics on the progress made in the areas of life expectancy and infant mortality since the 1950s and the promotion of local communities as harmonious and viable alternatives to the global system is also a matter for debate, few people today (at least within development theory) will doubt the following:

1. The traditional concept of ‘development’ is Eurocentric. The concept of labelling Western Europe and North America as ‘developed’ and Africa, Asia and Latin America as ‘underdeveloped’ is a Eurocentric construct in which the own society is perceived as constituting an ideal norm and other societies are perceived as imperfect deviations from this norm, as inferior versions of the self, which are, however, in the process of approaching the norm – although they will never reach it. Development discourse has evolved from colonial discourse, which was its direct predecessor regarding the conceptualization of the South from a Northern perspective. There are those who will object: ‘But life in the industrialized societies is in fact better, isn’t it?’ In terms of material affluence, the standard of living for the majority of people in the former regions is surely superior to that of the majority in the latter regions, but whether this indicates a superior way of life is highly questionable: this assumption neglects the necessary economic relations between the affluent and the poorer parts of the world (because of its ‘methodological nationalism’) and it neglects numerous other possible indicators for a ‘good life’ or a ‘good society’ apart from the possibility to buy commodities. If one defined violent crime, racism, suicide, isolation, alienation, environmental destruction and the like as major indicators of a ‘bad’ or ‘underdeveloped’ society, the industrialized countries would hardly be at the top of the ‘development’ scale. Different ways of measuring ‘development’ in the sense of ‘positive social change’ can easily be imagined. Whether the majority of the people in the South share the mainstream values of ‘development’ is a matter of debate between protagonists and opponents of post-development, but the non-universality of these values should not be.3

2. The traditional concept of development has authoritarian and technocratic implications. It is clear that whoever gets to define what ‘development’ is and how it can be achieved – usually some kind of ‘development expert’ – is in a position of power (because ‘development’ is usually seen as synonymous with ‘positive social change’). This is what has been described as the notion of
trusteeship (Cowen and Shenton 1996). Post-development authors have convincingly demonstrated that some measures undertaken in the name of ‘development’ had disastrous consequences for those supposed to benefit. The violence they had to suffer was directly related to their disempowerment concerning the question whether they wanted this ‘development’ and to the question who is in a discursive position to define the common good and to dictate what (and who) can be sacrificed to achieve it. Knowledge about ‘development’ is in this sense knowledge about the deficiencies of others’ way of life, about the necessity of its transformation, about the appropriate method, and about the legitimacy of all that. In the face of heterogeneous conceptions of a good society, to define one conception as universal clearly implies a position of power.

What is less obvious is that the rejection of the authoritarian implications of the concept of ‘development’ has further consequences. It also concerns those who see modernity as an aberration from the natural path of history and preach a return to subsistence communities. Any position that implicitly or explicitly relies on universal standards for classifying and evaluating societies in fact subordinates the countless different perceptions and values of other people (often, but by no means always, people from other societies). Such a position becomes extremely dangerous when it is linked to the political power to transform societies according to these supposedly universal standards. This is precisely the problem with any kind of social technology or technocratic reform trying to reorganize societies according to rational criteria from above, as well-meaning as they may be (and even if they claimed to act in the name of communism, many of these attempts were not well-meaning). Again, some might claim that a rational re-organization of society is desirable and that some sacrifices are indeed justified by the achievement of a better standard of living for the majority (and they might possess sound arguments), but post-development has opened the debate about these issues: they can not be taken for granted anymore. The mere reference to the grand narratives of progress and development is less and less convincing.4

These two central post-development hypotheses – that the traditional concept of ‘development’ is Eurocentric and has authoritarian and technocratic implications – are hardly contested even by the sharpest critics. The task of ‘slaying the development monster’ (Escobar 2000: 13) has been accomplished.

The book ahead

So, the stage is set. This book is therefore neither dedicated to promoting post-development as the cure to all ills nor to dismiss it as the ‘last refuge of the noble savage’ (Kiely 1999). In contrast, post-development is seen as a new school of thought within North–South relations, which has a lot of critical and constructive potential, but needs to be further refined, explored and argued over.

In Chapter 2, “‘Post-Development’ as concept and social practice”, Arturo Escobar, one of the leading post-development protagonists, provides a more profound introduction to post-development thinking, which he sees as a
post-structuralist critique of development. He situates this thinking within the field of development studies and also addresses several points raised by the critics.

Then it is time to move on: to elaborating post-development theory, to further analyse alternatives to development, to address the problems in theory and practice, and to sketch perspectives for post-development. Engaging the following questions seems a promising path in this direction, and the chapters in the next four parts of the book deal with a few of them.

**Part II Theory**

What exactly is being attacked in condemning ‘development’? What are the alternative ideals that can possibly act as hallmarks for ‘desirable social change’ and a ‘good society’? Hospitality, conviviality, emancipation, autonomy, solidarity – or something completely different? How can post-development alternatives be theorized? How can useful concepts be invented, political concepts beyond the state, economic concepts beyond scarcity, homo oeconomicus and the market, epistemological concepts beyond universalized Western science? How can a critique of Western universalism be formulated without giving up universalism in toto? How can post-development find a way between universalism and relativism? How can the relation to other critical theories be conceptualized? What can post-development theory learn from (post-)Marxism, post-colonialism, feminism, post-structuralism and ‘Zapatism’? What would post-development look like if it was seriously based on Foucauldian theory? And what is the relationship between theory and practice in post-development? What are the implications of the above theoretical questions for post-development practice?

In Chapter 3, ‘Development: the devil we know?’, Knut Nustad deals with the post-development theory and the charge that it would not offer a constructive political agenda. First of all, he argues that lack of instrumentality does not devalue a critique as such. The call for practical solutions ‘rests on the assumption that the apparatus now in place has the capacity for delivering a solution, and there are important reasons for doubting that premise’. Instead of dismissing it as impractical, the post-development critique should be seen as a starting point from which to examine the transformation of development interventions in local encounters as a promising line of future research. This would be an ‘indirect application’ of the theory for practitioners of development.

The next chapter, ‘Post-development and the discourse–agency interface’ by Jon Harald Sande Lie, addresses the ambiguous relation to agency of post-development theory. In emphasizing the power of development discourse to discipline and neglecting individual agency, its micro-level analysis is weak, the author argues, demonstrating his point through a case study of a development project in Ethiopia. Therefore, post-development needs to be supplemented by the perspective of actor-oriented sociology as outlined by Norman Long. This would better allow to analyse the ‘knowledge encounter between western development expertise and local knowledge’.
The following chapter by Yoshihiro Nakano, ‘On the singular name of post-development’, argues that the attempts to link post-development to a practice of emancipatory politics have been insufficiently theorized. Drawing on Heidegger’s philosophy, the author examines the ontological dimension of post-development and especially the fundamental logic of emancipation offered by the work of Serge Latouche, one of the most prominent French post-development writers. Nakano argues that Latouche’s act of ‘naming’ the informal transforms it into the subject of emancipation.

**Part III Problems**

What are the politically problematic aspects of post-development theory and how can they be addressed and overcome? How can the positive elements of ‘vernacular societies’ (direct democracy, communal solidarity, harmonious and humble relationship to nature) be told from the negative ones (patriarchal and oppressive traditions) – and according to what standards? How can the prevalent ideal of consumer society be criticized without preaching modesty to the poor from a position of affluence? How can the desire of many people for material improvements in their standard of living be taken seriously without supporting the notion that a good life is dependent on consumer goods? How can the state-centric model of development be attacked without implicitly supporting the agenda of neo-liberalism that wants to leave the poor to their fate? How can a fundamental critique of modern society be formulated without proscribing the subsistence community as the new model to be implemented? How can the imperialist universalism, that all societies have to be transformed according to the image of the ideal society be criticized while defending the modest universalism that every society (every culture? every social group? every individual?) should have the right to define their own ideal way of life? How can the Eurocentrism of development be criticized while avoiding the dangers of relativism on the one and anti-modern fundamentalism on the other hand?

Susan Maiava and Trevor King (Chapter 6: Pacific indigenous development and post-intentional realities) are going beyond post-development’s encompassing rejection of development by differentiating between immanent, intentional and indigenous development. This last kind of development originates from within the indigenous culture and is motivated by the moral economy rather than by accumulation and economic growth. Their case is supported by three studies of indigenous development, which would probably be applauded even by post-development protagonists. The authors call for a new theory of development that builds on the insights of post-development but incorporates five ‘principles of needs’ alien to theories of economic development.

The following chapter by Luciole Sauviat (Post-development and further: difference from ‘inside’ and autonomy) discusses the problematic idea of homogeneous cultural groups, which is implicit in many post-development texts. In stressing the differences between cultures, the differences within cultures are often overlooked – with dangerous political consequences. The question of
essentialism and the concepts of autonomy and difference are then explored building on the work of Castoriadis.

Chapter 8 (The ambivalence of post-development) addresses not only the question to what extent post-development can be seen as a Foucauldian perspective but also directly addresses arguments made by critics of post-development. It finds that many hold true only for some part of post-development, and that this school of thought has to be differentiated in neo-populist and sceptical approaches. The two approaches have an affinity with diametrically opposed political projects: a reactionary and a radical democratic one.

Part IV Practice

Where are the alternatives to development, and what does post-development practice look like? What are the difficulties, and what are the opportunities of living in a time and space where the myth of development has obviously failed? Do grassroots movements in the South really reject (all kinds of) ‘development’? On the other hand, do they really perceive themselves as ‘underdeveloped’? What are the discourses shaping their political agenda? What new forms of social organization arise from the breakdown of or the disillusionment with the institutions of the development era – forms of political organization beyond the state, forms of economic organization beyond the market, forms of the organization of knowledge beyond Western science and medicine? What hybrid forms are being developed? And what new concepts of social change and what elements of a ‘good society’ can be derived from post-development practice?

In Chapter 9 (What, then, should we do? Insights and experiences of a Senegalese NGO), Sally Matthews confronts the question of how to address problems such as poverty and inequity from a post-development perspective and examines the possible role for ‘outside experts’. In discussing the experiences of the NGO Enda Graf Sahel, she identifies some kind of post-development practice and argues that there are indeed possibilities for the relatively privileged to struggle against oppression without paternalizing the oppressed. Nevertheless, she also points to contradictions and challenges arising from these experiences, such as the dilemma of not imposing particular values on the one and avoiding a relativistic stance on the other hand.

In the chapter entitled ‘Surplus possibilities: post-development and community economies’, Gibson and Graham sketch their view of post-development practice in the Philippines. It includes an alternative conceptualization of the economy, also encompassing, for example, non-market transactions and unpaid labour. The authors find that even in the context of development projects traditional practices can be redirected towards improving standards of living for all members of the community and towards enlarging the commons. The multiple ‘ecologies of productivity’ visible here provide an inspiring challenge to the monoculture of mainstream economics.

Chapter 11 by Ravi Raman (Plachimada resistance: a post-development
social movement metaphor?) tells the story of the conflict about a Coca Cola factory and the mobilization of a social movement in southern India. The author analyses the Cola Quit Plachimada Campaign as an example of a post-development social movement uniting activists from different backgrounds struggling to ‘unmake the process of development’.

The following chapter (Comida. A narrative mirror for the universal concept of nutrition) by Martina Kaller-Dietrich illustrates the differences between development and post-development practice by an empirical case study on comida in Mexico. Comida stands for the culturally rooted concept and practice that can only be inadequately translated by words like ‘food’ or ‘meal’. The oral history study exposes the alternatives to the common discourse on food and scarcity and gives a glimpse of a ‘system beyond development’.

**Part V Perspectives**

What are the perspectives for post-development theory and practice in the age of globalized neo-liberalism? How can the dangers of co-optation and instrumentalization be avoided – in theory as well as in practice? Are the alternatives to development merely poor substitutes or do they offer genuine viable perspectives for the people involved? Can post-development be satisfied with building up local alternatives or is a global strategy needed? How can such a strategy for global change be formulated without falling back into the prescription of master plans to be implemented by the masses? How can we ‘change the world without taking power’?

In Chapter 13 (Post-development: unveiling clues for a possible future), Ana Agostino argues that post-development raises questions, motivates new debates, and presents alternative examples, but does not necessarily constitute an alternative discourse. Reviewing the characteristics of development discourse and the enlargement of horizons by post-development, Agostino argues that it should be linked to the framework of the sociology of absences and emergences by de Sousa Santos. ‘By acknowledging existence of what has been actively created as ignorant, residual, or underdeveloped’, she argues, ‘post-development is contributing to the formulation of alternatives.’ She then examines the relationship between post-development and the World Social Forum, before examining the concept of hospitality in North–South relations as a central feature of post-development.

Chapter 14 by Friederike Habermann and Aram Ziai (Development, internationalism and social movements: a view from the North) argues that alternatives to development have also to be found in the North. The authors therefore examine the shift from a focus on development to a new internationalism within Third World groups in Germany and the concept of ‘un-developing the North’, which was closely related to this shift. Similar ideas are to be found in the statements of the Zapatistas and the hallmarks of Peoples Global Action, a network of grassroots initiatives against neo-liberal capitalism. This new form of internationalism has left behind the assumptions of development discourse.
The final chapter reflects on the exploration in post-development undertaken here, on their theory and methods, on their conceptions of ‘development’ on the questions answered and on those left un-addressed.

Notes
1 Of course Esteva is aware that the concept of development has a far longer history, which he also reviews.
2 It can safely be assumed that some authors in the Post-Development Reader like George or Ferguson have quite a different view on ‘vernacular societies’ than Rahnema.
3 Despite innovations like UNDP’s Human Development Index (which still relies on a quantitative approach and a universal scale and puts the industrialized countries at the top of this scale), the most influential organization in this area still uses gross national product and per capita income as main indicators for ‘development’.
4 Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) described incredulity towards meta-narratives as the characteristic feature of a ‘post-modern’ era.

References


2 ‘Post-development’ as concept and social practice

Arturo Escobar

In 1992, a collective volume edited by Wolfgang Sachs, The Development Dictionary, started by making the radical and controversial claim, ‘The last forty years can be called the age of development. This epoch is coming to an end. The time is ripe to write its obituary’ (Sachs 1992: 1). If development was dead, what would come after? Some started to talk about a ‘post-development era’ (Escobar 1991) in response to this question, and a second collective work, The Post-development Reader, launched the project of giving content to the notion of ‘post-development’ (Rahnema with Bawtree, 1997). According to the editors of this work, the word ‘post-development’ was first used at an international colloquium in Geneva in 1991. Six years later, it had caught up in the imagination of critical scholars and practitioners in the development field. Reactions on all sides of the scholarly-political spectrum have continued since, resulting in a vibrant, albeit at times somewhat scattered, debate. This debate has brought together practitioners and academics from many social science disciplines and fields.

To fully understand the emergence of the notion of post-development and how it has functioned in the international development debate, it is important to locate it briefly within the development studies field. Over the past 50 years, the conceptualization of development in the social sciences has seen three main moments, corresponding to three contrasting theoretical orientations: modernization theory in the 1950s and 1960s, with its allied theories of growth and development; dependency theory and related perspectives in the 1960s and 1970s; and critical approaches to development as a cultural discourse in the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s.

Modernization theory inaugurated a period of certainty in the minds of many theorists and world elites, premised on the beneficial effects of capital, science and technology; this certainty suffered a first blow with dependency theory, which argued that the roots of underdevelopment were to be found in the connection between external dependence and internal exploitation, not in any alleged lack of capital, technology or modern values. For dependency theorists, the problem was not so much with development as with capitalism. In the 1980s, a growing number of cultural critics in many parts of the world questioned the very idea of development. They analysed development as a discourse of Western
origin that operated as a powerful mechanism for the cultural, social and economic production of the Third World (e.g. Apffel-Marglin and Marglin 1990; Ferguson 1991; Escobar 1995; Rist 1997). These three moments may be classified according to the root paradigms from which they emerged: liberal, Marxist, and post-structuralist theories, respectively. Despite overlaps and more eclectic combinations than in the recent past, a main paradigm continues to inform most positions at present, making the dialogue difficult at times.

Main elements of the post-structuralist critique

Since the notion of post-development emerged directly from the post-structuralist critique, it is instructive to give a brief account of the main elements of this analysis. In keeping with the overall questioning of realist epistemologies of post-structuralism (see the work of Michel Foucault for the best statement on this theoretical tendency), the main thrust of the post-structuralist critique was not so much to propose yet another version of development – as if by progressively refining the concept theorists would finally arrive at a true and workable conception – but to question precisely the ways in which Asia, Africa and Latin America came to be defined as ‘under-developed’ and so in need of development. The question the post-structuralists asked was not then, ‘how can we do development better?’ but ‘why, through what historical processes, and with what consequences did Asia, Africa and Latin America come to be “invented” as “the Third World” through discourses and practices of development?’ The answer to this question included many elements, among which are the following:

1. As a historical discourse, ‘development’ emerged in the early post-Second World War period, even if its roots lie in deeper historical processes of modernity and capitalism. A reading of the texts and historical events of the period 1945–1960 in particular validated this observation. It was in this period that development ‘experts’ of all kinds started to land massively in Asia, Africa and Latin America, giving reality to the construct of the third world.

2. The development discourse made possible the creation of a vast institutional apparatus through which the discourse was deployed, that is, through which it became a real and effective social force, transforming the economic, social, cultural and political reality of the societies in question. This apparatus included Bretton Woods institutions (e.g. World Bank and the IMF) and other international organizations (e.g. the UN system) as well as national planning and development agencies and local-level development projects.

3. The discourse of development can be said to have operated through two principal mechanisms: (a) the professionalization of development problems, which included the emergence of expert knowledges and fields to deal with every aspect of ‘under-development’ (including the field of development studies itself) and (b) the institutionalization of development, the vast
network of organizations already mentioned above. These processes made it possible to systematically link knowledge and practice through particular projects and interventions. Strategies such as ‘rural development’ for instance could be seen, from this perspective, as a systematic mechanism for linking expert knowledges of agriculture, food and so on with particular interventions (extension, credit, infrastructure, etc.) in ways that – even if appearing to be the ‘natural way of doing things’ – resulted in a profound transformation of the countryside and peasant societies of many parts of the Third World along the lines of modern capitalist conceptions of land, agriculture, farming and so forth.

Finally, the post-structuralists’ analysis pointed at the forms of exclusion that went along with the development project, particularly the exclusion of the knowledges, voices and concerns of those whom, paradoxically, development was supposed to serve: the poor of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The idea of post-development

It was these series of analyses, plus the observation of increasing discontent in many parts of the so-called Third World with development that led some theorists to suggest the idea of post-development. The deconstruction of development, in other words, led post-structuralists to postulate the possibility of a ‘post-development era’. For some, this generally meant an era in which development would no longer be the central organizing principle of social life (Escobar 1991, 1995) – one in which, to paraphrase a well-known paper of the period focused on the sub-field of women in development, development would not take place solely ‘under Western eyes’ (Mohanty 1991). Others added to this characterization a re-valorization of vernacular cultures, the need to rely less on expert knowledge and more on ordinary people’s attempts at constructing more humane and culturally and ecologically sustainable worlds, and the important point of taking seriously social movements and grassroots mobilizations as the basis for moving towards the new era (Shiva 1993; Rahnema with Bawtree 1997; Rist 1997; Esteva and Prakash 1999).

In general, it can be said that post-development is not a new historical period to which its proponents believe we have arrived or that is within reach. As we will see shortly, this would mean falling into the trap of going back to a realist position (‘we know that the real truth is that we are in a post-development era’), which would be against the spirit of post-structuralism. To ascertain in more detail the differences between the post-structuralist and the more well-known modes of analysis (liberal and Marxist), it is instructive to review how they answer differently to a series of questions. The idea of post-development refers to the following:

1 The possibility of creating different discourses and representations that are not so mediated by the construct (ideologies, metaphors, language, premises, etc.) of development.
Therefore, the need to change the practices of knowing and doing and the ‘political economy of truth’ that defines the development regime.

Therefore, the need to multiply the centres and agents of knowledge production – in particular, to give salience to the forms of knowledge produced by those who are supposed to be the ‘objects’ of development so that they can become subjects of their own right.

Two particularly useful ways to do this are, first, by focusing on the adaptations, subversions and resistance that local peoples effect in relation to development interventions (as with the notion of counterwork explained in the following) and, second, by highlighting the alternative strategies produced by social movements as they encounter development projects.

In this way, it may be said for instance that the conceptualization of alternative development developed by the Proceso de Comunidades Negras of the Colombian Pacific is an example of post-development. Not only have the activists and communities themselves claimed their right as knowledge producers (along with the conventional experts, whether in opposition to them, or hybridizing expert and local knowledges), in doing so they have developed an alternative conceptualization of the Pacific as ‘region-territory’ of ethnic groups that does not correspond to the conventional construction of a place for regional development. They have gone further in crafting what could be called an alternative political ecology, based on notions of sustainability, autonomy, diversity and alternative economies that do not conform to the mainstream discourse of development (see Escobar 1999 for a detailed examination of this framework). Many examples of this sort can be found throughout the world that could similarly be said to bring into being a regime of post-development – that is, an awareness that reality can be redefined in terms other than those of development and that, consequently, people and social groups can act otherwise on the basis of those different definitions.

Responses to post-development

In the second half of the 1990s, these analyses and forms of advocacy became themselves the object of poignant critiques and rebuttals. This may be seen as a fourth moment in the historical sociology of development knowledge. In fact, a partial result of this debate was the identification (mostly by liberal and Marxist critics) of ‘the post-development school’ of post-structuralist orientation. While the critiques of post-development have not constituted a unified body of work, it is possible to identify three main objections to the original post-development proposal: (a) with their focus on discourse, the post-development proponents overlooked poverty and capitalism, which are the real problems of development; (b) they presented an over-generalized and essentialized view of development, while in reality there are vast differences among development strategies and institution; they also failed to notice the ongoing contestation of development on the ground; and (c) they romanticized local traditions and social movements, ignoring that the local is also embedded in power relations (see, among the most
cogent and spirited critiques of post-development, Berger 1995; Lehmann 1997; Crew and Harrison 1998; Pieterse 1998; Kiely 1999; Storey 2000; for a response, see Escobar 2000)

Besides evincing contrasting paradigmatic orientations, the debate over post-development spurred by these critiques should also be understood by considering the changed context of knowledge production in the 1990s. This context saw the consolidation of new tendencies and fields, in ascendancy since the 1980s, such as post-structuralism, cultural studies, feminist theory and ethnic and environmental studies, which enabled a different understanding of how development operates. Adopting a sociology of knowledge perspective again, we may say that in the same way that the discursive approaches of the 1980s and early 1990s were made possible by earlier critiques (e.g. dependency theory and the cultural critiques of thinkers such as Illich, Freire, Nyrere, Fals Borda, Goulet and Galtung) and by the importation of new tools of analysis (post-structuralism), it is impossible to understand the critiques of ‘the post-development school’ without the post-development moment itself. Predictably, proponents of post-development have responded to their critics, in turn, by suggesting that the critiques are, themselves, problematic. To the first set of critiques, post-development proponents responded by saying that this argument amounts to a naïve defence of the real. In other words, critics of post-development argue that because of their focus on discourse and culture, the post-structuralists fail to see the reality of poverty, capitalism and the like. For the post-structuralists, however, this argument is not valid, because it rests on the (Marxist or liberal) assumption that discourse is not material, failing to see that modernity and capitalism are simultaneously systems of discourse and practice.

If the first critique of post-development could be seen as operating in the name of the real, so to speak, the second was seen as proposed in the name of (better) theory. This was also problematic to post-development authors on epistemological grounds. Paraphrasing, the critics of post-development said something like: ‘You (post-development advocates) represented development as homogeneous while it is really diverse. Development is heterogeneous, contested, impure, hybrid. Your theories are thus flawed.’ In response, the post-development theorists acknowledged the importance and validity of this criticism; however, they pointed out that their project was a different one – that of analysing the overall discursive fact, not how it might have been contested and hybridized on the ground. Besides, the post-structuralists argued that the issue was not to provide a more accurate representation of ‘the real’; this was everybody else’s project, and part of the problem from this perspective. In highlighting the nature and effects of the overall development discourse, the post-structuralist analysts saw themselves less as ‘trying to get it right’, under the mandate of an epistemological realism that post-structuralism in any case complicates, than as political intellectuals constructing an object of critique for both scholarly and political action and debate.

In other words, while established approaches for the most part see knowledge more or less as the representation of the real, and thus as something that can be
assessed as closer or farther from the truth, post-structuralists view this epistemological position as part of the problem (part of a Eurocentric belief in logical truth as the only valid arbiter of knowledge), and go on to argue that a choice of epistemology and of theoretical framework is always a political process that has consequences for the real world. This does not mean that knowledge cannot take on a systematic character, but that it does so in relation to a foundation that is always historical. (Some theorists, such as Ernesto Laclau, refer to this feature as ‘anti-foundationalism’, which they join together with ‘anti-essentialism’ or constructivism as the twin pillars of non-realist epistemologies.) To give another example, while liberals would give a definition of globalization in terms of allegedly real processes of flows, migration, markets and so on, post-structuralists develop a notion of ‘globalization’ that allows them to question the very dominant assumptions that define it in the neo-liberal terms, and in so doing they create a framework within which globalization appears as historical (not the ‘natural’ product of the development of markets, for instance), contested (and so deeply negotiated), and hence the actual or potential object of opposition and transformation. This view is no less ‘valid’ than that of the neo-liberals, even if the latters’ may be taken as ‘the truth’ due to the place it occupies within the current hegemony.

Finally, to the charge of romanticizing the local and the grassroots, advocates of post-development have responded by saying that the (liberal and Marxist) strategy of talking ‘in the name of the people’ from the distance of the academy or development NGOs will not do. To elaborate, the critics of the concept of post-development chastised their proponents by saying that they do not understand power (power lies in the material and with the people, not in discourse); that what is at stake are people’s needs, not theoretical analyses; and that because of their romantic, neo-luddite and relativist stance they patronize the people and overlook their interests. For the post-structuralists and cultural critics, this commentary is a reflection of the chronic realism of many scholars that invariably label as romantic any radical critique of the West or any defence of ‘the local’. In addition, post-structuralist authors pointed out that the realist notion of social change that underlies the commentary fails to unpack its own views of ‘the material’, ‘livelihood’, ‘needs’ and the like (Escobar 2000).

In other words, political economists for instance speak of the ‘real needs’ of the ‘people’ as if these terms were unproblematic, as if the theorist could know in advance what the people need and desire. But even ‘material needs’, as anthropologists would argue, are culturally constructed, they are the subject of meanings. It makes all the difference in the world to satisfy material needs, for instance, through a capitalist market economy or through non-capitalist practices and institutions (as throughout history most human communities have actually done). Many of today’s movements, such as the movement of black communities of the Pacific, are not only struggling for material needs – if this were the case, why not push for development projects that would bring the alleged material needs? Many of these movements pursue goals that from materialist perspectives are more intractable, such as cultural rights and identities, alternative
economies (not dedicated to accumulation) and so forth. In the insistence of these movements on these seemingly more intractable goals lies an indication that the defence of the local and the place-based is not just a naïve and romantic pursuit on the part of aloof academic theorists – this defence can be seen at least as the goal of some social movements as well.

The debate over post-development has contributed in creating a lively climate for more eclectic and pragmatic approaches. If anything has come out clearly of the debates around post-development in the 1990s, it is a greater willingness on the part of many authors to constructively adopt elements from various trends and paradigms (e.g. Gardner and Lewis 1996; Peet and Hartwick 1999; Arce and Long 2000; Schech and Haggis 2000). This is particularly the case around a series of questions, including the contestation of development on the ground (again, as the case of the black communities in Colombia illustrates); the re-conceptualization of social movements from the perspective of networks and local/global articulations; a new rapprochement between political economy and cultural analysis on questions of development (that is, the fact that some political economists of Marxist orientation have also started to consider culture as a more significant variable than they did before); and the examination of the relation between development and modernity as a way to deepen, and make more nuanced, the cultural critiques of the post-structuralists without overlooking the contributions of the liberal and Marxist critiques. These trends are producing a new understanding of how development works and is transformed.

Arce and Long (2000), for instance, have outlined a project of pluralizing modernity by focusing on the counter-work performed on development by local groups; these authors focus on the ways in which the ideas and practices of modernity are appropriated and re-embedded in local life-worlds, resulting in multiple, local or mutant modernities. By counter-work, they mean the transformation that any social groups perform on any development intervention as they necessarily reposition the said intervention (project, technology, form of knowledge, or what have you) into their cultural universe to make it meaningful for themselves; counter-work, in their view, often involves the recombination of elements from various social and cultural contexts and traditions in ways that significantly transform the intervention. One may add that the important aspect of this concept is to identify and foster those forms of counter-work that are most culturally meaningful and politically empowering. (To cite the PCN effort again, activists perform counter-work on conventional conceptions and strategies of biodiversity conservation, resulting in a hybrid proposal that creatively incorporates modern and local knowledges, modern and local practices.)

Bebbington (2000) has called for a notion of development that is at once alternative and developmentalist, critical and practicable, focused on the concept of livelihood. He has also underscored how the ‘uneven geographies of poverty and livelihoods’ are related to both historical political economies and culturally inflected patterns of development interventions (2004). Grillo and Stirrat (1997) take their critique of post-development as a point of departure for a constructive redefinition of development theory and practice. Fagan (1999), weaving together
Marxist and post-structuralist proposals, has suggested that the cultural politics of post-development has to start with the everyday lives and struggles of concrete groups of people, particularly women; Diawara (2000) implicitly makes a similar point by advocating a consideration of the varieties of local knowledge that are present in the development encounter. The relation between post-development, feminism and postcolonial theory has been another focus of fruitful discussion. Sylvester (1999) warns about the effect of our distance from those we write about on our accounts of the world; she advocates building connections between post-colonial theory and post-development as a corrective to this problem and as beneficial to both. Other authors find in gender and poverty a privileged domain for weaving together elements of post-development, post-colonial theory, political economy and feminism into a new understanding of development, while maintaining a critical eye on the ethnocentrism and exclusions that often characterized earlier developmentalist representations of women (e.g. Marchand and Parpart 1995; Gardner and Lewis 1996; Schech and Haggis 2000). Basic issues of paradigmatic differences have also been usefully brought to the fore (Pieterse 1998).

De Vries (2005) has pointed at an issue that has remained largely unexamined. Most critiques of development, he argues, have overlooked the desires for development that many people already have, precisely as a result of the same development apparatus dissected by post-structuralists; these desires exist between the gap of promises and meagre actual realizations, as a sort of desiring machine that also operates between the generation and banalization of hope. Treating development as an object of discourse, or chiefly in terms of governmentality, amounts to a disavowal of the subjectivity of people in many Third World communities. Moreover, in de Vries’ view, many critics fall into a position of cynicism, as if saying: ‘we know development is an apparatus of power, and we do not believe in it, and yet we do it anyway for pragmatic reasons.’ By acknowledging that development is a desiring machine and not only an apparatus of governmentality, he suggests, one might find new ways to radicalize development theory. This is so because ‘the desire for development both masks its impossibility and reveals a utopian dream that goes against the historical project of capitalist modernization’ (p. 16). It is thus important to see in people’s desires a refusal to accept ‘the banalization of development by the anti-politics machine’, which implies ‘an ethics of sustaining the capacity to desire, to keep searching for what ‘is’ in development more than itself, for demanding for what development offers but cannot deliver’ (p. 19). This is an insightful theoretical-political critique of Foucauldian approaches. In terms of post-development, it can be translated as asking: How could the very development apparatus be used to cultivate subjects of diverse developments and diverse modernities?

As we entered the present decade, the panorama of development theory was thus marked by a wide array of positions and growing inter-paradigmatic dialogue. This could be seen as a positive result of the sometimes-acrimonious debates on post-development during the 1990s. As the first decade of the new century unfolds, the problems of development continue to be as challenging, if
not as intractable, as ever. On the one hand, economic globalization has taken on such a tremendous force that it has seemingly relegated the debates over the nature of development to the back burner. On the other, global movements and the deepening of poverty continue to keep issues of justice and development on the agenda. For most of these movements, it is clear that conventional development of the kind offered by neo-liberalism is not an option. There are, indeed, many alternatives being proposed by movement activists and intellectuals. At the very least, it is becoming clear that if ‘Another World is Possible’, to appeal to the slogan of the World Social Forum, then another development should, indeed, be also possible. The knowledges produced by these movements have become essential ingredients for rethinking globalization and development. In this way, post-development has also come to mean the end of the dominance of expert knowledge over the terms of the debate. It remains for us, development scholars, to engage with these intellectual and political trends among the movements with the always important aim of rethinking our own perspectives.

After the Third World? The failures of modernity and the rise of imperial globality

The ability of post-development to become a socially effective imaginary might well depend on how we assess the present moment in the history of modernity – and, of course, on the historical course taken by these processes. It is important to refer briefly to this issue to conclude. Generally speaking, one may ask: what is happening to development and modernity in times of globalization? Is modernity finally becoming universalized, or is it being left behind? The question is the more poignant because it can be argued that the present is a moment of transition: between a world defined in terms of modernity and its corollaries, development and modernization, and the certainty they instilled – a world that has operated largely under European hegemony over the past 200 years, if not more; and a new (global) reality which is still difficult to ascertain but which, at opposite ends, can be seen either as a deepening of modernity the world over or, on the contrary, as a deeply negotiated reality that encompasses many heterogeneous cultural formations – and, of course, the many shades in between. This sense of a transition is well captured by the question: is globalization the last stage of capitalist modernity, or the beginning of something new?

The answer to this question depends, of course, on one’s perspective, and there is no single answer that is good once and for all. One possible strategy, which I believe is consistent with post-structuralism, is to examine current understandings within the critical traditions, particularly those which both contest the dominant neo-liberal accounts of globalization and which open up paths of transformation. While this exercise would be beyond the scope of this chapter, we can point at some of the most compelling argument from this perspective. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, for instance, has underscored the inability to think beyond the idea of modern solutions to modern problems. Is it possible to think outside this box? Santos has forcefully made the argument that
we are moving beyond the paradigm of modernity in two senses: epistemologically and socio-politically. Epistemologically, this move implies lessening the dominance of modern science and opening up to a plural landscape of knowledge forms. Socially, the transition is between global capitalism and emergent forms of which we have some glimpses in today’s social movements and events such as the World Social Forum. The crux of this transition is an untenable tension between modernity’s functions of social regulation and social emancipation, in turn related to the growing imbalance between expectations and experience. Intended to guarantee order in society, social regulation is the set of norms, institutions and practices through which expectations are stabilized; it is based on the principles of state, market and community. Social emancipation challenges the order created by regulation in the name of a different ordering. These two tendencies have become increasingly contradictory, resulting in ever more noticeable excesses and deficits, particularly with neo-liberal globalization. The management of these contradictions by science and the market is itself in crisis. Hence, the need for a paradigmatic transition that enables us to think anew about the problematic of regulation and social emancipation. To this end, a new approach to social theory, ‘oppositional postmodernism’, is called for:

The conditions that brought about the crisis of modernity have not yet become the conditions to overcome the crisis beyond modernity. Hence the complexity of our transitional period portrayed by oppositional postmodern theory: we are facing modern problems for which there are no modern solutions. The search for a postmodern solution is what I call oppositional postmodernism... What is necessary is to start from the disjunction between the modernity of the problems and the postmodernity of the possible solutions, and to turn such disjunction into the urge to ground theories and practices capable of reinventing social emancipation out of the wrecked emancipatory promises of modernity.

(Santos 2002: 13, 14)

For Santos, thus, globalization is not the last stage of capitalist modernity but the beginning of something new. In this, he seems to coincide with post-development advocates. But the analysis cannot stop here; one must consider the social conditions for this view to take hold, and they do not seem to be there, given the new face of global empire and the growth of social fascism. One of the main consequences, for Santos, of the failure of science and market to provide solutions to the problems they created is the structural predominance of exclusion over inclusion. Either because of the exclusion of many of those formerly included, or because those who in the past were candidates for inclusion are now prevented from being so, the problematic of exclusion has become terribly accentuated, with ever-growing numbers of people thrown into a veritable ‘state of nature’. The size of the excluded class varies of course with the centrality of the country in the world system, but it is particularly staggering in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The result is a new type of social fascism as ‘a social
and civilizational regime’ (p. 453). This regime, paradoxically, coexists with democratic societies, hence its novelty. This fascism may operate in various modes: in terms of spatial exclusion; territories struggled over by armed actors; the fascism of insecurity; and, of course, the deadly financial fascism, which at times dictates the marginalization of entire regions and countries that do not fulfil the conditions needed for capital, according to the IMF and its faithful management consultants (pp. 447–458). To the former Third World corresponds the highest levels of social fascism of these kinds. This is, in sum, the world that is being created by globalization from above, or hegemonic globalization. One needs only to think about Colombia (and the Pacific in particular), or the Sudan or the Middle East to realize that this may indeed be a plausible picture of what is going on in many parts of the world.

The US-led invasion of Iraq in early 2003 has made at last two things particularly clear in this regard: first, the willingness to use unprecedented levels of violence to enforce dominance on a global scale; second, the unipolarity of the current empire. In ascension since the Thatcher–Reagan years, this unipolarity reached its climax with the post-9/11 regime, based on a new convergence of military, economic, political and religious interests in the United States. In Alain Joxe’s (2002) compelling vision of imperial globality, what we have been witnessing since the first Gulf War is the rise of an empire that increasingly operates through the management of asymmetrical and spatialized violence, territorial control, sub-contracted massacres and ‘cruel little wars’, all of which are aimed at imposing the neo-liberal capitalist project. At stake is a type of regulation that operates through the creation of a new horizon of global violence. This empire regulates disorder through financial and military means, pushing chaos to the extent possible to the outskirts of empire, creating a ‘predatory’ peace to the benefit of a global noble caste and leaving untold poverty and suffering in its path. It is an empire that does not take responsibility for the well-being of those over whom it rules. As Joxe puts it:

The world today is united by a new form of chaos, an imperial chaos, dominated by the imperium of the United States, though not controlled by it. We lack the words to describe this new system, while being surrounded by its images. . . . World leadership through chaos, a doctrine that a rational European school would have difficulty imagining, necessarily leads to weakening states – even in the United States – through the emerging sovereignty of corporations and markets.

(Joxe 2002: 78, 213)

The new empire thus operates not so much through conquest, but through the imposition of norms (free-markets, US-style democracy and cultural notions of consumption, and so forth). The former Third World is, above all, the theatre of a multiplicity of cruel little wars which, rather than barbaric throwbacks, are linked to the current global logic. From Colombia and Central America to Algeria, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, these wars take place within
states or regions, without threatening empire but fostering conditions favourable to it. For much of the former Third World (and of course to the Third World within the core) is reserved ‘the World-chaos’ (p. 107), free-market slavery and selective genocide. In some cases, this amounts to a sort of ‘paleo-micro-colonialism’ within regions (p. 157), in others to Balkanization, in yet others to brutal internal wars and massive displacement to free up entire regions for transnational capital (particularly in the case of oil, but also diamonds, timber, water, genetic resources and agricultural lands). Oftentimes these cruel little wars are fuelled by Mafia networks, and intended for macro-economic globalization. In this view, it is clear that this new Global Empire (‘the New World Order of the American imperial monarchy’, p. 171) articulates the ‘peaceful expansion’ of the free-market economy with omnipresent violence in a novel regime of economic and military globality – in other words, the global economy comes to be supported by a global organization of violence and vice versa (p. 200). On the subjective side, what one increasingly finds in the Souths (including the South within the North) are ‘diced identities’ and the transformation of cultures of solidarity into cultures of destruction (see Escobar 2004 for a detailed elaboration of this last section).

**Conclusion**

After this analysis of empire, it is not unreasonable to think that post-development is wishful thinking. However, it might also mean that in rethinking radically development and modernity could lie powerful possibilities. If we accept the idea of the need for moving beyond modernity, or the argument that we are indeed in a period of paradigmatic transition, this means that the concepts of development and the Third World are already something of a bygone past. Let them rest in peace. At this level, we need to be puzzled by what seems to be a tremendous inability on the part of developmentalists and Eurocentric thinkers to imagine a world without and beyond development and modernity, and they need to be called on that. Modernity can no longer be treated as the Great Singularity, the giant attractor towards which all tendencies ineluctably gravitate, the path to be trodden by all trajectories leading to an inevitable steady state. Rather, ‘modernity and its exteriorities’, if one wishes (and the notion of post-development seeks to make those exteriorities visible at least) should be treated as a true multiplicity, where trajectories are multiple and can lead to multiple states. The social movements of the past decade are, in effect, a sign that this struggle is already under way. Imagining ‘after development’ and ‘after the Third World’ could become a more integral part of the imaginary of these movements; this would involve, as we saw, imagining beyond modernity and the regimes of economy, war, coloniality, exploitation of people and nature and social fascism it has brought about in its imperial global incarnation.
References


Part II

Theory
Imagine Marx, after completing *Das Kapital*, having second thoughts on the feasibility of communist society, and concluding that, since no practical solutions can be drawn from his critique of the capitalist system, we better stick to the system we know. According to some, history might have proven him right, but that would have left us without the denaturalizing critique of capitalist relations that still serves as an inspiration for many today. A similar attitude seems to be gaining ground with regard to the theories that have been loosely grouped under the headings of post-development and the post-structuralist critique of development. Some authors (e.g. Nederveen Pieterse 2000; Schuurman 2000) offer an evaluation of the critique of development put forward in the last decade, and conclude that, while the critique is sensible enough, post-development is flawed because no alternatives can be derived from it. So, the argument goes, post-development offers an interesting critique of the development apparatus, but it does not point to a way forward.

But the lack of instrumentality is not a weighty argument against the analysis itself. Post-development attempts to demonstrate why development interventions do not work, and this must be kept separate from a call for alternatives. Poverty is a major challenge and a very real problem, but it is precisely because of this that the critique levelled against development cannot be ignored. The aim of this chapter is twofold: First, I want to stress the importance of retaining the insights from the critique of early post-development theories. The first part of the chapter therefore highlights what I believe is the main achievement of this literature: that it offers a possible explanation of why 50 years of development interventions have produced so little effects. Second, I will argue that, although the critique in itself does not point to a way forward for development practice, an extension of the critique to include an examination of how development interventions are transformed in encounters with target populations might do so indirectly. This is because these analyses demonstrate that some of the premises on which development interventions are based do not hold. For those who retain faith in the ability of development institutions to deliver development, this is surely not irrelevant.
Post-development

Writings grouped under the headings of ‘post-development’ or the ‘post-structuralist critique of development’ are, as the terms imply, critical of development as it has been practised after the Second World War. Further, most of this writing is in some ways inspired by Foucault, and tends to see development as a discourse that orders and creates the object that it pertains to address. But here the agreement ends. Some set out to refute ‘development’ in all its manifestations. Sachs, in The Development Dictionary (1995), and Escobar, in his early work (1984), see the last 40 years of development as a direct continuation of the colonial project. Modernization theories after the Second World War were built on the assumption that the rest of the world could follow the American example, and the United States portrayed itself as the ‘beacon on the hill’ (Sachs 1995: 1), an example for all to follow. Esteva, writing in the same volume, stresses the constructed nature of under-development. It began, he maintains, ‘on January 20, 1949’ (the day of President Truman’s inauguration speech) (Esteva 1995). From that day, argues Esteva, the majority of the world’s population were no longer seen as diverse peoples, but were turned into a homogeneous mass characterized by their condition as under-developed. This point in time is also marked as the beginning of development by several other contributors to the development dictionary, and is put forward as an occasion that launched the key organizing metaphors of development by Porter (1995).

Escobar (1995), the most profiled writer within this genre, builds explicitly on Foucault in his analysis. He is concerned with examining how what is portrayed as a neutral knowledge about an object creates that object by establishing a set of relations between its elements. Through this mechanism, a set of procedures that decides what constitutes valid statements is produced, thereby displacing alternative ways of seeing the world. The political dimension in this explanation lies foremost in the normalizing effects of development discourse. Others have seen a more direct political agenda in development. Some 16 years ago, Nederveen Pieterse (1991) argued that development was launched by the Americans to forestall the spread of communism. This was certainly one important aspect of modernization. In the same speech that according to Esteva and others launched development, Truman was explicit about posing development as an alternative to communism, ‘the false philosophy which has made such headway throughout the world, misleading many peoples and adding to their sorrows and their difficulties’ (Caufield 1996: 48).

Escobar and others offer a broad critique of development as a unitized homogeneous power play with the ‘poor’ as the victim. Their target is development as it was formed and institutionalized in the years after the Second World War. This has been one of the allegations levelled against the analyses: the critique does not take into account newer trends and practices in development assistance. Thus, Nederveen Pieterse, in his later writings, points out that Escobar’s claim that ‘the World Bank stories are “all the same” ignores the tremendous discontinuities in the Bank’s discourse over time’ (1998: 363). This disagreement is a
result of different perspectives: from the point of view of post-development, with its focus on the discursive formation of development, what appears to the practitioner as groundbreaking revolutions is instead seen as a different constellation of the same elements.

Some writers seek to avoid the schematic description of development by distancing themselves from the purely discursive approach. This has taken two forms: either providing a more detailed history of development theories or examining the effects of development interventions. Cowen and Shenton (1995, 1996) take the development dictionary approach to task for ignoring the historical roots of the modern meaning of ‘development’. Ideas about development and under-development, they argue, were not created in the aftermath of the Second World War, but can be traced back to classical ideas about change. The modern interventionist development (what they term intentional development) has roots that stretch back to the first half of the nineteenth century. Their work offers a much more detailed and historically grounded account of the various threads of development thinking than the more polemic writings of many post-development writers. One of their main points is especially important for the argument here: that the idea of intentional development is inherently based on a notion of trusteeship. When development was conceived of as a state practice in the first half of the nineteenth century, they argue, those who saw themselves as developed took it upon themselves to guide the development of those who were not. Although newer versions of development argue against a top-down approach to development, they do not avoid this problem. The reason is simply that a development process is initiated with a specific goal in mind, and, although developers portray themselves as ‘facilitators’, they still know where the process ought to be heading. Cowen and Shenton argue that this leads to a tautology because the goal of development is assumed to be present before the commencement of a development process. Thus, the building of civil institutions characterized by separation of person and office (to avoid ‘corruption’) often assumes that the group of people with whom one negotiates already function according to this ideal (Nustad 1999).

Other scholars have sought to modify the discursive approach by examining the effects produced by the discourse. Ferguson’s *The Anti-politics Machine* (1990) contains what I believe to be one of the key insights from this literature: that the effects produced by development discourse (according to him, a depoliticization of development and a spread of bureaucratic power relations) do not come about as a result of bad faith on the part of the developers. By separating intentions and outcomes, he shows that the depoliticizing effects of development discourse are produced by the constraints imposed on developers. They have to construct the field in which they want to intervene in such a way that intervention is possible. Therefore, a local, technical perspective is substituted for a more global, political perspective on the processes that produce poverty in the first place.

This insight is not specific to the post-development literature: Kaplan, writing 50 years ago, was describing the same process when he wrote that ‘when all you have is the hammer, the whole world looks like a nail’ (quoted in Deleon 1991,
see also Nustad and Sending 2000). Later, Scott (1998) developed the insight in his book *Seeing Like a State*, where he argues that states, in order to control and intervene in populations, have to produce simplified and schematic models of the reality in which they want to intervene. An example helps clarify this point: Hart (1982) lists what he sees as the pre-conditions for the development of West Africa:

Agriculture linked to simple technology manufactures for the home market is the appropriate emphasis at this point in West Africa’s history. But for this strategy to be realized as an effective force for development, existing political structures will have to be drastically changed: the boundaries on the map will have to be redrawn to permit more inclusive political and economic units to emerge; and the composition and priorities of the entrenched ruling classes will have to be altered.

(Hart 1982: 154)

This programme is clearly out of reach for a development organization, with limited funds and time constraints, that needs to show donors that they have achieved ‘development’ for their money. What a development organization can do is to identify the lack of some specific piece of technology (a well, a community centre, houses) as a problem and concentrate its efforts on delivering it. This explains the widespread emphasis on technical solutions and the construction of the problem as localized. In this way, the depoliticizing effect of development is produced.

To sum up, the writings directly inspired by Foucault have served to illuminate the political and power aspects of what was earlier seen as a neutral and practical problem: how to deliver development to poor people. Further, the apparatus that emerged after the Second World War was shaped by the political climate of the time and explicitly set out to provide an alternative to communist ideology. The analyses that seek to transcend the limitations of the discursive approach have examined development as a historical process and examined the effects produced by development discourse. From the first perspective emerged the insight that development is based on an idea of trusteeship; from the second, that development tends to depoliticize poverty because of the limitations imposed on the developers themselves. I believe, as I have said, that this insight must be retained, while focus is shifted to how these processes are manifested in concrete encounters. In the following text, I pursue these two issues separately by first arguing that development is built on certain premises that no amount of reform will displace, and second, by arguing that this conclusion is in itself incomplete: these effects of development are modified when focus is shifted from discourses of development to the practice of development.

**Development and trusteeship**

Let me pursue the first part of my argument by the help of an analogy: the ideas of ‘justice’ and ‘popular justice’. In a discussion with Maoists about the
possibility for a post-revolution ‘popular justice’, Foucault is at pains to point out why the form of the court cannot be adopted to a true expression of the will of the people (Foucault 1980). Victor, his Maoist opponent, argues for the necessity of setting up ‘people’s courts’ after the revolution. Foucault, on the other hand, proceeds by pointing out that acts of popular justice in France and elsewhere in Western Europe have been profoundly anti-judicial, they are contrary to the very form of the court. The form of the court, Foucault argues, is an expression of a bourgeois idea of justice. Consider the physical layout of a court:

a table, and behind this table, which distances them from the two litigants, the ‘third party’, that is, the judges. Their position indicates firstly that they are neutral with respect to each litigant, and secondly this implies that their decision is not already arrived at in advance, that it will be made after an aural investigation of the two parties, on the basis of a certain conception of truth and a certain number of ideas concerning what is just and unjust, and thirdly that they have the authority to enforce their decision.

(1980: 8)

This is, Foucault argues, foreign to the very idea of a popular justice. There is a parallel here to the attempt at ridding development of its origin in trusteeship while retaining the conceptual apparatus. In response to criticisms that development has been a practice imposed by the state, the development industry has set out to reinvent itself as facilitators of a development that has its origin in people’s concerns. The image presented to us is one in which development grows out of ‘grass-roots’ concern, assisted and facilitated by development experts. Thus, Nelson and Wright state that ‘participation’ must involve a shift in power to be more than a palliative (1995: 1). This shift involves an integration of local knowledge in the development process. In the same spirit, Edwards (1989) argues that development studies have been irrelevant to the practice of development since they are based on expert knowledge. The solution, he argues, is to deploy participatory research methods.

But the appropriation of a participatory vocabulary does not in itself constitute a transferral of power (Nustad 1997). As the form of the court was the expression of a certain conception of justice, so the apparatus of development is, as Cowen and Shenton have pointed out, built on an idea of trusteeship. When intentional development was conceived as a state practice in the first half of the nineteenth century, the notion of trusteeship was seen as unproblematic. Those who saw themselves as developed took it upon themselves to guide those who were seen as less developed. Bottom-up development, on the other hand, takes as its point of departure a rejection of trusteeship. Cowen and Shenton point out that intentional development builds on a tautology:

Logically, the confusion arises out of an old utilitarian tautology. Because development, whatever definition is used, appears as both means and goal,
the goal is most often unwittingly assumed to be present at the onset of the process of development itself.

(1996: 4)

Thus, to speak of ‘bottom-up development’ is to confuse the means and the goals of development. If the goal of development is defined as enlarging people’s choice, this pre-supposes ‘a desire and capacity to choose, as well as knowledge of possible choices’ (p. 4). These factors, they argue, are often put as a precondition for development as well as the goal for development. The missing link in these explanations is trusteeship. Someone who has the necessary vantage point guides and controls the development process.

This is why I remain sceptical of attempts to reform the development apparatus to achieve a ‘true’ development from the bottom. Proposals for reform tend to look more like recapitulations of old efforts than true attempts at reform. Culpeper (1997), for example, argues that ‘problems such as overpopulation, global warming and environmental collapse, mass poverty . . . can only become more common in the absence of a rule-based, rule-abiding, and cooperative global community’ (1997: 3). This community, further, ‘requires viable and effective institutions to act on behalf of the common interest’ (ibid.). The trustee is here effectively re-installed. As the dependency theorists pointed out three decades ago, and as the history of the multilateral development system has made abundantly clear, there is no way one can assume a ‘common interest’ as a basis for policy.

**Whither now?**

So far, I have examined arguments that point out the top-down assumptions of development, and the effects that this has: it raises doubts about the possibility for a democratic reform of the current development apparatus and the possibility for a bottom-up approach to development. This is in part because the intervening agent has to construct the object it addresses in a way that makes intervention possible. The analogy to justice helps clarify this point: that embedded in an apparatus, a form, lies an implicit premise on which an approach is built, and that no amount of re-form will change those premises. The court itself conveys the idea of a universal justice and a neutral third party, in the same way that development discourse conveys the idea of trusteeship.

This is where most post-structuralist writings on development end. No wonder, then, that Nederveen Pieterse laments that ‘post-development articulates meaningful sensibilities but does not have a future programme’ (1998: 345). I have argued that these ‘meaningful sensibilities’ have a value in themselves because they point to a possible explanation for why development interventions so often fail. But I want to take this one step further and argue that a more grounded approach to the study of development interventions might yield insights that can be useful to development practitioners as well.

To continue with the analogy of the court, case studies have shown that the
actual functioning of that institution might be very different from what its form implies. Thus, Spencer (1999), in his ethnography of life in a Shinhala village, argues that the court set up by the British colonial authority, far from imposing an idea of bourgeois justice on the inhabitants, was used by them as an extension of local political struggles. In the 1860s, between 7 and 8 per cent of the population were taken to court each year, while only 10 per cent of the cases led to convictions. Spencer, following John Rogers, argues that the court was adapted to the peasants’ own purposes, and argues that the courts were used in much the same way as sorcery and demon rites had previously been used. This led a Governor to lament that ‘in their attempts to adapt our system to their wants they . . . have abused the process of criminal procedures, as the cheaper and more efficacious mode of enforcing their civil rights and of avenging their petty quarrels’ (Spencer 1999: 223). Even the court, it seems, a form that carries with it so much ideological baggage, is open for the adaptation to different ends.

Most post-development writings have focused on the development apparatus itself: how it constructs and orders the reality in which it seeks to intervene. But, as Spencer points out for the functioning of the court, it does not follow from this that the social world is created in the image of the developers. Thus, Grillo (1997) has argued that the writings of Escobar and others portray development as ‘a monolithic enterprise, heavily controlled from the top, convinced of the superiority of its own wisdom and impervious to local knowledge, or indeed common-sense experience, a single gaze or voice which is all-powerful and beyond influence’ (Grillo 1997: 20). Kiely (1999) argues that ‘post-development discourse tends to imply a passive Third World, simply having its strings pulled by an all-powerful West’ (1999: 48). This is a critique that has been levelled against discourse analysis more generally. Trombadori criticizes Foucault for a ‘lack of individuating real subjects who are capable of determining a relation of power: in the context of the tensions of a discursive formation or of a particular apparatus in which knowledge and power are intertwined’, he asks, ‘who struggles against whom?’ (Foucault 1991: 18–19, emphasis in original).

It is certainly true that the focus of these writings is very much on the discourse of the developers, how they portray and construct the object to be developed. The way forward for development studies, I believe, is to examine how development interventions are transformed, reformulated, adopted, or resisted in local encounters. Development interventions might not in practice function as an expression and concretization of the ideological baggage on which it is built. A growing literature has already begun to explore these issues. Everett (1997) argues that post-structuralists have ignored the agency of local elites as well as of ‘target populations’. As an example we are introduced to a development project in Bogotá, Colombia, where the local elite used the language of ‘sustainable’ and ‘participatory’ development to secure their interests (controlling the spread of squatting near the city). This rhetoric, she demonstrates, did not fool the residents of the informal settlements who mobilized against the development project. This she uses to argue that post-structuralist critics of development ‘have largely failed to reveal the agents of this repressive
system. By leaving out or simplifying agency, they portray development as both more unified and more powerful than it is’ (Everett 1997: 147). She agrees that the consequences of development might be misunderstood by those involved but goes on to say that ‘this fact does not mean that conscious actions and motivations have no role in shaping development interventions’ (Everett 1997: 147). Here she seems to be arguing with a ‘straw-man’ post-structuralism (Ferguson, for example, does not leave conscious actions and motivations out in his description of development; he argues that they cannot be identified with outcomes) but, nevertheless, she has a point. With analytic focus on the practitioners of development and how they construct their object through the discourse of development, the reactions of the people to be developed are neglected.

Some European academics that partly adopt a discursive approach set out to avoid many of these problems. Long (1992) argues for an actor-oriented approach when studying development encounters. He sets an agenda that examines such encounters through the concept of ‘interface’. This perspective focuses on how the different actors involved ‘attempt to create room for manoeuvre so that they might pursue their own projects’ (1992: 36). In a later publication, Arce and Long (2000) argue for an approach that examines how localized practices adopt and change the ideologies imposed on them by modernizing agencies. They call for an ethnographic examination of how ‘official discourses’ compare to ‘the strategies and language games of local people who face new and increasingly global social relations’ (2000: 3). They thereby make the important point that the spread of hegemonic discourses such as development is always played out in local encounters and through human agency.

One approach to this is demonstrated by Arce and Long (1993). They studied the Mexican Food Programme, a large effort at a rural development programme, through the person of the fieldworker Roberto. In their account, this person embodies the contradiction between local interests and the state-led development programme. Roberto is met with scepticism by the local peasants that he wants to help, and only gains their trust through an act of distancing himself from the government. He fails at first to obtain signatures from the peasants for a petition he wants to present to the headquarters. One night, while sitting with a group of the peasants around the campfire, he rages against the government and says that he would like to shoot the president, who ‘is at the centre of the web’ he feels caught in (1993: 199). As a result of this act of demarcation between himself and the bureaucracy, he is promised support for the petition by one of the peasants, provided he works to obtain a good that the peasant wants: cherry trees. He agrees to this, but finds himself unable to keep his promise. The contradiction, then, between the interests of the peasants and that of the development bureaucracy is played out in the person of Roberto. In order to distance himself from the government that has earned the peasants’ distrust, he both had to disavow that government and make promises that he could not keep. He was seen as disloyal both by his employer and by the peasants, and eventually he was transferred to another district.

The strength of this case is that the contradiction between the structuring
effects of the development discourse and the interests of the peasants is analysed through the person of the intermediary, thus giving meat and bone to the process. My own research on a development project in Durban’s Cato Manor parallels Spencer’s description of colonial courts (Nustad 1999). Post-apartheid development projects have to create a distance between themselves and the top-down development projects of the apartheid era, and have therefore come to advocate a bottom-up and people-driven version of development (Nustad 1996). In practical terms, this led the developers to establish local development committees to function as intermediaries between themselves and the community. From the premises of bottom-up development, these committees were meant to express the interests of the larger community. But these positions, from the point of view of the community leadership, also represented access to outside development resources. Securing a place on a development committee therefore became part of an ongoing power struggle within the community leadership. Numerous attempts at negotiating development failed because development resources were used by the local leadership to strengthen their own positions. This undermined all attempts at development, and eventually led to an armed conflict that destroyed all organizations in the area.

In this example, the object in which one sought to intervene – the community of Cato Crest – lacked the characteristic that was a premise for the intervention. For the development committee to function as an extension of the interests of the wider community pre-supposed a separation of office and person on the part of its members. In the volatile and often violent local politics of Cato Crest, those who had managed to secure prominent positions had most often done so by acting in direct negation of that principle. They were powerful and influential because they were able to secure resources and build up a personal following.

Examples such as these show that, although it is possible, on a conceptual level, to demonstrate that a development apparatus conveys certain effects, things are not so clear-cut on the ground. What I have argued, then, is that the answer to the realization that the post-structuralist critique of development seems to have reached a dead end is not to continue business as usual. Instead, the insights from this literature should be retained: First, that the apparatus in which development is embedded in itself has certain effects, such as the depolitization of poverty, and is built on certain assumptions, such as the agency of an outside intervening body. But, in addition, it is important to study the manifestations of development in concrete encounters. This will enable us to see that social life is less determined than an analysis that solely focuses on how development is constituted as a discourse would lead us to believe. Further, for those who believe in the ability of the development apparatus to change peoples’ lives for the better, insights such as the ones derived from the study of the development intervention in Cato Crest are surely not irrelevant. If the development of Cato Crest is to succeed, an intervention must be based on a recognition of how the local political system works.
Conclusion

This does not, of course, supply an answer to those who want to salvage post-development by deriving new ways of practising development from it. But I think it unlikely that the institutions that have so far made this problem their own, that for at least 50 years have supplied a shifting stream of solutions and remedies to it, are likely to solve it. Discourse analysis, at its best, has supplied an answer to why so little progress has been made.

Where is the solution to poverty going to come from, then? To continue the analogy with Foucault’s discussion of popular justice, where the idea of bourgeois justice was contained within the form of the court, it follows that an expression of justice that is truly popular would be very different in form. It would probably not even be recognized as an expression of popular justice by those working within a court, and had a new court been set up, based on its principles, the form would have corrupted the content.

The same, I believe, holds true for development. As I have argued, the call for practical solutions rests on the assumption that the apparatus now in place has the capacity for delivering a solution, and there are important reasons for doubting that premise. Instead, there is an important task ahead of reconstituting poverty within the political domain: to examine how poverty is produced, what the relationship is between processes that produce wealth and poverty. Writings on development have tended to obscure these processes because the analysis has been hampered by the constraints imposed on the developers who seek to intervene in specific areas.

But I have also argued that, when extended to include actual development interventions, the post-structuralist critique of development has indirect applications for development practitioners. If one retains faith in development, analyses that point out that the premises on which an intervention is based do not hold, surely must be of relevance. There is thus a double imperative for continuing research on how development encounters are acted out on the ground: Theoretically, post-development has been too concerned with describing development as one homogeneous field, and has overlooked the way in which development interventions have been transformed and given new meaning by those whom they seek to help. Practically, this line of research has pointed out how the restrictions imposed on the developers’ conception of their task sometimes undermine the whole intervention. This, surely, is an important contribution, even if the critique does not have a future programme.

Note

1 This chapter appeared in Third World Quarterly in 2001 under the same title. Much has happened in the conversations and discussions that have taken place under the loose heading of post-development in the six years that have passed since then, and many have commented on the original article, among them are Morgan Brigg (2002), David D. Gow (2002), Sally Matthews (2004), Aram Ziai (2004) and David Simon (2006). Still, I have chosen to include the original text with only a few corrections of style and language as I still think it expresses well the state of the debate at the period when it was written.
References


This chapter addresses post-development theory and its ambiguous relation to agency. In its radical critique to development, post-development suggests that discourse plays a momentous part in structuring development actors and their practice. This post-structural critique of development analyses development as a powerful discourse that serves to order and regulate the object of development, providing a privileged point of departure to grasp the knowledge system of development and possible explanations to the slowness of practical changes despite regular paradigmatic alterations of development’s theoretical and rhetorical level. Post-development provides an interesting approach to the formal macro level of development, but its application of a Foucault-inspired discourse analysis and the emphasis given to discourses’ formative power raise concerns regarding the notion of actors’ agency internal to and in relation to what is perceived as the development discourse. In their emphasis on development discourse’s power over agency, post-development scholars reduce what was cherished by the post-modern tradition of which post-development is part, that is, individualism and multitude on both an empirical and theoretical level. Post-development’s strict view on agency and development discourse’s formative power over the individual is perhaps best illustrated by the words of James Ferguson who in *The Anti-Politics Machine*, which belongs to the post-development gospel, writes that

> [w]hatever interests may be at work and whatever they may think they are doing, they can only operate through a complex set of social and cultural structures so deeply embedded and so ill-perceived that the outcome may be only a baroque and unrecognisable transformation of the original intention.  
> (1994: 17)

It was from this perspective and with the intention of providing an *in situ* empirical account of post-development theory that I embarked on my research on a development project in northern Ethiopia (Lie 2004), on which this chapter draws. In the course of my research, however, I realized the project staff in most cases were perfectly aware of what they were doing when engaging with donors and various aspects of the formal level of development; I saw the need to
supplement post-development theory with an actor-orientated approach. This enabled me to study the formal representation and the project’s macro level – grasped by post-development theory – in relation to the heterogeneity among the local project staff and their knowledge. Consequently, the object of analysis becomes discursive practices and how these interrelate with subjective realms and practices, which enables the study of the knowledge encounter between western development expertise and local knowledge.

Critics of post-development argue that post-development in its strictest sense is not only guilty of homogenizing the very idea of development and conflating it with the modernization theory of the 1950s and 1960s, it is also responsible of constructing ‘the others’ – that is, the recipients and intended beneficiaries of aid – as post-colonial subjects constructed by development discourse (Peet 1997; Kiely 1999; Brigg 2002). Combining discursive and actor-orientated approaches to development both illustrates and counters the shortcomings of post-development theory, that is, its ambiguous relation to agency. However, I argue, it also illustrates the strengths of post-development theory as one approach to one of the multiple levels and layers of development and aid relations, that is, macro, structural and policy level. I thus make a call for methodological and theoretical triangulation in the study of development processes and relations. I do not tend to promote a theoretical ‘add and stir’ approach – there is no magic in triangulation. It only makes the researcher aware that different approaches yield different pictures and slices of the empirical field, and underlines that no methodological nor theoretical standpoint manages to grasp a phenomenon in its entirety. Also, it counters post-development’s tendency to privilege discourse and donor’s policy over what happens in the field when policy is made operational.

This chapter starts off by presenting the empirical case to which the following theoretical discussion relates. The case is about the local project staff and a consultant and how they go about devising a new project application to secure further funding. The project takes place in Aba’ala in the Ethiopian Afar-region, is funded by NORAD1 via a Norwegian NGO, and is implemented by two Ethiopian institutions. The consultant is hired by the donor NGO to assist the local institutions in producing a ‘good application that will meet the donor and NORAD requirements’ – as the consultant puts it. He is hired because he knows the current development policy trends, NORAD’s policy and the format in which the application is to be submitted.

‘He knows the NORAD format’: the case with the consultant

Planning and the production of project documents are constitutive in manifesting a development project and in building causality between the abstract level of the project as illustrated in documents and what these represent, while also establishing links between input and expected outputs. The development project at task has formally an explicit agenda of applying participatory approaches and bottom-up planning, meaning that the recipients and beneficiaries are to be
empowered and emancipated to take control over their own development and to plan, propose and manage their own project. Project documents – which constitute a project’s formal order and establish the aid-chain linking donor and recipient institutions – are thus to be produced by the project’s beneficiaries. However, as project documents require donor acceptance to become effective, it is an implied necessity that the documents reflect donor’s policy and wishes and feed into the larger discursive whole. This, alongside the means and methods applied when planning reduces the multitude the documents are to portray with the effect that the empirical particularisms are reduced to certain simplistic representations on which development agencies rely. Project documents are characterized in that they correspond to certain aesthetic criteria (cf. Stirrat 2000) that advance projects’ legibility when planning, monitoring and implementing. These factors make participatory planning processes difficult in cases where the beneficiaries do not hold the necessary skills. When facing donor’s aid conditions, participation tends to become a means for cooption or to ascribe whatever proposed to the beneficiaries so that they are made responsible for donor’s policies. The case presented below – about the inclusion of an external consultant to a development project in the process of making a new project application – addresses the conditionality–participation nexus, and illustrates how actors can be reflexive towards donor’s system of knowledge.

The development project – an integrated pastoral development project – is in its final stage of the first five-year phase, consequently donor and recipient organizations have started the application process for the second phase. The local project manager prepares a ‘feasibility and identification study’ to gain information to devise the new project proposal, whereupon he seeks to accommodate the idea of participatory approaches as stipulated in the project’s formal guidelines. This is the first time he is involved in formulating such an extensive proposal. He became project manager just after the first phase was initiated and his inexperience makes him abide to the formal stipulated guidelines for planning, ‘... because this project is community based I need to know what the beneficiaries regard as important in order to make the application as valid and accurate as possible’.

On the day of departure for the fieldtrip, planned to last for five days, to collect data for the feasibility study, the project manager arrives late to our scheduled departure wearing his ordinary suit, being rather inappropriate for a fieldtrip. He informs that the trip has to be cancelled and that ‘we have to wait for a consultant that donor sends from Norway. They don’t want us to make the application ourselves, or, they say we need help.’ The reason given by the donor for sending a consultant is that ‘he knows the NORAD format’. The project manager informs that he has been e-mailing extensively with the donor but the donor is determined that a consultant is required, making him upset as it will diminish the time allocated for the fieldtrip and consequently infringe the participatory approach. He maintains that ‘if we postpone the fieldtrip until the consultant arrived, we won’t have time for it. We’re soon expected to submit our application to the donor, and involving another person is very time-consuming.’
The project manager questions what there really is to know about the NORAD format and thus the consultant’s engagement. He argues that the application form is well arranged with several open-ended questions only to be filled in with the information gained from the beneficiaries. He also recalls the words of the donor representative a few months earlier who informed about the application process: ‘In order to make it easier, it is only to copy from the application we made for the first phase. The socio-cultural elements have not changed dramatically, and it makes the application process easier.’

After heavy delays, the process around the new application starts as the consultant, who the donor has employed on several previous occasions, arrives. The project manager expresses anxiety regarding the deadline, whereupon the consultant assures that they will make it. He underlines his experience and skill with such work and format and that ‘... everything we shall do and produce is stipulated in the ToR [Terms of Reference] I got from the donor. We’ll manage this’, he argues while handing out copies of the ToR.

At the first meeting, the project manager repeats his concerns. ‘The project is a bottom-up project and we need to talk to the community in order to identify their constraints and the activities to address these. It will take a long time and hard work.’ The consultant starts to get annoyed by the continuous stress and replies that the paramount objective is to convince NORAD to maintain funding the project. ‘We only need to write that we have talked to the community so that they believe we’ve done it. Talking to the whole community is too exhaustive and I guess things haven’t changed that much since the study five years go.’ Again the project manager expresses discomfort as the consultant seems to lack basic insight to the area and to the fact that the project is to expand and target new groups.

The divergence between the project manager and the consultant is settled through choosing a middle course. They decide to go to Aba’ala, the project area, and talk to community representatives, that is, the elder council and employees at the governmental offices and other community leaders. The project manager objects, stating that these groups are not the primary beneficiaries, rather people that already have employment and live under relatively good conditions compared to the average of Aba’ala. The consultant argues that it is impossible to apply a participatory approach and bottom-up planning literally, due to the extensive workload it implies. He refers to his experience in designing projects and applications as a safety valve. When they have agreed to go to Aba’ala for one day to talk with community leaders about the project, the consultant says that ‘it would be good to visit the project area. According to my ToR I’m supposed to have discussions with the local partner in Aba’ala.’

A crucial issue for discussion with the local institutions in Aba’ala concerns how to design the partnership agreement. The donor has expressed that they would like one of the two partner institutions to withdraw as a formal partner of the project and rather be hired as a local consultant to assist the other. ‘This is a wish from donor’s side, but I think it is impossible’, the project manager states. He argues on the second institution’s lack of institutional capacity, manpower
and knowledge on general project management. On this issue, there is a discrepancy between the consultant, who represents donor’s case, and the project manager. The former works according to ToR defined by the donor, which states that the consultant shall ‘[a]ssist in developing the application, in general, based on the inputs given by the donor, and specifically assist in developing activities, goals and indicators for the new project phase’. The project manager states: ‘Well, you just have to go talk to them [the second institution]. I have, and they are perplexed about managing the project all alone. They told me they wouldn’t manage it. And they don’t have the institutional and technical capacity to implement and supervise the project.’ The consultant answers that it is up to him to make recommendations to the donor, and that he will talk to the institution about the matter.

In a meeting between the consultant and the project manager, responsibility is distributed about who should write what in the project application. One of the last points in the application form for new projects (as defined by NORAD) is ‘[h]ow is the project to be financed after Norwegian support has ended?’ (point 3.5). The project manager claims that ‘it is improbable for the project to be financed by others, and even more impossible that it would be self-sustained. The project’s budget is nearly one million birr, while the implementing institution’s annual budget is only 40,000. There’s nobody to finance the project except NORAD.’ The consultant replies:

Well, of course, we cannot say that we are dependent on the funds from an external donor. The application for the first phase did so, but we can’t do it once more. Again, we just have to convince them that the project is sustainable, and that the local institutions will take over the responsibility for the introduced infrastructure. We write that through lifting the capacity of the local institutions and creating awareness, the people in Afar will manage the project themselves. I don’t think the second-phase application will be accepted if we say that we are dependent on further external funding after the implementation. And we have to write that it is cost-efficient.

The consultant informs that it is easier to fill out the application if ‘you know what they want’. He says that he merely promotes the inputs given him by the donor, who knows the trends and policy of NORAD and the Norwegian Government, to whom the project must accord.

This case exemplifies a contradictory aspect of the formal order of development, that is, between donor’s wishes, intentions and conditions, which infringe the notion of participatory bottom-up planning. The case shows how development agents relate to the formal order and discourse of development, and that actors are able to be reflexive towards both imposed knowledge and prevailing discourses. Additionally, the case shows that the project exists on two different levels, namely one in project documents and the other at the practical implementation level. These two levels are interconnected, but do not necessarily reflect each other directly. However, the local informal practices can contribute to
maintain the formal codified order (in documents). As the actors have knowledge about the formal order to which they relate, they can be reflexive to it and produce knowledge that feeds into the larger whole of development, despite the practices applied to do so diverge from the same order. As these practices are not reflected in the formal order, and simultaneously maintain the same order, the preconditions for similar actions are reproduced. The case tells us how actors relate and might respond to prevailing ideas and imposed expert knowledge. Practices leading to the reproduction of a formal order might also be intentional and instrumental – discourses can be perceived to be knowledge frames the actor can enter and exit rather than cultural dope. The case thus provides an interesting point of departure for discussing post-development’s view on the individual subject as post-development has a tendency to privilege discourse over practice, which informs social theory’s general structure–actor dilemma.

Discourse as systems of knowledge

The concept of discourse as applied within the social sciences denotes the inter-relation of meaning, practice and power, that is, systematic knowledge/power formations that are shared by various people. Neumann, writing on the general linguistic turn of the social sciences of which post-development is part, asserts that discourse may be understood as a system for the formation of statements and as a precondition for social action, and hence discourse analysis must include the analysis of practice (Neumann 2002). A discourse refers not only to oral and written statements, but also to aggregates of social practices, and works by inscribing itself into individuals and institutions whereupon it becomes more or less normal for those internal to a discourse, hence the notion of normalization and discursive formation. This explicitly concerns the degree of freedom ascribed to the individual in relation to discourse with implications for Foucault’s discursive framework and post-development scholars’ application of it.

With the concept of discourse Foucault – being among the seminal thinkers of discourse analysis as applied in the social sciences – gives a framework for how to grasp various systems of knowledge without recourse to standards of objective truth or what’s morally and ethically right. This is premised on his rejection to equate reason, emancipation and progress of modernity as, to Foucault, knowledge is indissociable from regimes of power and the temporal and spatial context in which the particular discourse has been generated. Foucault’s knowledge/power regimes suspend categories of truth/false, consequently, he dismisses other modern theoretical views on knowledge, as, for example, positivism’s notion of neutral and objective knowledge and Marx’s view on knowledge as emancipatory (cf. Best and Kellner 1991).

Foucault proposes a discourse that is perceived as insignificant by its bearers, and emphasizes the structuralizing power discourse has over its bearers through the discourse’s conditions of existence, rules of formation and procedures of exclusion. For those embedded in a discourse the discourse is the reality – a reality that inscribes itself into others who regularly relate to it. The rules of
formation lead to regularity in statements and practices aligned with the discourse. Actors’ expressions and practices that do not reflect or relate to the existing discursive order are sanctioned by exclusion. Foucault’s argument is that the actors’ self-disciplinarian and self-regulating normalization of statements and practices leads to a strengthening and reproduction of the established discursive order, whose conditions of existence are to be studied in contemporary and historical societies. Hence, the discourse’s originator is not the main concern since a discourse comprises a sort of anonymous system that is available to those who want or can operate it without its meaning or validity necessarily being lost (Foucault 1972).

**Post-development**

Post-development emerged as a result both of general post-modern trends within the social sciences and the impasse of development after half a century of flawed interventions, leading Sachs to argue that ‘[t]he idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape’ (1992: 1). The reason of development’s failure was no longer explained with recourse to people’s conflicting interests and intentions, but rather to the macro systemic level of how contemporary development practice and ideology are embedded in a western neo-colonial discourse perpetuating unequal power relations between the North and South of the world where post-war United States stands as the beacon on the hill guiding other nations to follow in its footsteps (cf. Sachs 1992; Schuurman 2000).

In their discursive approach, post-development scholars see development ‘... as a system of knowledge, technologies, practices and power relationships that serve to order and regulate the objects of development’ (Lewis et al. 2003: 545). Post-development proposes development as a hegemonic and monolithic discourse that overrides cultural variations wherever it is articulated. In her assessment of post-development theory, Green argues that post-development scholars, who position themselves outside the institutional structures of development, see development as

a bureaucratic force with global reach and an explicitly pro-capitalist agenda, operating as a tool of regimes that seek to perpetuate relations of inequality and dependence between the West and the rest and, through their representation, to perpetuate the construction of others as post-colonial subjects.

(2003: 124)

This comprehension of development leads to a post-structural rejection of development ‘... not merely on account of its results but because of its intentions, its world-view and mindset’ (Pieterse 2000: 175). This indicates post-development’s central problem concerning the inter-relationship between representations of reality and what happens on the ground. Post-development theory is favourable in understanding the formal order of development on the
macro-structural level and the inter-relationship between various overarching structures and ideas concerning development. But to assume a direct causality between discourses and lived life raises important questions regarding the view on subjectivity and individual freedom in relation to discourse.

In the view of post-development scholars, development constitutes a particular discourse that is manifested as an objective form of knowledge through the regularity of various development institutions’ practices. This system of knowledge constructs its field of intervention as a particular object and creates a structure around that object on which development intervention relies (cf. Ferguson 1994: 14) making development a ‘... form of knowledge ... characterised by regularity in dispersion’ (Escobar 1991: 666). It is this system of knowledge that actors relating to the development apparatus are formed by processes of normalization and discursive formation. In being formed by the discourse, actors’ agency thus reproduce the very discourse they are shaped by. Ferguson names this the reproduction thesis, meaning that a ‘... structure always reproduces itself through a process’ (1994: 13). Hence, in the Foucauldian sense, development’s mindset and world-view are continuously reproduced by development agents and agencies – having the effect of strengthening the already established discourse and thus reducing the relevance of other knowledge formations. This makes it even more difficult for other forms of knowledge and practice to reason within the prevailing discourse, which has implications for the discourse/agency nexus in terms of power. ‘Considering the development enterprise as a discourse implies that the “underdeveloped” world is constructed through representations and that reality is constantly “inscribed” by discursive practises of developers, economists, demographers, nutritionists, etc.’ (Orlandini 2003: 20). Consequently, the development discourse is continuously reproduced and thereby strengthens its hegemonic position and power of formation and normalization over those individuals relating to it, while minimizing the influence of alternative or deviating knowledge and practices.

Too strict a conception of discourse and its formative power has implications on the general view on actors and their agency. Ferguson, for example, proposes – as illustrated in the indented citation on page 47 – a rather static picture of actors and their agency in relation to the discourse’s formative power. Actors are seen as mere representatives, bearers and reproducers of the development discourse, which is the post-development explanation to why so many development projects seem to fail, that is, actors’ agency is not only intentionally neglected by the development apparatus but also in effect inscribed into a particular world-view and thus constructed by the discourse they are embedded in. As an inevitable result of this rigid comprehension of discursive power, human agency is neglected as a factor that might deviate from the prevailing discursive order, and in being instruments of the discourse individuals are dispatched from any kind of freedom. How does this notion of individuals’ inferiority to external discourses relate to actors’ lived life, and more general, how does post-structural analysis relate to the concept of freedom and how does it take subjects’ agency into account?
Discourse and power

While post-development celebrates tradition and multitude in its critique of institutional development’s ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach and lack of taking the heterogeneity among aid recipients into account, post-development is simultaneously guilty of minimizing the complexity internal to the development apparatus by conflating it with modernization theory. This relates to an inconsistency on behalf of post-development: while many criticize institutional development for lacking sensitivity to agency and diversity in the ‘Third World’, they commit fallacy when ascribing too much power to the discourse and thus viewing the subject as a mere bearer and reproducer of a given discourse. Hence, Kiely maintains, development becomes ‘a particular discourse which does not reflect but actually construct reality. In doing so, it closes off alternative ways of thinking, and so constitutes a form of power’ (1999: 31). This illustrates the capillary and productive – as opposed to the prohibitive – aspects of Foucault’s notion of discursive power: a discourse ‘allows’ for certain ways of thinking and thereby excludes others. With explicit reference to Foucault (1980: 115), Kiely asserts that ‘[i]t is thus discourse, and not the individual subject that produces knowledge – indeed the subject is the product of discourse’ (1999: 33). As knowledge is intimately connected to power, each society has its regime of knowledge and the constitution of subject is therefore inseparable from knowledge/power, hence the subject’s condition of and possibility for freedom is to be found internal to discourses (cf. Oksala 2005).

The tendency to omit agency is a key weakness in post-development theory and has great implication for the view on the free subject in relation to larger structures. For Foucault and post-development scholars in particular, power is not seen as something operating over or against individual subjects, rather, it is ‘a machine in which everyone is caught’ (Foucault 1980: 156). However, in his later works, Foucault operated with three various modalities of power, that is, dominance, strategy and governmentality (Foucault 1994b; referred to in Neumann 2003). Dominance is a direct power relation leaving no doubt regarding who governs whom, akin to the Weberian notion of power but different in that Foucault emphasizes subjects’ ability to yield resistance because as power is relational it cannot exist without the possibility of resistance. Strategy is a game between wills where it is not a priori determined whose will prevails, that is, it becomes an empirical question. Governmentality is a modality of power attached to reflexivity and how the subject governs itself – defined as the conduct of conduct. Generally, post-development theory ascribes only to the dominance modality of power. The dismissal of the relational aspect of power and how power operates – as indicated by the concept of governmentality – illustrate a rather eclectic use of Foucault’s framework having the effect of minimizing individual variation, local resistance and general complexity.

My general concern about discourse analysis, which parallels my critique of post-development, is the validity and the area of application ascribed to it and its ability to grasp the entirety and complexity of what it sets out to analyse. It is
hardly a novel anthropological insight, but it echoes my argument that no single theoretical approach manages to grasp the full complexity of what it sets out to describe. Theoretical selectivity leads to a conception of discourse as a monolithic, hegemonic and homogenizing system of knowledge that neglects and undermines humans as reflective individuals and rather sees them as subordinate and merely bearers of a discourse. Discourses, regarded as obvious conditions for communication, can be questioned under particular circumstances; they can be revealed to be constructions and therefore changeable. Conceived of as social constructions, one can assume the possibility for discourses to be re- or even deconstructed. This is the work of actors, and post-development’s lack of focus on agency thus precludes how discourses are articulated among the intended beneficiaries. To assume a very strict causality between discourse and practice would be a great fallacy. Moreover, too rigid a conception of discourse necessarily precludes certain ways of thinking and viewing the world while privileging others. No discourse is hegemonic – it always gets local expressions as knowledge becomes contextualized when it is distributed. Hence, the result of discourse encounters is an empirical question. The development discourse, as analysed from the donors’ side, is not necessarily what happens locally among recipients. Transformations and translations occur as the realms of donor and recipient encounter, and an analytical focus on actors as bearers and articulators of knowledge enables them to identify such processes. In my case, the development discourse represents a system of knowledge development agents in various ways relate to in constituting their reality. The consultant case illustrates that he relates to, but is not shaped or formed by development discourse. He intentionally conducts non-discursive practice that relates to development discourse, which illustrates that there might be several discourses at stake simultaneously and while some coexist others overlap or oppose each other. An actor-orientated approach renders it possible to see how various systems of knowledge get affected when challenged and encountered by others through the study of situations of interface.

**Actors, informal practices and interface**

An actor-orientated approach not only helps open up black boxes of formal, institutional and discursive development but also opens up and nuances post-development theoreticians’ depiction of the development discourse. Such an actor orientation is more about pitching the analytical focus on actors than studying their intentions as is the core of traditional actor analysis. Hence, an actor-orientated approach offers a possibility of understanding how meanings associated with development are ‘. . . produced, contested and reworked in practice – and thus to illuminate the multiple significances that the term holds for actors involved in the development process’ (Lewis *et al.* 2003). In order to understand these processes, it is important to understand the broader picture of development, a picture offered by post-development scholars, and how the various organizations involved function formally and practically. The under-
standing of development as a discourse relies mostly on formal sources. What is regularly prominent in this field is the discontinuity between formal organization and the many informal practices (that arise in relation to the former) that oppose but at the same time relate to the formal structure of development. An actor-orientated approach illustrates this slippage. This approach enables us to provide ethnographic studies on how particular texts are consumed by development organizations and agents, how they relate to or feed into a development discourse and how these influence and interact with project practices as communicated by local development agents. Norman Long’s concept of interface is, in this respect, very appropriate as it takes as its primary concern the encounter between various life horizons as articulated through actors, and takes the knowledge encounter as the privileged analytical point. In my case, this is reflected by the consultant: He represents and articulates the knowledge encounter he faces, and relates to various forms of knowledge and demands. On the one hand, donor’s knowledge and demand, the need locally for more money and their wishes, while on the other his defined objective is to produce and finalize the application.

Norman Long defines ‘... a social interface as a critical point of intersection or linkage between different social systems, fields or levels of social order where structural discontinuities, based upon differences of normative value and social interests, are most likely to be found’ (1989: 1–2). Identifying situations of interface is an approach for studying linkages between structures and processes, and encounters between different systems of knowledge as articulated through actors. Interface studies help in bridging the gap between structural and actor-orientated research. Long states that interface is an analytical tool for understanding what happens in the encounter between different knowledge systems and calls for a ‘... thorough-going actor-orientated approach which builds upon theoretical work aimed at reconciling structure and actor perspectives’ (Long 1992a: 4). This is to counter the resurgence of simplistic system thinking, stressing the importance to acknowledge and take ethnographic particularism into account. The fruitfulness of using interface as a methodological and analytical tool is that its ‘... concepts are grounded in the everyday life experiences and understandings of men and women, be they poor peasants, entrepreneurs, government bureaucrats or researchers’ (ibid.: 5). Actor-orientated research takes the multiple realities and diverse social practices of various actors into account and makes it possible to grasp these different and often incommensurable social worlds of different actors.

Development discourse’s encounter with ‘multiple realities’ involves a transfer of technology, knowledge, resources and organizational forms from the more developed world or sector of a country to the less developed parts. The encounter denotes a process of transformation as the formal order of development ‘... is transformed through acquiring social meanings that were not set out in the original policy statements’ (Long 1989: 3). Situations of interface articulate factors, which cannot be directly linked to the development programme itself, but evolve as a result of the intersection of different fields of knowledge.
In dealing with multiple realities, acknowledging potentially conflicting social interests, we must look closely at the issue of whose interpretations or models prevail over those of other actors, and under what conditions. Knowledge processes are embedded in social practical processes where aspects of power, authority and legitimation play a critical role, which bring about parallels to the notion of discourse. Like power, knowledge is not simply something that is possessed and accumulated. Nor can it be precisely measured in terms of some notion of quantity or quality. ‘It emerges out of processes of social interaction and is essentially a joint product of the encounter and fusion of horizons’ (ibid.). Power and knowledge must therefore be understood relationally and not treated as if they could be codified, depleted or used up. That someone has power or knowledge does not necessarily imply that others are without, nor is this the case in the development sector concerning the relations between donor and recipient. Recipients are not incapable and powerless in their encounter with externally imposed structures, rather they can apply a wide range of strategies to cope with the formal order of discursive development. One cannot generalize over the multitude of local and practical knowledge. Neither is it correct to generalize about what happens in the encounter between different systems of knowledge. Whereas the development discourse reflects a formal order of development, what happens in the encounter with other systems of knowledge as it is deployed in various settings is solely an empirical question.

Reflexive counter-tendencies

The notion of interface challenges the formal institutional arrangement of development and post-development’s depiction of it, and emphasizes that one needs to identify the formal and informal settings that can generate various effects of the representations of development. Interface studies aim to bring out the discontinuities that exist between different systems of knowledge. Studies of knowledge encounters show the struggles, strategies and interactions that take place and show how ‘... actors’ goals, perceptions, values, interests and relationship are reinforced or reshaped ...’ in situations of interface (Arce and Long 1992: 214). Interface gives focus on the diverse types of interplay and interaction between different knowledge realms. Parkin (in Arce and Long 2000) presents the notion about ‘counterwork’. Counterwork denotes the process that unfolds when different systems of knowledge intersect, conceptualized as the rebounding effect of knowledge in its diversity. Partnership relationships and the interactions between donor and recipient involve the interplay of ‘hegemonic’ and ‘non-hegemonic’ discourses and values. Thus, Arce and Long also give an account of Wertheim’s notion about ‘counterpoint’, characterized as composed of ‘deviant’ values that, in some way or another, are institutionally contained. The central point is that the ‘... dynamic processes of change can never be understood if the opposing value systems within society are not taken into full account’ (Wertheim cited in Arce and Long 2000: 11). In studies of interface, one must take the different realms that actors relate to and that shape their
perception of everyday life. The analytical amplification of counterpoint values challenges the existing institutional arrangements. Arce and Long call for a combination of counterwork and counterpoint, which they call counter-tendency and which evolves in situations of interface. To identify counter-tendencies is a useful methodological approach to grasp different and entangled systems of knowledge in situations of interface and the outcome of these. ‘Life-worlds exist as specific time, space and experiential configurations . . . where some coexist, some clash, some mix, and others separate or retreat into themselves’ (Arce and Long 2000: 13). Thus, the encounters and interactions between the different systems of knowledge are centres to gain empirical data of the process of counter-tendencies.

Counter-tendencies might not only take the form of implicit responses to whatever is imposed. In fact, actors can be acutely aware of the external system of knowledge they encounter, and they might also have thorough and even intimate knowledge about it. Hence, the counter-tendencies become explicit reactions and not merely an implicit response to various situations of interface.

The consultant from the case presented above was hired because he knew the prevailing discourse and how to go about it. As ‘he knows the NORAD format’ he is able to produce whatever is of interest and make it fit into the format in which the executive officers at NORAD evaluate and estimate the project. Working regularly as a consultant for the development sector, he alternates between various discourses, which enables him to be reflexive not only to what he is doing or producing but also to the very discourses themselves which, in turn, become contested. Through distant knowledge and low degree of embeddedness into the development discourse, the consultant manages to produce an application that fits directly into the very discourse despite bypassing several of the formal guidelines and structures (such as participatory approaches) that he inevitably is supposed to relate and stick to. Thus, by bypassing the formal structures and thus producing a project application that feeds into the larger whole (that is, the development discourse), he is on the one side being strategic and manipulative. On the other side, he then also contributes to the reproduction and maintenance of the formal order, the formal structures or what post-development theoreticians denote development discourse. Nevertheless, the case shows that discourses can be contested by actors deviating practices, and that a discourse is not as powerful, hegemonic and totalizing as a strict post-development approaches tend to state.

**Concluding remarks**

Post-development theory might provide a fruitful approach to the systemic and structural level of development, but has shortcomings in its relation to practice and agency. Development projects generally imply a transnational donor–recipient relationship that is articulated on at least two layers, that is, the document-based formal order and the practical level where the project is implemented, and both demand analytical attention in the study of development
processes and discourses. The empirical case to which this chapter relates illustrates the general post-development point in that development discourses circulating in the NGO system tend to be self-referential, as, for example, Ferguson asserts by his reproduction thesis, and thereby discourses gain autonomy from the practical side of development. However, this is neither the result of an automatic process nor due to actors’ internalization of a certain development discourse. It is rather the direct result of a pragmatic, clever and manipulative consultant whose only concern is to secure further funding and to do so he consciously seeks to master the particular discourse at stake in the top-heavy system of development. While Marx conceived of ideological consciousness as ‘they don’t know it so they do it’, the cynical consultant fits with Zizek’s understanding of ideological consciousness as ‘they know it, yet they do it’.7 Reproducing development discourse on the formal level is in the case above an active and pragmatic choice – a point post-development’s pure discursive approach fails to grasp because of its predisposition to favour the formal textual and discursive level to practice. This parallels an inclination in the social sciences over the last two decades that Kapferer (2005) denotes as the retreat of the social, that is, an increased dichotomization of researchers’ perception of the society into micro and macro, actor and structure. To complement post-development with an actor-orientated approach thus helps in bringing the social – understood as the intersecting point of what is conceived of as structure and agency – back into social analysis. Including practice and ethnographic particularism to the analysis not only challenges post-development theory and its ambiguous relation to agency, but also counters the resurgence of simplistic system thinking. As post-development theory becomes more nuanced, it also gains relevance as one approach to the various systems of knowledge to which development actors relate.

Notes

1 NORAD is the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation – a directorate under the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). MFA delivers the general policy and NORAD is the implementing branch of Norwegian aid allocated via non-governmental organizations (NGO).
2 This and other quotations, as well as the case in general, are from my six months’ field research on the development project in Afar, Ethiopia. Fieldwork was conducted during spring and summer of 2002 (Lie 2004).
3 Cited from the Terms of References for the consultant, produced by donor, and signed by both parts.
4 In a meeting between the institutions and an evaluation team investigating the partnership model, the second institution expressed concern over the plan to transfer the whole responsibility to them and that they lack the overall infrastructure, capacity, knowledge and technology to manage the project alone.
5 The form is called ‘NORAD – Department for Non-Governmental Organizations. Application for Support to New Project, Year: 2003’. From autumn 2002 a new application format substitutes the old ones, as the one used in this case.
6 This view is also associated with Escobar (1991), Sachs (1992) and Ferguson (1994).
7 I am indebted to Marianne Lien and Erik Henningsen for making me aware of this point.
References


On the singular name of post-development

Serge Latouche’s *Destruktion* of development and the possibility of emancipation

*Yoshihiro Nakano*

Assessments of post-development thought divide around the issue of the demand for transcendence (‘beyond development’/‘alternatives to development’): some critics reject this demand as a rhetorical and empirically vacuous thesis; others welcome it as a genuine possibility for radical social change. The climate of the post-development debate has recently shifted from a sceptical rejection of the demand for transcendence to a more positive evaluation of this demand. More recently, a number of scholars have attempted to rearticulate a potential link between post-development thought and transformative politics (Hoogvelt 1996; Fagan 1999; Nustad 2001; Rojas 2001; Saunders 2002; Matthews 2004; Rapley 2004; Ziai 2004): they suggest that the demand for ‘alternatives to development’ can be elaborated by alternative normative criteria to those which predominate in mainstream development studies such as the feasibility of policy making, global governance, and institutional arrangements.

The insights of these scholars, though congenial, fail to offer a distinctive theoretical vindication from the traditional programme of development. They are unclear by which criteria this demand for transcendence can be seen as truly transformative. This shortcoming in offering a theoretical vindication, however, can be resolved by refocusing our attention on the central philosophical themes of post-development thought, specifically the issue of *overcoming of metaphysics* that Heidegger’s philosophy opens up. When we refocus on the philosophical themes that run through post-development, it is the work of Serge Latouche that comes to the fore: Latouche elaborates on his critique of development in the post-Heideggerian tradition, and implicitly offers a fundamental logic of emancipation that no other post-development thinker demonstrates with such theoretical rigour. Here, the potential of Latouche’s thought for providing a new agenda for post-development is evaluated under the theme of emancipatory politics, which is devised in post-Heideggerian philosophy.

Overcoming of metaphysics is a philosophical project that deconstructs the essentialism of identity: it seeks alternative manners of constructing identity beyond the grammar of Western metaphysics. It is a project to transform the principle of foundation, that is, the transformation of the condition of reality.
Following this project of Heidegger, post-Heideggerian philosophers reconsider the central theme of emancipatory politics, that is, the construction of collective identity/the representation of community.¹ They rethink the logic of constructing the universal, which is the source of social bond, in a different manner from the tradition of metaphysics that arose in Western civilization. To achieve this aim, they reemphasize the role of transcendence in instituting a new social order, particularly by seeking the reactivation of the singular event of the political.

Implicitly, the central theme of post-development thought dovetails with the above Heideggerian project. Post-development thinkers problematize the foundational myth of international development as the heritage of Western civilization: they criticize the scientific reductionism that underlies the theories and practices of development; they repudiate the top-down style of development policies dominated by the cultural bias of advanced industrial societies and international organizations. They also propose to institute alternative social orders in which excluded existences enjoy their autonomy in a ‘convivial’ way. A central concern of post-development is how a new social order can be grounded by a possibility that is absent in the imaginary of development.

Thus, post-development thought is underpinned by the philosophical question of transcendence. The question is twofold. On the one hand, it is concerned with how post-development thought delimits the foundation of international development. On the other hand, it questions how it opens up an avenue towards a new order in the way another possibility of social bond is reactivated. Both aspects of this question are elucidated through the analysis of the logic of transcendence intrinsic to post-development literature.

Therefore, the analysis of post-development thought necessitates a philosophically grounded method: such an analysis needs to scrutinize the ontological dimension that thematizes the thinking of post-development authors. It is necessary to examine how the demand for transcendence emerges in the structure of post-development thought, and how this demand overlaps with the post-Heideggerian theme of emancipatory politics.

For these reasons, this chapter analyses the possibility of emancipatory politics in post-development thought by reemphasizing its implicit philosophical themes. It applies Heidegger’s fundamental ontology to interrogate the ontological dimension of the post-development literature. Fundamental ontology, which is alternatively called Destruktion, is a philosophical method that aims at revealing the limits of conventional ontology. It analyses the way in which the identity/signification of entities is determined in a given discursive structure of texts. Then, it demonstrates the alternative possibility of identity that is missing in discourse. Destruktion seeks a new way of thematizing discourses – philosophical works, literature, socio-political phenomena and others – by inflecting and radicalizing the existing theme of these texts.

My analysis focuses on the work of Serge Latouche. His work is key for understanding the role of transcendence in the framework of post-development thought. Influenced by Heidegger, Latouche himself adopts a type of fundamental ontology in problematizing international development. His Destruktion of
development illuminates the fundamental problems of international development as the metaphysical totalization of ontology: his demand for new social order emerges against this ontological closure exercised by the imaginary of development. Furthermore, it hints at a philosophically advanced insight into alternatives to development. A fundamental logic of emancipation is at work in his text: In his *In the Wake of Affluent Society* (1993), the phenomenon of the political—that is, the construction of singularity—is implicitly presented. The text suggests to us that alternatives to development can be gleaned from the exceptional place that does not belong to the order of the prevailing discourse, that is, an empty place of power.

In what follows, I employ a technique of fundamental ontology and demonstrate this instance of singularity intrinsic to Latouche’s text. By illuminating the Heideggerian influence, I elucidate the issue of the overcoming of metaphysics that underlies his project. Then, I highlight the potential of his vision of post-development by delineating its connection with several categories from post-Heideggerian philosophy, including (absolute) singularity, the political, the Thing, the universal, unnameable names, and sublimation. Thus, my analysis aims at deepening the politico-philosophical aspects of Latouche’s thought.

The chapter begins with the introduction of Latouche’s project and the analysis of his existential critique of development. With his analytic of the ‘West’, I demonstrate that the scope of his critique is not directed merely towards empirical facts but, more fundamentally, towards the ontological dimension that determines the destiny of beings. Second, I analyse the logic of transcendence in his text, demonstrating that ‘the informal’—heterogeneity in Africa—is transformed into absolute singularity; the latter is subsequently translated into the possibility of another universality by an unnameable name of ‘post-development’. Lastly, I examine the normativity of a post-development order, which can be explored from Latouche’s thought. I argue that his post-development thought paves the way for plural possibilities of the political beyond the grammar of development.

**Serge Latouche and the existential critique of development**

*Development and its existential problems*

Latouche’s project of post-development is by character philosophical. It is foremost a project that seeks the possibility of transcendence as opposed to the dominant imaginary of development. Its underlying theme has a strong affinity with Heidegger’s thesis that proposes the overcoming of metaphysics.

A basic tenet of this thesis centres on the reactivation of the role of transcendence that institutes identity. For Heidegger, reality, which is the order of discourse, is always conditioned by something radically different from itself, that is, Being [Sein] (Heidegger 1962, 1969: 23–41; 1995: 358–359). Being has a double character. On the one hand, it functions as a common reference point by which entities/beings [seiendes] are bound together as a totality of discourse:
it is the supposed origin of identity [Idem; le Même; Selbst], that is, sameness/homogeneity/universality. On the other hand, it also indicates another possibility of reality that is not yet actualized in the discourse: it is the unknown Other [Alter; l’Autre] that the present identity cannot fully possess. Therefore, reality is not a self-contained totality. Heidegger’s philosophy suggests that, although identity/universality is necessary for the existence of beings, it is potentially transformed into different forms through the possibility that transcends the present order of discourse.

Heidegger denounces how Western metaphysics obliterates the role of transcendence: it fixes identity upon the assumed totality of foundation, which is derived from ontology and theology; it reduces the signification of beings to empirical facts (Heidegger 1969). By introducing fundamental ontology, Heidegger seeks to de-struct this essentialism of identity. He ventures to reinterpret the identity of beings in the light of their relation to the transcendence of Being, which is an unknown Other. In this way, fundamental ontology undermines the naturalism of modern sciences that pretends to ground reality as the simple aggregation of empirical facts. It reveals a residual element of reality, which is not yet actualized, and opens up a new thinking that explores another possibility of reality. Thus, the task of fundamental ontology is not to abandon identity/universality but to rethink their conditions in a different manner (Heidegger 1998: 288–289; 2006: 312–313, 343).

Like Heidegger, Latouche carries out a rigorous enquiry into the foundational principle of economy and development, that is, what is ‘real’. Drawing upon phenomenological hermeneutics, psychoanalysis and structural anthropology, he argues that the reality of what we call ‘economy’ and ‘development’ is grounded by the imaginary, which is an invention of a set of theories and practices exercised in a particular socio-historical situation (Pieroni 2004: 10).

Latouche elucidates the process of the promulgation of the imaginary by interrogating the development of technicity and scientificity in the intellectual history of Europe (Latouche, 1973, 1995, 2001a, 2001c, 2003). His work shows that the maturation of those paradigms in Modernity and their application beyond Europe delimit the horizon of reality to the calculable fields of the modern sciences. Hence, beings have become the functional part of the modern social system, what he refers to as the megamachine, which is governed by the economic and techno-scientific reasons (Latouche 1995). His critique strives to reveal the arbitrariness of the foundation of the prevailing reality of development and explores other possibilities of the real in a broad context of discursivity.

In this way, his work reinterprets development issues as existential problems rooted in the tradition of Western metaphysics. For Latouche, the problem of international development is foremost concerned with the identity that enables the coexistence of beings, that is, the relation between self and other. Therefore, he interrogates the regional knowledge of economy/development by recourse to fundamental ontology and seeks to demonstrate its existential limits (Latouche 1986, 1989, 1991, 1998, 2003). His project of post-development thus joins
Heidegger’s – and also Derrida’s – strategies that explore the possibility of beings beyond metaphysical totalization (Montanari 2001: 182). As such, it can be examined as a philosophical engagement, with a number of categories used in his work indicating an existential analytic rather than being empirical concepts.

The logic of the west and the demand for transcendence

Our concern at this stage is to examine how Latouche problematizes the imaginary of development, and how his demand for transcendence emerges. Here, it is instructive to draw upon Heidegger’s analytic of Dasein, ‘Being-there’. Heidegger introduces Dasein in order to interrogate the limits of discourse (Heidegger 1962). Dasein is the ultimate horizon of ontology within which the possibility of beings is inscribed: it gives a structure that shapes the identity of beings in a given socio-historical context. The destiny of beings is determined by the meaning of Dasein as a whole (ibid.: 436–437).

In Faut-il réfuser le développement? (1986) and L’Occidentalisation du monde (1989), Latouche adopts a Heideggerian critique of development. He interprets the post-war regime of international development as that which determines the destiny of Dasein in a particular manner. His Heideggerian influence can be found in his analytic of ‘culture’ and the logic of the ‘West’. First, by ‘culture’, he means ‘nothing other than the mode of response given by each society to the problem of its social existence’ (Latouche 1986: 164, my translation). Culture is the autonomous capacity of society to construct its own destiny. Each society has its own culture practised in its particular historical trajectory; the world consists of a plurality of culture. We can read à la Heidegger how Latouche’s conception of culture is coterminous with Dasein’s authentic potentiality to decide its own destiny. Then, the plurality of culture implies a possibility of the coexistence of different types of Dasein in the world: individual Dasein is potentially opened out to the other Dasein: the destiny of beings can be plural. Whether and how the coexistence with other cultures is inscribed depends on the structure of the meaning of Dasein. Second, the ‘West’ in Latouche refers to a particular determination of the destiny of people (Latouche 2005: 10). It is a discursive logic that institutes universality without the care for the Other.

Latouche extensively demonstrates the genealogy of the West (Latouche 1989, Chs 1 to 3), and argues that the West represents the desire for a universalism that excludes the plurality of culture. It is a logic that homogenizes Dasein under a single telos. Philosophy since Plato, the Hellenic–Judaeo–Christian religion, humanism and modern democracy as well as modern sciences and capitalism have cultivated a particular form of universality: the uniformalization through the subordination of the Other.

Latouche contends that the Other is integrated into the West only to the extent that the former is represented by the image of the latter. Societies in Africa, for example, were represented as the uncivilized during the colonial period and were forced to follow ‘civilized’ Europe. Mimetism (the imperative
of imitation) is always at work in the process of Westernization. In particular, the rise of Modernity endorsed the grand project of social organizations. The social field came to be seen as a calculable machine under the paradigm of the modern sciences: the form of life came to be governed in accordance with the scientific calculation of the objects such as natural resources, labour, commodities and the subjects of the state law.

The post-war regime of international development is, in effect, a continuation of the Westernization of the world. The imaginary of development reduces the diverse modes of living in developing societies to the object of economy (Latouche 1986: 164–165). The dispositif of the West has changed from a mere European experience to the global order symbolized by the United Nations, G8 and the decolonized countries that adopt the paradigm of development. The logic of the West is omnipresent. Societies in developing countries have lost their autonomous ‘cultural identity’. Upon them have been imposed the Western values of progress, modernization, economy and scientific rationality as they are subjugated to the imperative of development (Latouche 1986, 1989, 1991).

Likewise, Latouche’s concern lies in the identity of beings instituted by the logic of the West. The West negates the autonomy of other cultures and eventually legitimizes the domination of the West over other cultures. He contends that this causes an existential crisis for people in developing societies because development obliterates different possibilities of the ‘real’ that are unique to each culture. The authentic possibility of these people is alienated to a level at which they lose their autonomy, creating a crisis that he refers to as deculturation [la déculturation] (Latouche 1986: Ch. 6, 1989: Ch. 3).

His demand for transcendence is enunciated against the prevailing logic of the West. In Faut-il . . ., he inscribes his demand for the alternatives to development:

To escape from the preoccupation of the paradigm necessitates the complete rejection of the myth. There is nothing other than development. However, is it forbidden to search for another place [un ailleur]? To invent some other paradigms? The diktat of the West ‘No salvation except for development!’ , despite its terrible power, is perhaps not absolutely irremediable. It is not totally impossible to give new meanings to history and to break with the shackles of the monosemy of ethnocide.

(Latouche 1986: 11, my translation)

The point is what this ‘another place’ implies. Two issues are suggested in the passage above. First, the transcendence of development is concerned not only with the empirical facts of ‘this’ or ‘that’ phenomenon associated with development but also with the logic of the West itself: his thesis is that transcendence must take place against the closure of ontology that is perpetrated by Western metaphysics. Second, ‘another place’ is a place in which the lost autonomy of cultures is reactivated existentially. It follows that the alternatives to development must have a specific kind of a function that institutes an ontologically
different order. Here, Latouche’s project of post-development coincides with Heidegger’s overcoming of metaphysics.

**Absolute singularity of the informal and the unnameable name of ‘post-development’**

**Singularity and the political**

Identity, according to Heidegger, is originally instituted by the possibility that is not yet actualized, that is, the unknown Other. The transformation of the order depends, ultimately, on how to reactivate this transcendental possibility that Heidegger intimates. Latouche also ventures to open up such an alternative possibility that is outside the imaginary of development.

Similarly, emancipatory politics concerns itself with the transformation of the collective identity of people, that is, the representation of community [*universitas*/ *communitas*]. Insofar as society is a symbolic order in which the coexistence of beings is guaranteed, the focal point of politics is the construction of the *social bond* (i.e. the source of identity) that binds people in a certain communitarian space. Hence, emancipation *qua* radical social change does not mean the total abandonment of universality. Rather, it means the reactivation of the possibility of another universality, that is, the reconstruction of the universal.

The logic of emancipation is understood by what Lefort calls *the political* [*le politique*] (Lefort 1988a). The political is the inaugurating moment of social change. It brings something beyond the present order: it is the *event* that ‘gives birth to the unknown’ (Lefort 1988b: 276). By the ‘unknown’, Lefort means the possibility of the new social bond that is absent from the given order. Hence, the political is seen as transcendence, that is, the phenomenon that breaks with representation and engenders another possibility of the universal. It marks the beginning of the construction of collective identity, which eventually shapes [*mise en forme*] the world of coexistence: the political gives the meaning [*mise en sens*] to the emerging social relations, and stages them [*mise en scène*] as the objectified order (Lefort 1988a: 11).

In philosophy, the phenomenon of the political is coterminous with the construction of *singularity*. Singularity is something that does not belong to generality (i.e. the order of representation). It is neither a particularity nor a universality (Agamben 2001: 13–14). It is constructed in itself for itself. Singularity maintains *non-relation/non-identity* against generality: the *ab-solute* (detachment). Hence, singularity escapes from the conceptual determination of representation: it inflects the existing grammar of discourse because it emerges as a void in representation and blocks the attempt at signifying existence. Singularity is thus conceived of as the phenomenon that reveals the limit of reality.

In politics, the emptying out of representation means the suspension of power. Lefort argues that singularity takes place with the *conquest of an empty place of power* (Lefort 1988b: 279–280). Singularity is a situation in which someone occupies a ‘place that cannot be taken’ (ibid.: 279) and, by doing so,
this someone avoids being absorbed into the ‘power of Opinion [i.e. generality]’ (ibid.: 280). The role of singularity is to suspend the existing economy of power and representation from a transcendent position. Then, singularity gives rise to a new power relation by representing itself as a possibility of another universality. To summarize, the political is understood as the phenomenon that constructs an empty place where power and representation are decentred: it produces a new social bond (i.e. the universal) from within this exceptional position.

**The singularity of the ‘informal’ and unnameable name of ‘post-development’**

Latouche has so far delineated the closure of ontology through the logic of the West. He seeks to subvert this totalization by opening up an avenue towards the construction of the singular event of the political. In his *In the Wake of the Affluent Society* (IWAS) (1993) [*La planète des naufragés* (PN) (1991)], the phenomenon of singularity is implicitly presented as that which subverts the logic of the West.

In Part II of IWAS, Latouche focuses on the ‘informal’ social groups that exist in Ouagadougou of Burkina Faso and other societies in West Africa. The informal is presented as the antipode of the ‘formal’. The ‘formal’ refers to the formal economy that rationalizes the social field through the logic of the West: it represents the modern social system itself. In the situation in which the logic of formalization infiltrates developing societies, the informal is represented as irrational and useless by the dominant development discourse (IWAS: Ch. 1/PN: Ch. 1). Its identity is signified by economists as non-structured, non-official, non-organized, a-normal, a-legal, non-capitalist, non-exploiting of others, non-visible, non-readable, a-typical, and such and such (IWAS: 129/PN: 115). It is also conceived of as the informal ‘sector’ ancillary to the development of the formal economy (IWAS: 127–128/PN: 113–114). All in all, it falls into the discourse of economy/development and is relegated to a pejorative status.

Then, Latouche sets out to deconstruct this binary opposition between the informal and the formal. In the following passage, the signification of the informal is radically transformed. It is subtracted from the order and becomes singularity:

The term ‘informal’, however, does not designate just an atypical and invisible economic reality, but also and more fundamentally a *society* which is unreadable and delicately placed in relation to modernity, being neither legal nor illegal, literally *elsewhere* [*ailleurs*], outside the terms of reference and normative imperatives of the dominant society. Of course, many aspects of the informal, especially the strictly economic aspects, end up clearly visible in conventional terms (in particular jobs, production of goods and services, money incomes). Also, there are many immediately visible social manifestations such as the pavements cluttered up with people and stalls, and the veritable invasion of urban spaces by the ‘informal’. But even
where life in the informal has been subjected to bureaucratic intervention and police control, it still is not really legalised, because for the most part it operates outside the framework where legality has any meaning (that is, the framework of a modern liberal society). The Third World ‘society’ where the informal takes place floats in a kind of non-being.

(WAS: 130/PN: 116)

In the first sentence, Latouche brackets out the conventional signification of the informal. For him, the informal cannot be signified in the existing grammar of the formal economy. Rather, it indicates something unrepresentable – that is, ‘unreadable’ – because it is placed ‘elsewhere’, outside the modern social system. He calls such a heterogeneous nature of the informal a ‘society’ rather than an ‘economic reality’.

This trope ‘society’ should not be conflated with the instituted social order or the hidden essence of foundation. For Latouche, ‘society’ means the excess of the discursive totality of the ‘formal’. It escapes from conceptual determination, and resists the formal by producing unknown social relations from within. Montanari offers an astute understanding of the destructive effect of this trope: ‘the experience of sociality, of which the informal consists, is the fruit of a radical destructive force, the result of a complete crossing . . .’ (Montanari 2001: 182, my translation). Thus, ‘society’ designates a pure potentiality of the informal, which is incommensurable to the formal: it refers to a transgressive force inherent in the informal. It can be said that, by illuminating its unrepresentability, Latouche reveals the informal as the unknown Other of development.

In this way, Latouche refuses to give any conceptual determination to the informal. He continues to subtract the informal from the formal (WAS: 130–147/PN: 116–133). For him, to determine the meaning of the informal amounts to the negation of its potentiality: ‘Formalising the informal boils down to asphyxiating it’ (WAS: 158/PN: 144).

Latouche further radicalizes the absolute singularity of the informal. He translates the informal into the universal by giving it a name ‘post-development’:

The castaways from the development misadventure are not able to buy anything at all. They are condemned to make everything. Their survival thereafter depends on how good they are at sorting things out for themselves. It is not a case of an other development, rather of a beyond (at the same time as being within) [d’un au-delà sur le mode de l’en-deçà]. They are literally elsewhere, outside development; and in certain respects before, as there is a linking back to what existed previously, stretching across the break caused by modernity [on renoue avec ce qu’il y avait avant, par-dessus la rupture de la modernité]. They are also after. We can speak of a situation of post-development [Il s’agit d’un après-développement] for two reasons. First, because the informal dynamic emerges after the passage of modernity and after the tidal wave of development; and secondly, because the planet of the
castaways will expand to its true size only after the grand society has gone down.

(IWAS: 158–9/PN: 145)

‘Post-development’, thus, emerges as a metonymy of the informal. It represents the informal as the possibility of another order (a ‘situation’). ‘Post-development’ is unnameable because it names the pure potentiality of the informal (‘the castaways of development’) that escapes from the conceptual determination in the grammar of the development discourse. The informal is the terrain that is outside the time and space of the order of development: in terms of space, the informal is situated ‘elsewhere’; in terms of time, it refers to the possibility of the radical past (‘before’) that is lost, and the incalculable future (‘after’) that is not yet actualized in the historical time of Modernity. ‘Post-development’ is foremost the name of this unrepresentable materiality. The unnameability of ‘post-development’ indicates that in the place of the informal exists the plenitude of being that is absent in the imaginary of development, and that it can be the source of post-development order.

The status of the name ‘post-development’ can be understood in terms of Heidegger’s concept of the Thing [das Ding] (Heidegger 1958). For Heidegger, the Thing is the transcendental terrain that conditions the totality of the objects: Being of beings. It is outside the order of representation but holds a necessary relation with the latter. He remarks that etymologically, the Thing means ‘binding together’ [dingt]: it is the point of origination by whose reference all objects are concatenated (ibid.: 211, 216–218). It is absolutely singular – it is non-identity – but at the same time gives the condition of universality (i.e. the universal). It is the primordial source of reality, that is, ‘the real’.

It follows, therefore, that ‘post-development’ represents the informal as the Thing. Like the Thing, it opens up another possibility whereby objects are newly bound together by reference to the singularity of the informal. It changes the location of the ‘real’. In the dominant situation, reality is identical to the order of development: it reduces the existence of the informal to an object of the formal; there is no possibility of reality other than the formal. By contrast, ‘post-development’ indicates that the ‘informal’ is something more real than the reality of development, thus, more universal than the universality of the latter. It suggests that the primordial source of reality exists outside the development discourse. In this we find the primary objective of Latouche’s philosophical work: the articulation of knowledge with other possibilities of the ‘real’ through Destruktion of the imaginary of development.

The normativity of the post-development order

What has been shown demonstrates the transcendence of the imaginary of development through the singularity of the informal. We can now draw a few theoretical insights into the normativity of post-development order, reflecting on this instance of singularity. I shall point out the following points: (1) the implication
of the logic of naming ‘post-development’, which is explained in terms of subli-
mation and a sharing process; (2) the transition toward the post-development
order, which can be conceived of as the complication of the social field and the
pluralization of the universal.

1 The political significance of the unnameable name

The logic of the political is certainly at play in Latouche’s work, where the pos-
sibility of alternatives to development is presented by way of the singularity of
the informal. The process of constructing the singularity is enacted through the
transmutation of the identity of the informal to non-identity. This transformation
can be understood as what Lefort calls the conquest of an empty place of power
because the informal is exempted from conceptual determination and its signifi-
cation is relatively emptied. ‘Post-development’ is the name of this emptiness. It
gives legitimacy to the informal by representing the latter as a possibility of
another order, that is, the Thing. It is in this empty place that the autonomization
of the informal takes place.

The Thing/the universal is not a substance that pre-exists outside discourse.
What has been shown is the transformation of the particularity of the informal
into the status of the Thing. The empty place of the universal is constructed by
the particular being. Lacan’s psychoanalytic category of sublimation explains
this well. Drawing upon Heidegger’s concept of the Thing, Lacan defines subli-
mation as the elevation of an ordinary object to the dignity of the Thing [das
Ding/la Chose] (Lacan 1986: 133). It is the change of the quality of the object,
that is, a ‘change in the object’ (ibid.: 113). It transforms a particular object to
the symbol of the plenitude of being that is missing. The sublimated object sym-
bolizes the terrain of the ultimate satisfaction [le jouissance] and causes the
desire for that terrain. Sublimation subverts the symbolic order in the way satis-
faction is obtained beyond the foundational principle of the existing order (i.e.
the pleasure principle). Like Heidegger, Lacan understands that the place where
the sublimated object symbolizes the Thing is a place characterized by an empti-

Copjec points out the pertinence of the logic of sublimation to emancipatory
politics (Copjec 2003: Ch. 1). She argues that Lefort’s insight of the political as
the conquest of an empty place coincides with Lacan’s logic of sublimation that
symbolizes emptiness through a particular object (Copjec 2003: 23–24). In both,
the empty place/emptiness is the place that is exempted from the order of
representation, that is, singularity: it does not exist a priori but is constructed by
the transmutation of particularity to non-identity. In addition, both agree that
singularity symbolizes the universal: it engenders a disruptive effect to the order
by giving the unconditional Law for itself (ibid.: 43). The emergence of empti-
ness thus divides the social field into two antagonistic camps, non-identity and
identity; it undermines the legitimacy of identity by revealing the non-identity of
the excluded existence as the universal. The same logic takes place in
Latouche’s text. The particularity of the informal is transformed to singularity.
Then, ‘post-development’ sublimates this absolute singularity to the status of the Thing. The social field is divided into the formal *qua* the existing universality and the informal *qua* the possibility of another universality, which are incommensurable. The political is foremost a logic that transforms a particular being into an empty place of the universal: the universal refers to this situation in which the non-identity of singularity becomes the Law without referring to generality.

It should be noted, however, that the self-referentiality of the universal does not mean the insistence of non-relation. The empty place also becomes a place in which the rest of generality partakes. As Rancière remarks:

> A political community is not the realization of a common essence or the essence of the common. It is the *sharing of what is not given as being in-common* [la mise en commun de ce qui n’est pas donné comme en-commun]: between the visible and the invisible, the near and the far, the present and the absent. This sharing assumes the *construction of ties that bind the given to what is not given*, the common to the private, what belongs to what does not belong. It is in this construction that common humanity argues for itself, reveals itself, and has an effect.


Social change by necessity involves the process of sharing singularity. Generality (‘the given’) is urged to transform its structure in response to the emergence of singularity (‘what is not given’) because the latter symbolizes a more authentic source of social bond than what the former actually possesses. The political engenders a minimum possibility of sociality, though it does not determine the form of order.

In sum, the act of naming ‘post-development’ can be seen as the ‘moment’ of the political. It can be said that the name transforms the informal into the Subject of emancipation. It can also be said that Latouche himself comes to share this empty place of ‘post-development’. His position was initially different from the informal: he is a thinker from a developed society. However, by giving an unnameable name ‘post-development’, Latouche finds in the singularity of the informal the universal. This singularity, he suggests, can be shared by people in developed societies: he makes the identification of his position with the informal by mediating ‘post-development’. Then, as a member of the developed societies, Latouche seeks to transform developed societies from the vantage point of the informal. The transformation of his subjectivity is obvious when we read the rest of the text (IWAS: Chs 5, 6, 7/PN: Chs 5, 6) and others (Latouche 1998, 2003). He not only defends the autonomy of the informal but also suggests the social change of developed societies through association movements and the practices of ‘auto-limitation’. He demands that people in advanced industrial societies be emancipated from the imaginary of development and live in a reciprocal relation with the informal (‘Another Africa’) as ‘authentic partners’ (Latouche 1998: 215). Therefore, what the name ‘post-development’ implies is
not relativism in the sense of the indifference of developed societies to their cultural other but the construction of a new social bond at the global level: it implies that the informal becomes a centre of the world. The name of post-development suggests the \textit{incarnation} of the singularity of the informal into developed societies: it universalizes the informal.

Here, Latouche suggests a reversal of the power relation. In the situation of development, societies in Africa are subordinated to the universalism of developed societies. The world is homogenized through the logic of the West. By contrast, in the name of ‘post-development’, the location of the universal is transposed to the singularity of the informal: the informal is represented as a supposed centre of new order in the sense that it functions as the Thing that binds the objects. However, the centrality of the informal does not imply a monopoly of power, as the West does. The new order of ‘post-development’ constitutes a different power relation. It evokes an order of relatively horizontal power relations in which people in both developing and developed societies become ‘autonomous’ and ‘convivial’ at one and the same time (Latouche IWAS: 159/PN: 145): ‘post-development’ affirms a plurality of culture (‘autonomy’) as well as sociality/universality between different cultures (‘conviviality’).

2 Towards the pluralization of the political

The construction of a post-development order begins with the indeterminate negotiation between singularity and the generality of international development. It is a process of the reactivation of the political beyond the grammar of international development. It can also give rise to the complication of the process of symbolization that radicalizes the possibility of symbolic constitution of social relations by incessantly dislocating the order through the unknown Other. As post-development thinkers argue, it can be a process of the struggle for meaning (Latouche 1998: 185) and the reactivation of the symbolic universe of human institutions (Besson-Girard 2005). The transition from development to post-development is not to be seen as a determination of the concrete contents of a new order but as the enhancement of different possibilities of our signifying practices.

Thence, the singular event of the political can possibly take place in a plural manner. Post-development order may be best described as \textit{pluri-versalism} (Latouche 2001b: 62, 2005: 20–22). The universal is necessary for the construction of collective identity. However, it must be a universal that does not totalize the social field; otherwise, the plurality of singularity will be eliminated and the possibility of social change would be extinguished. The locus of the universal must be as plural as the number of singularity. To put it in Heidegger’s terms, the structure of Dasein, which is the condition of identity/universality, must be infinitely opened out to the plural possibilities of other Dasein so that the possibility of transcendence (i.e. the unknown Other of Being) is not exhausted. In this way, \textit{the destiny of beings must be pluralized}.

The \textit{pluralization of the universal}, though it may sound contradictory, is a
necessary condition of emancipatory politics in post-modernity. As the legitimacy of scientific rationality is displaced, the Enlightenment project that aims at governing the social field based upon the single metaphysical ground becomes tenuous. In post-modern politics, the location of the universal and the manner of emancipation becomes, in essence, plural (Laclau 1996). Hence, the construction of a multi-polar global order may be a necessary condition: it is crucial to ensure that diverse socio-political demands are symbolized in a ‘plurality of the centre of decision’ (Mouffe 2005: 116). Yet, we must not assume that this multi-polar politics is based on state politics. In the post-modern condition, collective identity is not necessarily monopolized by a politics that sees the juridico-governmental state as the ultimate horizon of emancipation. The possibility of political community can be explored beyond state system (Agamben 1996).

Here is the legitimacy of the existing post-development literature that covers a broad range of issues from alternative economy, ecology, gender and human rights to indigenous knowledge (Shiva 1989; Sachs 1992, 1999; Mies and Shiva 1994; N’Dione 1994; Escobar and Pedrosa 1996; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997; Esteva and Prakash 1998; Saunders 2002; La Ligne d’horizon 2003). The ongoing studies, however, fail in demonstrating the analytically clear instance of singularity. Apart from a few exceptions, it is difficult to see whether the phenomena discussed by those thinkers refer to particularity or singularity. Therefore, the post-development research needs a philosophically grounded analysis. It needs to demonstrate the mode of singularity and the possibility of its universalization.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the potential link between post-development thought and emancipatory politics. By scrutinizing the philosophical theme of post-development under Heidegger’s thesis of the overcoming of metaphysics, it has demonstrated that the central concern of post-development lies in the transcendence of the metaphysical totalization underlying the imaginary of development. It has also revealed that, to enact transcendence, it must take place with the construction of singularity. Thus, the potential of post-development thought is to be found in the reactivation of singularity. The search for alternatives to development can be radicalized by the further interrogation of the mode of singularities that emerge in different contexts. The validity of singularities can be examined through a normativity that centres on the pluralization of the universal. Ultimately, an exploration of post-development lies in the investigation of the different ontological conditions that resist the totalization of the social field: it is crucial to further develop the normativity of post-development. The rethinking of ontology proceeds with deepening an understanding of the link between plurality and the universal. The contemporary political debate on immanence and transcendence will buttress this new agenda for post-development.
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Notes

1 By post-Heideggerian philosophy, I mean the contemporary thought that inherits or responds to Heidegger’s philosophy of finitude. It is diverged into two currents. (1) The thinkers of transcendence: inter alia, deconstruction (Derrida); ethics (Lévinas); rhetoric (de Man); Neo-Heideggerians (Agamben; Lacoue-Labarthes; J.-L. Nancy); and radical democratic theorists (Laclau, Lefort, Mouffe and Rancière). We can add psychoanalysis (Freud and Lacan) to this. (2) The thinkers of absolute immanence: Foucault, Deleuze, Negri, W. E. Connolly and (partly) Agamben. Both currently accept the limits of Western metaphysics and adopt the anti-essentialism of identity. However, they respond to the question of the overcoming of metaphysics differently. The former radicalize the possibility of transcendence as the necessary condition of grounding alternative immanence, while the latter abandon transcendence and radicalize the condition of immanence as a sole possibility. The transcendence–immanence debate is the frontier of contemporary thought of emancipation among these groups. My position is on the current of transcendence.


3 See Heidegger, 1962: §26, in particular, his category of ‘Being-with’ [Mitsein].

4 Latouche refers to George Bataille’s concept of the informal that means ‘non-structured’ (Latouche 1991: 117). In Bataille’s thought, it is coterminous to excess.

5 Saunders (2002) already refers to several post-development books that potentially contain the instances of singularity. She draws upon Derrida’s concept of the wholly Other and the undecidable, and briefly mentions the instances of singularity in Latouche (1993), Mies and Shiva (1994), Sachs (1999) and others (Saunders 2002: 15–23). Also, I can add N’Dione (1994) and Escobar and Pedorosa (1996). The former illuminates the autonomous economy movement in Dakar. The latter singles out the heterogeneity of indigenous movements and biodiversity in the Pacifico area of Colombia. However, those texts contain theoretical limits. Although some instances of singularity can be found, the texts are unclear about the political significance of singularity, that is, the scale of the universal and its ontological function.

References

Part III

Problems
Development, it is often observed, rarely seems to ‘work’ – or at least with the consequences intended or the outcomes predicted. Why then, if it is so unworkable, does it not only persist but also seem continuously to be expanding its reach and scope (Crush 1995: 4)? Clearly, the inference to be taken from this paradox is that reality is under-determined by theory. Previous approaches to this impasse have been to deconstruct or refine existing theories of development, often at the expense of metatheory (Schuurman 1993: 1). But our view is that the reality of development outcomes cannot be explained by theory because the epistemological orientation of existing theories is wrong.

We believe that a new theoretical approach is required. In this chapter, we attempt to construct a theory of development that would make sense when viewed from the perspective of indigenous or local realities and processes. Can development theory be constructed from the ground up? Our approach goes further than the populist empirical and professional reversals advocated by Chambers (1983, 1997), in that an attempt is made to produce a broad-based metatheory suited to local conditions.

We will argue that there are three forms of development: intentional development, including both intentional economic growth and modernization, and intentional socio-environmental amelioration; immanent development and indigenous development which, while it has some of the characteristics of intentionality, has further characteristics which distinguish it as a third, often hidden and unrecognized form of development. This tripartite model that we have devised draws on Cowen and Shenton’s (1996) two-part concept of intentional and immanent development, but adds a new third dimension.

Post-development analysis has exposed the misrepresentation and bias that results when intentional modernizing development is recognized as the one and only development. Indigenous development, in particular, has been hidden for decades, unrecognized as the source of viable alternative development strategies, and instead has at times been considered problematic or the cause of failures. In post-development theory, it is argued that development, as external intervention, has both shaped and been shaped by an unequal discourse (Escobar 1995) which judges the Third World but is unable to recognize or listen to the indigenous perspective. That is, the Third World is represented through the
prism or lens of intentional development, shaping our knowledge of the people who live there as poor, problematic, needy, passive recipients. This both fundamentally misrepresents the Third World and limits our vision. Development has ‘. . . created a space in which only certain things can be said or even imagined’ (Escobar 1995: 39). We therefore spend most of this chapter recognizing (and even celebrating in the post-development sense) indigenous development.

To illustrate, we use three examples of indigenous development from the Pacific. The first is the role of migration and remittances in the Pacific as an indigenous development strategy. The second is the indigenous alternative to conventional development in the Navosa valley in Fiji, and the third is the incorporation of cattle into cultural exchanges, set within the context of official projects and expectations, in rural Samoa. But first, some definitions:

Intentional development, our first form of development, is development as most commonly recognized (such as development projects, government spending on infrastructure, private sector growth). It involves deliberate intervention by external ‘trustees’ to achieve economic growth and the modernizing prerequisites for economic growth such as an educated workforce, physical infrastructure and business services. It includes deliberate activities ranging from the building of schools to regulatory legislation for the banking industry – in short, everything that is necessary for the penetration of capitalism and modernization, as modelled by the West.

But intentional development also includes a second motivation for intervention: socio-environmental amelioration. Many development interventions are deliberately undertaken to ameliorate the unintended negative impacts or outcomes of economic growth. There is a whole genre of activities, which fall under the category of project rehabilitation. The concept of sustainable development has its origins here. Such activities include projects to employ the landless poor, replant deforested areas, prevent soil erosion and so on. Most in some way intend to reverse or at least correct the destructive effects of conventional development.

Intentional development relies upon distally pre-planned outcomes that follow government or other external policy, including attempts to rehabilitate the destruction caused by unsustainable human impact, reflecting the role of intentional development as an instrument of external control (Ferguson 1990). The social group that maintains (or attempts to maintain) control may be broadly described as trustees, reflecting their interest and assumed power to direct change. Of the trustees it may be said ‘. . . power has been appropriated by . . . a class of professionals – who have possessed monopoly over development knowledge and expertise. Direct producers have submitted to this class out of a sense of intellectual inferiority’ (Rahman 1993: 70).

The view that external trustees know what is best, and are the best people to determine development outcomes assumes that local people do not. ‘Their [the trustees] prejudices include a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think, to want, to know . . . They talk about the people but they do not trust them’ (Freire 1972: 36). This is both the beginning and the consequence of non-
recognition manifest in the condition that Santos (2004: 238–240) has called the ‘sociology of absences’.

Immanent development, our second form of development, has three fundamental characteristics: it accompanies the penetration of capitalism, it is not deliberate or pre-planned (in fact it is often unexpected), and it is seldom recognized but rather is hidden. An inherent or intrinsic characteristic of the spread of the world capitalist system, immanent development is what happens as a consequence of economic growth. It is the unconscious outworking of capitalism, at the level beyond what was ever intended or thought about, whether that outcome is positive or negative. One example of an immanent process is rural–urban (or urban–rural) migration, which is seldom noticed until an overt change in population relations becomes manifest. Immanent development brings destruction to any social system, and provides motivation for renewed intentional intervention, but now ameliorative in nature.

In this way, the different forms of development articulate, interact and hybridize with each other, resulting in multiple manifestations of development (or mal-development), which are unable to be wholly accounted for by conventional universal theories of development. Intentional intervention as economic growth unwittingly stimulates immanent development, often with negative consequences, which in turn motivates further intentional but now ameliorative intervention. Indigenous forms also respond to both intentional and immanent development, as we will see.

Indigenous development, our third form of development, surprisingly, shares a number of characteristics with intentional development in that it is also deliberate activity, and it may involve both opportunity-seeking and ameliorating activities (both seeking advancement and halting deterioration). But it does not share the characteristic of intervention by external trustees and its intended outcomes are different. Instead of being motivated by economic growth, it is motivated by the ‘moral’ or cultural economy, both socially and environmentally. Its origin is from within the indigenous culture, motivated by that culture and directed by cultural criteria.

Maiava (2001: 219–220) has identified five principles which motivate indigenous responses to development interventions:

1. The need to feel good about oneself
   This is the need for self-esteem and confidence, or psychological empowerment (Friedmann 1992), particularly through cultural identity, usefulness, achievement or creativity. Cultural resurgence and participation provide an avenue to feel confident, self-assured and empowered in the face of apparently contradictory evidence, as when the forces of capitalism seem overwhelming.

2. The need to belong and feel secure
   This is the need for social inclusion (social exclusion being a common experience of the poorest of the poor). Family and kinship relationships are valued and nurtured because they provide belonging, identity and a social security network. Community participation also provides the assurance of
belonging and security, especially in the face of external alienation or marginalization.

3 *The need to feel in control of one's life*

The need for empowerment is a response to the vulnerability, powerlessness and frustrating lack of control over one's life situation, which is particularly obvious when intervening forces are exercising that power instead. Many responses, then, attempt to create or regain certainty and control (Porter *et al.* 1991).

4 *The need to be free, active and independent*

This is the need to be creative, expressive, to move freely, 'create space' and remain independent of outside forces and official expectations. It is the need to make one's own decisions and choices according to one's own priorities, and act on and put them into practice (Sen 1999). This incorporates the concept of 'agency' (Long 1992) and includes positive responses to perceived opportunities as well as negative ones.

5 *The need to support one's family*

This is the need to contribute to the self-reliance, security and well-being of the family, household and its livelihood. Friedmann (1992: 33) argues that development should be centred around the empowerment of households as the centre of the moral economy. It is the need for sustainable livelihoods and sustenance in the material sense (and this assumes full access to and maintenance of the resource base) but it also includes the cohesion, emotional welfare and social position of the family.

While indigenous development may be what people are doing in spite of capitalism, or were doing before capitalism arrived, in most cases indigenous development is a negotiated response to capitalism and its consequences (that is both intentional intervention and its unconscious immanent outworking). It is a response to perceived opportunity via adoption, innovation, adaptation or manipulation, or a response to perceived threat by ameliorating action, or even distancing or damaging activities or rejection. Most of the time the response is unanticipated. While one item or activity is adopted with enthusiasm, another is rejected while another is modified and used for a purpose never envisaged, or contrary to the 'official' intention.

There may be local resilience (King 2005) or antagonism to external intervention and its consequences in situations where indigenous agency is being realized. A number of authors have explained this process as 'creating space':

> they prosper through creating new freedoms to sustain their autonomous spaces.  
   (Esteva and Prakash 1998: 288)

> [people] attempt to create space for themselves in order to carry out their own 'projects' that may run parallel to, or perhaps challenge, government programmes or the interests of other intervening parties.  
   (Long 1992: 34)
Peasants the world over [maintain] a subsistence economy . . . this gains them a measure of security, and a measure of freedom from the market as well as the government . . . it is evident they preciously nurse their ability to evade the dictates of government. (Porter et al. 1991: 17)

Like immanent development, indigenous development is hidden and marginalized, a perspective that is aided by the eurocentricity of Western economic development (Mehmet 1995). Instead, the thinking that recognizes indigenous development is post-modern; the agency of indigenous actors as active decision makers, not passive recipients or adopters, is acknowledged. People-led (rather than people-centred) indigenous development may be described as ‘what people are doing anyway’.

But because these activities do not originate from within the boundaries constructed by the prevailing development paradigm, this is not recognized as development. Our argument here is that it is a viable form of development. However, to recognize it as such we must conceptualize development in an entirely new, different and much more sophisticated and inclusive way than eurocentric convention allows. Our three case studies of indigenous development illustrate these concepts more fully.

**Pacific emigration, remittances and international networks**

The Pacific has always been expected to follow the path of intentional development, particularly through developing light industry and exporting agricultural crops. But Pacific countries, far from their potential markets with prohibitive transport costs, face the disadvantage of peripheral location, and low populations on small islands prevent economies of scale. Despite its tourist image, the Pacific is a place of considerable instability (Field 2006: E3) exemplified by the recent unrest and violence in the Solomon Islands and East Timor. In December 2006 Fiji suffered yet another military coup. Ongoing problems include poverty of opportunity and unmet aspirations, vulnerability to degrading exploitation (e.g. from international logging, mining and fishing companies), poor governance and the environmental degradation of fragile ecosystems.

With few exceptions, Pacific economies are unable to compete in the world capitalist system on an equal footing. However, many millions of dollars of development funding has been poured into projects aimed at developing the ability of Pacific Islanders to adopt capitalist economic behaviour and to enter and compete in the world economy. But, despite playing by these rules to the best of their ability, Pacific countries are just not producing the results as expected. This ‘failure’ is acknowledged from both local and external perspectives, including those who blame Pacific countries for not trying hard enough (e.g. Hughes 2003).

Meanwhile, many Pacific Islanders (especially Polynesians from countries such as Samoa, Tonga, Niue and the Cook Islands) have been working
unnnoticed over the last 40 years on their own development strategy: migration, largely to New Zealand, Australia, Hawai‘i and the West Coast of the United States, and the sending of remittances back home. This development strategy has been unrecognized because it did not involve any external intervention, consultants, aid funds or development projects. Furthermore, immigration has often been viewed as a problem for the destination countries. It can be claimed, however, that this strategy has helped the countries with the highest levels of migration to be among the most peaceful and prosperous in the Pacific, Samoa being the best example.

Migration might easily be interpreted as immanent development, a straightforward consequence of exposure to modernization with all its attractions. But in the Pacific it can be regarded as something more, because of what it has, in turn, created. Many Pacific (especially Polynesian) economies are described as MIRAB economies\(^5\) (Bertram and Watters 1985), a distinct type of economy which is now highly dependent on the remittances returned home by emigrants to support families, which may form up to a third or more of the home country’s GNP,\(^6\) a pattern now established over several decades.

Remittances also subsidize the survival of traditional livelihoods and the subsistence economy (at a reasonable level of affluence) in places where it would otherwise be consumed or obliterated by the fallout of capitalism. They are a survival tactic in a world where the playing field is not level.

But more than simply sending remittances, Pacific Islanders have also developed sophisticated and enduring trans-Pacific links and networks (Hau‘ofa 1994). As a result of migration, Pacific Islanders are exposed to new invigorating ideas and trans-border Pacific cultures are being rejuvenated. Pacific Islanders have fully grasped the concept of being global citizens and have developed a concept of ‘people as nation’, irrespective of geographical location and political boundaries; separating the concept of ‘nation’ from the concept of ‘state’ in a remarkable and unprecedented way. The decisions to migrate (often made by families of migrants) and the networks that have formed are the result of Pacific Islanders recognizing opportunities, making decisions and acting on them, and in the process creating something entirely new and unexpected. This has not been recognized as a viable development strategy but our argument here is that it should be.

**Agricultural developments in Navosa**

During the mid-twentieth century, it was observed that, rather than being conservative, ‘[Sigatoka Valley Fijians] have been selective and adaptive in developing a new society and culture which appeals deeply to them’ (Belshaw 1964: 118). The point Belshaw was arguing (against the prevailing development thinking of the time), was that Fijian society was its own agent, developing in its own way, by interacting with and incorporating Western elements that served local needs, while at the same time maintaining its traditional structure which ensured the survival of the culture.
This second case study, drawn from information collected during 1998 and 1999 by King (2004), expands on this insight through an analysis of agricultural change occurring in the Navosa region of the Sigatoka Valley in Fiji, where the practice of indigenous communities modifying their environment can be interpreted as indigenous development.

There is little doubt that the historical construction of irrigated terraces in Navosa for growing *dalo* (Colocasia esculenta), a culturally-esteemed subsistence root crop (Pollock 1992), known more widely as *taro*, was a deliberate practice aimed at increasing agricultural production and enhancing sustainability. It is likely that increasing aridity about 1,000 years ago (Nunn and Britton 2001) jeopardized the cultivation of the preferred dry-season crop, the yam (*Dioscorea sp*.), and stimulated the large-scale construction of irrigated *dalo* terraces to ensure food security. In this case, irrigated terraces, an example of landesque capital (an investment of labour in permanent land improvements for future gain (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987: 9)), were an indigenous development, which has been seldom recognized as such by the trustees of development.

The adoption of *vaivai* (Leucaena leucocephala, a tree legume) has been widespread in particular niches where it has been used for indigenous purposes, which are somewhat different from the purposes for which it was intended (alley cropping and fodder). It is locally used as a ‘living support’ for yam vines which climb up the narrow trunk after being planted at the base (or vice versa, *vaivai* is planted near the yam), a practice that owes little to the plans of modern agroforesters.

The varied interplanting of crops reflects a sophisticated adaptation of crop plants to an ecological niche, an approach that can be interpreted as localized indigenous development. An example is the open-ground inter-planting of pineapples with cassava, but the multi-layered, multi-species arboricultural gardens (Clarke and Thaman 1993) observed in Navosa can have very complex combinations of support and crop species adapted to different conditions that vary garden to garden in the same area. The size and importance of these agroforestry gardens is easily underestimated by visitors because they are commonly shrouded by the upper-storey forest canopy, and thus the organizational and innovative skill of the cultivators escapes notice.

The cultivation of the traditional beverage *yaqona* (Piper methysticum), known more widely as *kava*, is a notable example of indigenous development. This shrub has origins in the South Pacific where it was believed to have been developed through selective breeding by indigenous peoples (Aalbersberg 1997). It is now grown as a very profitable cash and export crop in high-rainfall parts of Fiji and other parts of the Pacific, and also doubles as the main local beverage in Navosa. The cultivation of *yaqona* for sale is a clear example of market-influenced indigenous development based on local technical knowledge and skills. *Yaqona*’s customary cultivation and use for ceremonial purposes provided a solid foundation for its metamorphosis into a Pacific-centred indigenous cash crop that serves to enhance rural livelihoods.

The creation of plant-based remedies by Fijian medicine men or women
clearly indicates indigenous development. These medicines are made from a recipe containing blends of different amounts of different parts of native plants and trees, and possibly could be protected by patents if such innovation occurred in a more industrialized country – where their role as a development innovation would never be questioned. Instead, indigenous technical knowledge is seldom perceived as development from the industrial perspective despite being the product of learning, creativity and innovation – perhaps because it is a reversal in the hegemonic direction of the diffusion of knowledge (Apffel-Marglin and Marglin 1990).

To varying degrees, these agricultural innovations reflect the combination or hybridization of traditional indigenous and modern techniques. The aforementioned farming of yaqona and the creation of local plant-based medicines are examples of primarily locally developed innovations, which represent relatively pure forms of indigenous development, whereas the following innovation reflects the beneficial adaptation of modern technology and a hybrid form of development.

The problem of supplying water from a spring to irrigate a traditional sloping terrace growing wetland dalo has now been eased by using flexible polythene pipe to transport water. Because of the robustness of polythene, the new technology ensured that the fields remained productive through 12 months of the year despite the trampling of animals, which damages traditional canals and timber aqueducts. This combination of technologies is best described as a hybrid adaptation, rather than as an evolutionary advance as conventional ideas would insist.

What of immanent development? The spread of capitalist commodification has been steadily progressing in the urban centres, the tourist areas and the more industrialized rural areas of Fiji throughout recent decades, as elsewhere in the world. The forces of immanent development have been largely resisted in Navosa (e.g. customary ways and church still outweigh the importance of money (King 2004: 217, 227, 231)), but, in the long term, the effects of globalization and immanent industrialization may ultimately be destructive to local livelihoods. In the case of yaqona farming, prices have risen in the short term due to increased consumer demand, but yaqona is now being produced outside its native region (Johnston 1997), and there is a danger that yaqona exports from non-indigenous geographical regions may come to dominate the market, thus negatively affecting the indigenous producers.

What impact has intentional economic growth and modernization had in Navosa? Perhaps the most noteworthy impact comes from the logging of high-value timber species from native forest. The demand for logging can be viewed as the immanent outworking of capitalist development, but in another sense it represents a form of intentional development, in that the exploitation of the forests is frequently justified in the name of intra-Fijian economic growth.

The large-scale and non-selective logging of the forested slopes of the northern Navosa boundary during the 1970s provided little or no lasting benefit for local livelihoods. Instead, the largest village of this area is now considered to be the first to have entered a cycle of poverty in Navosa. Good yaqona sites
were destroyed, creeks dried-up and pervasive land degradation set-in. Logging was largely extractive with few follow-on benefits and no replanting. As an example of intentional development, it was very destructive.

During 1998, logging was occurring in two other parts of Navosa. In one village, logging proceeds had aided with the building of an access road and several new houses, but the houses are still not complete because of a dispute over aid funds with the government. In the other village, a large new Methodist church and a house for the village chief had been partly completed, but there were acrimonious disputes about the distribution of proceeds, not helped by most community members belonging to churches other than the Methodist church. The common feature was that the average village resident gained little. The discontent regarding the use of irregular proceeds strongly indicates that logging activities were more destructive than beneficial.

What of socio-environmental amelioration? The most visible ameliorative strategy was the community woodlots of Pinus caribaea planted on erosion-prone land near villages in Navosa. Most are less than two hectares in size, and the intention was to create a local and marketable timber resource. Their market role has proved precarious because of the economics of size and remoteness, but the timber is harvested locally for use in house framing and, most important, the forest cover helps in afforestation and the prevention of erosion.

Social amelioration, however, is seldom desired in Navosa because the local socio-cultural system has been highly adaptive, self-reliant and sustainable. The prevailing egalitarian values of indigenous communities manifest in the communitarian ethos and a cultural economy based on sharing and reciprocal exchange, together with a benign environment, limit real poverty, while secure returns for some cash crops (especially the indigenous yaqona), lead to livelihood security.

In sum, the view of Navosa as a quiet and unchanging site of tradition is deceiving. Instead, Navosa society, as reflected in its changing and adaptable use of natural resources over time, is inventive, dynamic and developing. But this process is seldom recognized as such by the modern agents and trustees of development.

The incorporation of cattle into cultural exchanges in Samoa

Our third case study is based on research conducted in Samoa by Maiava (1998, 2001), which examined the contribution of cattle by smallholders to traditional Samoan exchange ceremonies (fa’alavelave) within the context of cattle projects. Fa’alavelave are important occasions, principally funerals but also including weddings, the conferment of chiefly (matai) titles and church dedications, in which gifts, including woven fine mats, money, cartons of tinned fish, cooked pigs and (uncooked) beef are ceremonially exchanged between two extended families in the centre of the village. The goods are gathered in beforehand from extended family members and then redistributed back widely within the contributing families later. Far from being historical, fa’alavelave remain vital and lively components of Samoan culture today, serving a number of important
social and cultural functions, both traditional and modern. Their frequency and variety ensure that over time reciprocity occurs and resources are shared equitably.

The smallholder cattle farmers in this case study originally sourced their cattle just a few years earlier from government cattle farms where the original breeding cattle were supplied by aid partners (principally Australia), and advice was regularly received from overseas ‘experts’ (from New Zealand and Australia). The breeding and distribution of aid-subsidized cattle to smallholders, which occurred over several years, came with extension services and expectations of how the cattle were to be farmed and utilized. This series of development projects was a classic example of intentional development with trustees who knew what was best. Samoan cattle farmers were expected to be passive recipients of cattle and farm them according to conventional Western farming practices. The cattle were to be bred, fattened, sold to the butcher and the profits reinvested.

The contribution of cattle to *fa’alavelave* was a common and increasing practice but was heavily disapproved of as a hindrance to expansion of the national herd by visiting cattle experts and Western-educated locals alike, criticized in project documents and blamed for perceived ‘project failure’ (Maiava 2001: 68–72). Documented beliefs held about cattle farming and utilization behaviours included the following: That cattle farmers did not understand the commercial value of their cattle, that most cattle were slaughtered for *fa’alavelave* and that farmers did not discriminate between breeding and non-breeding stock when choosing which stock to slaughter (i.e. female breeding stock were frequently killed), to the detriment of any hope of increasing herd numbers (ibid.: 71).10 However, none of these beliefs, in which smallholders were characterized as irrational and lacking understanding, were empirically substantiated.

In addition to these beliefs, whereby the interpretation of unexpected culturally based responses were both misrepresented and interpreted as ‘failure’, the preference for commercial production, again a function of the predominant paradigm, also drew support and funds away from the smallholder sector. Large amounts of funding were directed into the government commercial beef farms, the productivity of which was probably lower than that of the relatively neglected smallholders (ibid.: 179, 183). That is, smallholders were both ignored and blamed. This pattern was repeated elsewhere in the Pacific where the same perception of ‘failure’ led to the abandonment of smallholders. In Melanesian cattle projects ‘... as smallholder cattle came to be judged as a “failure” ... local officials and donors alike ... sought to discard cattle and seek “success” elsewhere’ (McKillop 1989: 26).

The empirical and longitudinal research this case study is based on revealed a quite different picture, however. The research found that Samoan smallholders certainly *were* contributing cattle to *fa’alavelave* and doing so with increasing frequency,11 especially to funerals. ‘Cattle had become a measure of the importance [of *fa’alavelave*]: if there were cattle then the occasion was considered important, but if there were no cattle then the occasion was considered not so important’ (Maiava 2001: 130).
However, this was not having a detrimental impact on cattle herds as herd sizes were steadily increasing and the percentage of each herd contributed per fa’alavelave was decreasing. Between 1987 and 1994, the proportion of respondents’ herds slaughtered for a fa’alavelave decreased from 28 to 14 per cent on average (ibid.: 129) and their herd sizes increased from 13 to 25 cattle, a very dramatic increase over seven years (ibid.: 186). Rather than being an obstacle or the cause of failure, fa’alavelave were providing a motivation to increase herd sizes. Twenty per cent of respondents gave fa’alavelave as the main reason for starting cattle farming and most farmers wanted to increase their herd size for this reason, as well as gaining the prestige of owning a large herd (ibid.: 134). The projects, therefore, were not failing, whether judged by conventional or Samoan criteria.

The most interesting finding was that smallholders were very proactive and strategic in managing their herds to achieve their objectives, and in particular in deciding which fa’alavelave they would contribute to, how many cattle they would give and, most importantly, which cattle they would choose to give. They were very aware of both the commercial and reproductive value of their cattle and actively chose not to contribute but to preserve female breeding stock.

To do this, they devised various strategies, excuses and alternatives, which they used at times when they judged it was necessary. These included pretending they could not find their cattle in the bush or pretending a cow was pregnant to deflect requests, choosing bulls or old cows, swapping a cow for a bull with a neighbour, reserving their cattle for their parents’ funerals only, buying cattle in or raising pigs to substitute, giving money instead, or simply saying no, arguing that if they increased their herd size now, they could give more later (ibid.: 133).

In doing this, smallholders managed to both make contributions that satisfied their cultural needs (and they wanted to do this, it provided a motivation for their cattle farming) and increase the size of their herd, allowing them to both contribute again in the future and achieve a measure of prosperity. This met and satisfied multiple requirements, both traditional and modern. In fact, cattle facilitated many modern changes Samoans were seeking to make, such as the move to individual land ownership.

In sum, then, none of the beliefs held about the behaviour of Samoan cattle smallholders was found to be substantiated under empirical scrutiny. But, while the smallholders were grasping a new opportunity, the ‘experts’ were unable to respond back in turn because they were unable to recognize a Samoan response with which they could negotiate. The Samoan response was misinterpreted and misunderstood by practitioners; the incorporation of cattle into fa’alavelave was just not part of the plan.

Again, a remarkably similar experience was reported in Melanesia:

cultural values and social relationships meant that outcomes were very different from those envisaged by program planners. . . . Although official perceptions of smallholder cattle rearing now tend to highlight ‘failure’, evidence suggests that this is an over-reaction. Gradually beef cattle have
gained an acceptance as an important component of smallholder farming systems.

(McKillop 1989: 26, 19)

This then suggests that the Samoan experience can have wider application and may be used to inform theory, as we suggest here.

Within conventional development thinking, this culturally motivated practice could not be recognized as positive in any sense, but as an outward expression of indigenous aspirations it was enormously successful. Cattle are now part of the moral economy in Samoa, and fa‘alavelave, because they are motivated by the moral economy, in turn motivate cattle farming.12 This has contributed to maintaining the strength of Samoan culture and identity, independence and family reputation, security and welfare. With reference to the five motivations outlined in the previous section,

the adoption and farming of cattle, . . . the practice of fa‘alavelave and the incorporation of cattle into them fulfil all these needs. The fact that Samoans do incorporate cattle into fa‘alavelave (when it is officially disapproved of) allows them to feel self-assured and confident, reaffirm belonging, security and identity and reassert control. It gives them independence and the ability to meet the cultural and welfare needs of their family. In this way they have interacted and negotiated with official expectations at the interface of rural development, made their own independent decisions and put them into practice.

(Maiava 2001: 220–221)

This is an example of a practice rejected as being a constraint to development but which should be recognized as a successful indigenous development strategy. Through a process of negotiation, the strict dichotomy between the traditional and the modern was blurred as Samoans responded to an intentional intervention and adapted what they perceived it had to offer them, according to their own priorities and criteria. A new hybrid was created. If development is a complex process of negotiation between forms, then cattle facilitate the negotiation of that process by smallholder farmers in Samoa.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued for a new theoretical approach that begins with indigenous processes of development. Too much development theory begins with the evolutionary, universal and ideological presuppositions of Eurocentric experience, and too much development practice misunderstands indigenous notions of development. Insufficient effort is made to understand culturally adaptive forms of indigenous development, which are often fundamentally different from the prevailing ideas of economic growth assumed by the agents and trustees of modern development.
In the context of this book, our tripartite classification of intentional, imma-

nent and indigenous development has the promise to make post-development
critiques of discourse more tangible. Our approach has been to start at the grass-
roots among the many aspects of local or indigenous knowledge and practice,
and then search for emergent themes, which integrate important development
processes. We have discerned aspects of indigenous development, which exhibit
the contrasting goals of different societies and cultures while at the same time
recognizing the inescapable power of the world economic system working-out
through immanent development. The concept of immanent development also
broadens our view to the wider context within which both intentional and
indigenous development are operating and necessitates the consideration of the
long-term and pervasive effects of economic growth in development.

We have been especially concerned to give voice to the already manifest role
of indigenous change as a process of development. It is our prediction that the
perceived and actual failures of intentional economic development in indigenous
territory are due to the arrogance of intending agencies or trustees who fail to
perceive and understand, or ignore, already existing processes of indigenous
development.

The focus on intentional development, especially growth-oriented inter-
vention, forces the powerful role of trusteeship into visibility. Eurocentrism and
other hegemonies become exposed when they are unmasked by both the intent
of trusteeship and its contrast with indigeneity. Cycles of economic growth and
amelioration, where the destruction of extant socio-environmental systems are
followed by intentional attempts to ameliorate the degradation (e.g. under the
sustainable development banner) are exposed to research.

Intentional development is unable to recognize both immanent and indigen-
ous development, and the need for amelioration, that it leaves trailing in its
wake. The inherent blind spots in this dominant paradigm can be attributed to
the focus on prescribing ‘what should be’, leaving it unable to recognize ‘what is
actually happening and what people are doing anyway’. Furthermore, if cultures
are assumed to be passive, static and restrictive, they cannot also be recognized
as active, innovative and motivating.

The trustees have been surprised by this failure:

We did not perceive these problems (sic) sooner because we still expected
history to unfold progressively. For decades we have been blind to what
was happening, merely being able to see that material progress ... was
taking much longer than expected.

(Norgaard 1994: 174)

The resulting non-recognition continues to have consequences: misunder-
standing, misinformation and bias, incorrect expectations, development funds
directed at unhelpful or even damaging activities, the need for ameliorative
action, and perhaps most importantly, the marginalization and undermining of,
and failure to support, indigenous initiatives and activities.
We have argued in this chapter that development involves processes of active negotiation between our three forms of development and between cultures. Indeed, we argue that only a new theory of development, which recognizes development as processes of interaction and negotiation can more accurately account for the diverse experience of development over the last 50 years, as recognized by post-modernism and encountered by inductive research.

As outlined in the first section of this chapter, we argue that five principles of need can usefully inform a new theory. These are worth repeating: The need to feel good about oneself, the need to belong and feel secure, the need to feel in control of one’s life, the need to be free, active and independent, and the need to support one’s family. They explain the interactive processes, the interplay of external and internal influences, and the central role of human agency, consciousness and culture in the development process.

Our three case studies of indigenous development have much in common. We have identified the unscripted responses of Pacific Islanders to external change, whether intentional or immanent. No expert or development practitioner was consulted or made recommendations, no reports were written and no aid funds changed hands. Pacific Islanders were doing what was best for their families, given the opportunities as they perceived them. The scenarios in these case studies were labelled as problems or failures, and were unrecognized as viable development strategies because project participants did not conform to expected behaviour, or their actions were completely outside any project framework.

Should development practitioners, those people who, with the best of intentions, intervene to try and bring about ‘good change’ (Chambers 1997), then, just give up and go home? Certainly post-development thinking rejects the determination of direction and the control of possibilities. Projects, as instruments of control, are in fundamental contradiction with development as processes of negotiation and creativity. However, here we do not reject all intervention and are instead searching for what can be useful for practitioners. Can post-development be practised? We argue it is to recognize people as knowing, active and capable (Long 1992: 23). As Freire put it: ‘... trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change’ (Freire 1972: 36). It is to recognize indigenous endeavours and ‘what people are doing anyway’ (however unconventional and unofficial) as development and move to support (without any attempt to influence or control, and only by invitation) these efforts in practice. Beyond being people-centred, it is being people-led with the intentions of indigenous development.

Notes

1 This definition of intentional development differs from that of Cowen and Shenton (1996) in that our economic growth has both intentional and immanent aspects.
2 We use the term trustee in a general sense and not in more specific ways that Cowen and Shenton (ibid.) use it.
3 In addition to tourism, which has been relatively successful.
4 Exceptions perhaps being the licensing out of the huge fishing zones surrounding far-flung island chains, and the potential of minerals in Papua New Guinea.
5 MIRAB economies are based on Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy (Bertram and Watters 1985).
6 For example, the sending home of remittances by Fijian mercenaries and peacekeepers abroad is now second only to tourism as the highest source of income in Fiji (Field 2006: E3). (This is a variant on the MIRAB model in that the soldiers are not migrants.)
7 The use of local names is preferred here in the interests of theoretical consistency.
8 This longitudinal study was based on research conducted in 1987 among 59 smallholder farmers and with the same smallholders (now numbering 50) again in 1994, seven years later.
9 Including the need for remittances from overseas to be sent as contributions, which are not reciprocated in kind.
10 Specific examples are cited in detail in Maiava (2001: 69–71).
11 Only 14 per cent of respondents had never contributed cattle to fa’alavelave in 1994, down from 42 per cent in 1987, and the frequency of contribution increased from once every 26 months to once every 13 months for each farmer on average between 1987 and 1994. The average number of cattle contributed each time increased from just over two to three cattle per fa’alavelave, although it is important to note that the median remained at one cattle beast per fa’alavelave and 75 per cent of contributions were of only one or two cattle (Maiava 2001: 120–122).
12 The moral economy includes being able to support one’s family financially. Cattle offer increased monetary income for little extra labour.

References


In the academic field, post-development was more criticised for its post-modern outlook than understood as a way to think emancipation without development. One of the arguments against post-development was that post-development is only a critique of development and has no programme for ‘after development’ (Pieterse 2000: 184). In some sense, this chapter deals with ‘after development’. Not because I think that the problem of post-development is the missing of an alternative ‘after development’, but because I think that two central elements of the so-called post-development era, namely autonomy and difference, are not thought through thoroughly enough.

This text deals with the necessity to address difference when talking about culture as well as with the concept of development, and with the concept of autonomy of Cornelius Castoriadis. Castoriadis shows that autonomy and development are part of the contradictory imaginary of the ‘West’. To make autonomy an alternative to development, one has to discuss an intercultural conception of autonomy.

After development

Although some of the post-development proponents give some hints for the post-development era, for example, sufficiency as a rejection of the unlimited growth of material needs (Sachs 1999: 174), post-development writers have enough reasons not to want to offer a programme. One of the reasons, according to Escobar:

If we refused to theorize about ‘how things must be instead’, it is not because of a relativizing conceit (. . .), but precisely because, in the spirit of poststructuralist genealogies, we see all too well how this normative stance has always been present in all development discourses, even if naturalized and normalized.

(Escobar 2000: 13)

A second important point is that development is blocking our intellectual horizon. This is one of the reasons why it is necessary to break with development (‘decolonisation of the imaginary’: Latouche 2001; ‘decolonisation of the
mind’: Nandy 1997). This break is meant to be the precondition of a new historical situation. Only when it is not already decided how people have to think and to live can the question of the ‘good life’ be asked.

Of course, one also has to know what it means that in the concept of development it is already decided ‘how people have to live’. One of the strengths of some post-development proponents, especially of Escobar and Rist, is that they were able to describe the unity of the discourse of development. Rist’s analyses of ‘great texts’ of development (Rist 1999) and Escobar’s analyses of the language and the praxis of development experts (Escobar 1995) show that in each development discourse, there is the idea of the endless development of history, the (hybrid) westernisation of the world (in the sense that the idea of development comes from the West), rationalisation, domination of nature and endless economic growth. Sometimes they homogenise development (see e.g. Pieterse 2000: 178, 180; Storey 2000: 42; Harrison 2003), but as noted above, the aim is to demonstrate the unity of discourse, that is those elements which keep recurring in disguise in the new development concepts.

Nevertheless, even though post-development wants to avoid the pitfall of the normative stance of development discourses, what post-development has in common with development concepts is a normative and universalistic stance. Of course, post-development does not have a programme, but when they say: ‘we have to break with development because it makes the situation worse than it is’ and because we should be for the right to autonomy and difference’, they mean everybody should break with development, work for autonomy and accept difference. In their writings, there is no real explanation why one should be for these rights and not for others (except the important fact that people know better what their own needs are and how to solve their problems themselves). The problem for me is not so much the normative stance or the universalistic one, but that the universalistic demand ‘every one has to break with development’ is in contradiction with their own rejection of universalism (see e.g. Esteva and Prakash 1998). Furthermore, it is not clear whether concepts of autonomy and difference exist in every culture.

Hybrid development and the forgotten difference from ‘inside’

The concept of hybridisation is often used in the sense of a ‘mixture’ of western and southern cultural elements (see Bhabha 1994). Rist and Escobar are aware of the so-called hybridisation of culture (for example in the field of technology: Escobar 1995: 51; Rist 1996: 395), which means that the westernisation through development is not fully successful although it is one of the presuppositions of the development projects. This can be understood as the failure of the colonial dream of subordination of the culture of the colonised, like Rist does when he stresses that despite the very real (westernising) effect of development, a new appropriation and interpretation of development is possible (Rist 1996: 394–395). The concept of hybridisation is somewhat problematic as it comes
from biology and implies that there are closed cultures, which are mixing
together; therefore one always has to say what one means when one talks about
hybridisation. For Escobar, it is a way not to continue to speak about tradition
and modernity (Escobar 1995, 219–220). In fact, it is also a way to recognise the
creativity of people in a situation of subordination.

Despite the recognition of hybrid cultures, post-development authors tend to
imagine people who are living in a more or less homogeneous ‘ethnic’ environ-
ment, and some of them even tend to essentialise culture (see Alvares 1992;
Esteva and Prakash 1998: 125–132).2 The difference is then seen as something a
group concedes to itself or to other cultures but not necessarily to individual
members or groups within their own culture who have different stances (rejec-
tion, affirmation and ambivalence in all possible combinations) to the culture in
which they are living. In so doing, the large variety of differences, which exist
within a culture, a society, a group and so on is neglected.

The point is not to deny that there are differences between cultures. In some
cases, to ascribe a sort of false consciousness to members of other cultures
would be a new attribution (Schirilla 2003, 292) like what is done in develop-
ment (‘you are not developed enough, you are not modern enough . . .’). I just
want to point out that in every culture there is a struggle or at least a controversy
about sense, significations and aims. Additionally, all societies and cultures have
always had contact with the ‘outside’ (Schirilla 1999). Of course, the problem
with development is a problem of power relations where some cultural patterns
are more valued than others, but if we only deal with difference from ‘outside’,
we cannot analyse reality in its entirety. An example: capitalism, colonialism
and globalisation have given rise to a more extensive migration than ever. As a
result, after ‘the break with development’, there will not be just one tradition
possibly hybridised through westernisation. In fact, there are many traditions
within ‘one’ culture, which have been reconstructed over and over again.

By the way, some of the advocates of post-development were migrants them-
selves, for different periods of time, and it is quite obvious that this experience
contributed to their development critique. One of the precursors of post-
development, François Partant (1926–1987),3 wrote much of his critique of
development when thinking about his developmentalist work in Madagascar;
other post-development authors4 also had to confront their culture of ‘origin’
with others.

Now migration movements continue with different power relations, often
bound with capital, not limited to North–South relations. We find migrant
workers from economically poorer countries (not exclusively) in all economic-
ally richer countries no matter whether they are in the North or the South.5

The migrants (like other minorities), mostly labour migrants, as victims of
multiple discriminations, in either Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia or the USA,
have, in order to struggle against racism, to appropriate the radical critique of
development: discrimination of people from different ‘origins’ goes hand in
hand with the development idea which is based on the hierarchisation of soci-
eties. The radical critique of development and the abolition of racism both imply
the rejection of the hierarchisation of societies and the acceptance of non-
hierarchical differences within ‘one’ society.

In order not to discriminate and not to be racist, the difference should not be
essentialised. Essentialisation consolidates differences; it ignores the change
over time and the fact that there are no characteristics that could be ascribed to
all migrants of one culture. It denies or at least obscures the individuality of
individual members of the essentialised culture.

Migrants are only one example of difference which is neither strictly ‘inside’
nor ‘outside’; another example would be gender differences. Actually this
applies to all individuals and groups who feel discriminated and do not wish to
discriminate others.

**Castoriadis: the social imaginary of autonomy and its
contradiction with the imaginary of development**

In my view, the vagueness of the concept of autonomy of post-development pro-
ponents could be the result of their conception of difference (and of culture). In
this way, autonomy is the autonomy of a cultural group, it is the self-determination
of a cultural group (see Esteva and Prakash 1998: 198).

If we think that autonomy and the acceptance and even better the affirmation
of difference (within and outside society) is worth striving for, and this is a matter
of choice, how do we conceptualise autonomy and difference? Interestingly, one
author who conceptualised autonomy, Cornelius Castoriadis (1922–1998), is also
someone who formulated a critique of development similar to that of the pro-
nonents of post-development (Castoriadis 1977). There is also a direct link
between Castoriadis and some post-development authors. Serge Latouche con-
siders himself more or less as an ‘heir’ of Castoriadis, Sachs and Latouche
worked with the ‘anti-utilitarian movement’ (MAUSS) of which Castoriadis
was also a member and it would be interesting to know if he was known by
other post-development authors. Despite those links and the wish for autonomy,
the idea of autonomy is not conceptualised in post-development.

In a certain way, autonomy has always been at the centre of Castoriadis’
quest. During the Second World War in Greece, Castoriadis was a member of a
Trotskyist group. He arrived in France in 1945 and with other ex-Trotskyists set
up the group ‘Socialism or Barbarism’ (1948–1967) and worked like many post-
development authors for a development institution, namely as economist for the
OECD. His early work in the 1950s and the 1960s (see e.g. Castoriadis
and of a merciless critique of Stalinism and of the Soviet bureaucratisation. In
this phase, he began to formulate a positive conception of the content of social-
ism – autonomy seems to be the core of socialism – and criticised what he con-
sidered the ‘traditional’ or non-revolutionary elements in Marxist thought like
the historical ‘laws’ of societal development.

In his later work, he turned to psychoanalysis, and this turned out to be con-
stitutive for his main work The Imaginary Institution of Society (1975, English
1987). In some sense, his critique of development is already implicit in his theory of the social imaginary and of imaginary significations.

For Castoriadis, the imaginary (which is a creative process) acts for the individual as well as for the society; autonomy, which is an imaginary signification, is individual and social autonomy. Individual autonomy is impossible without social autonomy and vice versa.

Human beings are not only ‘symbol-creating animals’ (Cassirer) but also imaginative ones. The understanding of freedom and of the very being of societies, according to Castoriadis, depends on the full recognition of the imaginary. The very possibility of autonomy depends on the radical imaginary.

The radical imaginary exists as the socio-historical and as psyche/soma. As socio-historical, it is an open stream of the anonymous collective; as psyche/soma, it is representative/affective/intentional flux. That which in the social-historical is positing, creating, bringing into being we call social imaginary in the primary sense of the term, or instituting society. That which in the psyche/soma is positing, creating, bringing-into-being for the psyche/soma, we call radical imagination.

(Scastoriadis 1987: 369)

Societies create their own ‘common world’ by positing ‘things’ and relations which are not given in perception. But societies tend to deny their own self-institution:

The alienation of heteronomy of society is self-alienation, the concealment of the being of society as self-institution, covering over its essential temporality.

(Castoriadis 1987: 372)

The difference between societies as instituting and as instituted implies the possibility of alienating social institutions but also the possibility to change and create new forms and new forms of self-alteration.

Criticising functionalism, Castoriadis explains that neither institutions nor the social construction of reality can be understood by analysing the fulfilment of pragmatic needs or symbolic practices alone without taking into account the source of meaning, i.e. the imaginary (Castoriadis 1987: 145).

Autonomy and development are for Castoriadis two (partly unconscious) imaginary significations of the West, which are contradictory. In *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, he speaks about the Modern: The rational domination of the world is an imaginary signification of the modern society. The last goals of rationality cannot be justified by reason itself and are arbitrary. This pseudo-rationality can be seen in the autonomisation of technical development and economy, which is seen as the rationality of modernity (Castoriadis 1987: 156–157).

Development, an idea that for him began approximately in the fourteenth
century with the spread of the bourgeoisie and the idea of endlessness in the hereafter (1977: 213–214), is for Castoriadis an ideology but also on a deeper level an imaginary social signification that has come to mean maturity, the capacity to endless growth (1977: 216). These imaginary significations are con-substantial to other practical and theoretical postulates of which the most important are:

1. The virtual omnipotence of technology.
2. The illusion of the sciences as approaching reality asymptotically.
3. The illusion that all economic mechanisms are rational.9
4. The idea that people and society are predestined for progress or that they can be manipulated to arrive at progress.

The teleological concept of history inherent in development excludes the emergence of something radically new. If we think with Castoriadis that societies are self-instituting and if we keep in mind that the notion of development is based on such a concept of history, the imaginary of development can be seen as yet another attempt of society to negate its self-instituting power. Since the teleological concept of development excludes the creation of something radically new, any attempt to pursue autonomy must necessarily criticise development.

The social imaginary of development is in contradiction with the social imaginary of autonomy because autonomy means that all institutionalised social traditions can be questioned and that the goals can be defined anew at any time. Social autonomy means for Castoriadis that society posits its own laws and does this in a collective way. But Castoriadis goes even further, saying that society not only makes its own laws (knowing that it is doing so) but also recognises itself as the source of its norms.

Such a meaning of social autonomy implies autonomous individuals. The individual can only come into being by answering to the discourse of others, by interacting with others who at the same time refer to social institutions. The society cannot call itself into question without the capacity of individuals to answer to the discourse of others, i.e. also to negate it.

Castoriadis explains first the autonomous individual and then social autonomy in order to distance himself from a philosophy of liberty that is idealistic. For Castoriadis, the autonomous individual is one who posits his law opposed to the regulation of the unconscious. The aim is not to completely master the unconscious (which is impossible) but not to let it take control of the individual, by means of a permanent process of regarding, objectifying, setting at a distance, detaching and transforming the discourse of the other. An autonomous individual is:

a real person who would be unceasingly involved in the movement of taking up again what had been acquired, the discourse of the other, who is capable of uncovering fantasies and who, finally, never allows them to rule – unless he or she is willing.

(Castoriadis 1987: 104)
The idea of development is in fact in contradiction with the coming into being of autonomy because it did not break with heteronomy: a conscious choice of means and goals is not possible.

Important in this idea of autonomy is that the goal is not a society where people do not need laws anymore because they internalised them for ever, but the possibility of the law and its foundation being questioned anew and again. The idea of an internalised law would mean that our actual wishes are valid forever, when they are in fact the answer to a specific historical situation. Wishes are in relation to present situations, and since both can change, the possibility of new distances between the instituting society and the already instituted institutions can never be excluded (1987: 110ff.).

**Difference and autonomy in an intra- and intercultural perspective**

If we agree with the idea of the centrality of the imaginary signification of autonomy, what does all this mean for the question of difference?

It means that we cannot say: ‘you are the way you are, whether it is good or bad, you will stay the way you are’. That would be the stance of an essentialising multiculturalism, feminism or, even worse, the essentialist culturalist discourse about race of the extreme right. Instead we could say: ‘you are the way you are and if this is the result of an autonomous decision, it is good’. Taking a critical standpoint, we could even ask: ‘is it the result of an autonomous decision? Do you want to stay the way you are?’ (in this case, we are asking the difficult question of specific cultural values). And this question can only be answered by the people concerned.

In addition, the autonomous individual questions the homogeneity of the group (difference from ‘inside’) as he/she knows that what enables him/her to be autonomous is his/her own choice as well as the choice of society. Of course, there are differences that are not always a matter of choice, there are differences which are still impossible or difficult to change like physical differences (here I am thinking about the possibility to give birth, about bodies functioning in a different way, skin colours and so on). However, if we know that what makes our world is not ‘natural’ (the feeling of a natural order happens due to the heteronomy of our institutions) and can always be questioned, otherness should appear to be less of a danger to us. Otherness then should not disturb an order that no longer seems to be natural. In this way, it should be no longer this other side of our own love and of our own hate anymore, no longer the projection of our own ambivalence – as Castoriadis in his ‘Reflections on Racism’ (1990b: 35–36) explains the hate of ‘the other’. 10

Nevertheless, it has to be said that Castoriadis is only a specialist of the history of the West and that he makes the mistake that post-development authors and others criticise: to see in ‘the others’ an opposition to their own values and the necessity for the others to adopt these values (e.g. Hall 1995). Ironically, it is in his ‘Reflections on Racism’ that he writes that ‘the others’ do not have the
imaginary significations of liberty, equality, law and endless questioning (Castoriadis 1990b: 37).

This assertion is the consequence of his ‘euro-grecocentrism’: Castoriadis situates autonomy as an imaginary signification that appeared for the first time in ancient Greece when a partial break with heteronomy occurred. The law (nomos) did not seem to come from a high instance/supreme being anymore; this was a moment of radical imagination. He also sees a rapprochement to this ideal in modernity, particularly in the philosophy of enlightenment and in the American Revolution and the French Revolution (1990a: 343), and even that the history of the West is linked to and codetermined by the autonomy project (1990c). In fact, even the history of the American Revolution does not conform to Castoriadis’ dichotomy.11

Sardar et al. in their pamphlet on western racism state that the idea of the importance of communal life for ‘the others’ also has roots in ancient Greece:

The notion that barbarous people live a communal life is also equally old; to the hierarchic Greeks, even when they were democrats, this indeed was the ultimate in Otherness.

(Sardar et al. 1998: 28)

In a certain sense, Castoriadis seems to repeat the process of self-definition of the ancient Greeks.

Interestingly, the prevalent idea of the autonomous subject (in the sense of a consciously acting subject) seems to be part of the development ideal of the West, which constructs and depreciates ‘the other’ who is not autonomous (Schirilla 2003).12

I do not want to enter the discussion whether people in the south (or elsewhere) resist development (see e.g. Rigg 1997: 284–285; Engel 2001: 115, 128; Veltmeyer 2001b: 624). Whether post-development authors romanticise the resistance of people on the grass roots or not, we can expect that some do resist and others do not. When people want to break with development that means that they want to break with a form of heteronomy. Of course, that does not mean that they necessarily avoid other sorts of heteronomy, but it is a step in the direction of autonomy, because they are in fact asking the question of how they want to live, and this momentum is a creative one where they are trying to give themselves their own law.

Autonomy means that one has the possibility to question tradition, and even if there are sometimes uncritical statements in post-development, Rist for example knows that one has to question tradition, after the emancipatory break with development:

The idea (…) in spite of ‘development’, is to organize and invent new ways of life – between modernization, with its sufferings but also some advantages, and a tradition from which people may derive inspiration while knowing that it can never be revived.

(Rist 1999: 244)
The question of the universality of individuality has not yet been addressed in this chapter, but an intercultural discussion on the idea of autonomy seems to be possible. Generally speaking, the problematisation of the relation of the self to itself and to others can be seen as a critical starting point for more active autonomous interventions. Brian Morris (1992), indeed, shows that conceptions of the relations of the self to itself and to others exist in many cultures.

Arkoun sees in Islam a core of a modern conception of autonomy, the most important bond of the single human being is its bond with god; this discharges him from other bonds that he watches critically (Arkoun 1989).

Kwame Gyekye (1997: 54) stresses that individuals in traditional societies can take a critical stance towards tradition. This position is also supported by Odera Oruka’s Sage philosophy project.

Analysing Oruka’s project of Sage philosophy as well as its critics, Oluwole (1997) concludes that Oruka ‘to a large extent, achieved his two basic aims’ (p. 161), proving that individual critical philosophers do exist in ‘traditional’ societies and that their thinking can and must be a valuable point of departure for future African philosophy if the decolonisation of the mind is to take place.

When having an intercultural discussion of autonomy at this particular point in time – the concept of development being in crisis but still very present – we have of course always to keep a close look at power relations. For the moment, the ‘West’ is still in a superior position of power and has more means to export its ideology and its imaginary significations, but autonomy in Castoriadis’ meaning is really not what is being propagated through capitalist (or ‘socialist’) development.

Autonomy is something that not only needs to exist as an imaginary signification. It has to be made a practical reality or to be struggled for and, by definition, it cannot be imported ready-made from outside – otherwise, it is anything but autonomy.

Notes

1 Actually for Sachs, it would be also the success of development that we should be afraid of (Sachs 1992: 3).
2 When Esteva and Prakash speak about what they name Pluriverse (the pluralism of cultures) they are not entirely wrong when they say that cultures have different world views but they neglect the plurality inside one culture, especially when they deny the existence of self in ‘traditional cultures’.
3 For Rist (1996) and Latouche (2001), Partant was one the first persons who in the way of post-development broke with development. He worked for two big French banks in Madagascar. He went back to France and wrote books against development and drafted an alternative to development. He tried without success to convince the governments of his ideas in South Yemen (1969), Congo (1971) and Madagascar (1972–1975) after the socialist revolutions in these countries. That was also constitutive for his writings.
4 For example, M. Rahnema in Mali and the USA, I. Illich in the USA, Mexico and Germany and A. Escobar in the USA.

7 Mouvement Anti Utilitariste en Sciences Sociales (MAUSS), founded in 1981, was named after Marcel Mauss. The idea that capitalist societies cannot be interpreted without considering the principle of the gift was the starting point of the MAUSS.


9 This is an important point that has often been overseen in the literature about post-development. Post-development sees the economy embedded in culture and criticises that the economy is seen as rational. Some post-development authors are influenced by Marcel Mauss’ analysis of the role of the gift (Latouche 1986: 166–169; N’Dione 1994, 2001: 46; Rist 1996: 274; Latouche et al. 1999). Another prominent scholar who analysed the embeddedness of economy and inspired post-development authors is Polanyi with ‘The Great Transformation’. Two of the reasons Castoriadis mentions to reject the idea of the rationality of economy are:

• the costs cannot be rationally calculated because of what economists call externalities, that is historic, social and natural processes;
• the investments are not rational: present and future are unknown, and the choice of investment time frames (e.g. five years or ten years) is arbitrary.

(1977: 219–221)

10 Nevertheless, Castoriadis’ ‘Reflections on Racism’ is problematic because he sees racism only in its extreme form – in the idea of the non-convertibility of ‘the other’. He understands forced assimilation only as nationalism (Castoriadis 1990b: 34).

11 As Jack Weatherford (1988: 133–150) demonstrated, the ideas of the American ‘founding fathers’ on democracy were influenced by Europeans and Native Americans.

12 The developmental ideal is a western idea, and therefore, it is related to both of the central imaginary significations which, according to Castoriadis (1990c), dominated classical capitalism, namely limitless domination and autonomy. This could be verified by analysing the development discourses which mix technology, social engineering and the so-called empowerment without noticing the contradictions.

References


8 The ambivalence of post-development
Between reactionary populism and radical democracy

Aram Ziai

The post-development school of development theory bluntly rejects ‘development’ simultaneously as a Eurocentric discourse, an imperialist project and a meaningless concept. It argues for alternatives to development, usually in the form of communities combining elements of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ culture, regaining control in the fields of politics, economics and knowledge in opposition to the state, global capitalism and science and thus finding ‘alternatives to development’. In the past decade, the school has been widely discussed and criticized. Despite the differences between the critics, there seems to be widespread agreement on the assumption that post-development is to be interpreted as a Foucauldian critique of development as well as on certain ‘standard criticisms’ against the post-development school. The chapter proceeds as follows: after defining post-development, it is examined in how far post-development can be seen as a Foucauldian critique of development. Then, the standard criticisms of the post-development school shall be described and evaluated. This procedure leads us to distinguish two variants of post-development: sceptical and neo-populist. The final sections are concerned with investigating the dangers of reactionary populism in neo-populist post-development and the convergence between the sceptical variant and radical democracy.

Post-development . . .

To begin with, it might be best to start with defining the subject matter: what exactly are we referring to by using the term ‘post-development’? There are two explicit definitions by self-proclaimed post-development protagonists. Whereas one of these is so vague as to be rather unhelpful – post-development texts are described as ‘subversive’, ‘people-centred’ and ‘radical’ (Rahnema 1997b: xif.) – the other seems more precise. Escobar (1995: 215) describes the hallmarks of post-development as follows:

1 an interest not in development alternatives but in alternatives to development, thus a rejection of the entire paradigm;
2 an interest in local culture and knowledge;
3 a critical stance towards established scientific discourses;
the defence and promotion of localized, pluralistic grassroots movements (Escobar 1995: 215).

Taking this definition seriously, the scope of post-development has to be widened beyond those writers generally subsumed under this heading (Esteva, Escobar, Sachs, Rahnema and sometimes Rist), to include the works of Nandy (1988, 1992), Alvares (1992), the UNU studies edited by Apfel-Marglin and Marglin (1990, 1996) and maybe even DuBois (1991) and Ferguson (1994). Common to these texts is that they criticize development simultaneously as a Eurocentric discourse, an at least partly imperialist project, and (often) a meaningless concept.

... a Foucauldian critique of development?

The post-development texts are usually associated with concepts of Michel Foucault. Reason for this is the frequent use of terms and concepts of Foucault’s ‘tool box’: ‘archaeology of development’ (Esteva 1985: 79; 1987: 136, 144; Sachs 1999, part I), ‘knowledge as power’ (Sachs 1992a), ‘autonomous production of truth’ (Esteva 1987: 146) and ‘insurrection of subordinated knowledges’ (ibid.). Most obvious example is the nearly ubiquitous concept of ‘discourse’ (Esteva 1987: 137; 1991: 77f.; Rahnema 1992: 168; 1997d: 381; Esteva and Prakash 1998: 8, 116, 166, 192f), and in the introduction to the first major post-development publication, the critique of ‘development discourse’ is given as the main aim (Sachs 1992b: 4). Further quotes from and references to Foucault (Esteva 1987: 146; Rahnema 1997d: 402) led to the widely shared assumption in the reception of post-development: ‘The largest intellectual influence on post-development theory is the work of Michel Foucault. Following Foucault, post-development theory sees development as a discourse’ (Storey 2000: 40; similar statements can be found in Corbridge 1998: 138; Kiely 1999: 31; Nederveen Pieterse 2000: 176).

This is certainly not plain wrong: ‘development’ is indeed seen as a discourse in the sense of a historically situated mental and linguistic structure that has been shaped by certain interests and implicates certain relations of power. Therefore, the way we speak about ‘development’ and the Third World is attributed considerable significance in post-development (instead of dismissing it as superstructural phenomenon of lesser importance). However, a closer reading of post-development texts leads to the impression that post-development is in a similar position to the discourse analysis of Foucault as Marxism–Leninism was to the work of Marx. Contradictions to or deviations from the work of Foucault can be discerned in the following points:

1 Whereas Foucauldian archaeology – in opposition to the history of ideas – stresses the breaks, differences and discontinuities and claims that the unity of a discourse is constituted by its rules of formation (and not by common assumptions) (Foucault 1972), in post-development, discourse is portrayed as a monolithic structure (cf. Esteva 1992: 17; Sachs 1992b: 2ff.; Rahnema
The heterogeneity of 40 years of development theory and policy and especially the originality of alternative approaches (declaration of Cocoyoc, Dag-Hammarskjöld-Report and so on) is not adequately taken into account.

A central rhetorical device in post-development is the demasking of the development’s promise of universal prosperity as ‘deceitful mirage’ (Rahnema 1997b: x), or ‘malignant myth’ (Esteva 1985: 78; 1991: 76). This is achieved by pointing out the real, ‘true’ nature of development discourse (a Eurocentric construct and a political project for restructuring Third World societies according to the image or the needs of the West leading to spiritual and material impoverishment), sometimes even using rhetoric reminding of conspiracy theory: ‘the time has come to unveil the secret of development’ (Esteva 1992: 6). The post-development writers thus remain trapped within a traditional objectivist critique of ideology which Foucault explicitly rejected (Foucault 1980a), in particular because it uncritically claims to have found ‘truth’ without reflecting its power-stricken historical and social production and function.

Essentializations (especially of ‘development’) are also a frequent phenomenon in post-development literature. While on the one hand post-development writers have (as a result of the many redefinitions of development since the 1960s) pointed out the ‘amoeba-like’ character of the concept of development – its contours are blurred, it is hard to grasp and can be filled with almost any content – (Esteva 1985: 79; Sachs 1992b: 4), on the other hand they maintain it can be unambiguously determined (in a very negative way). When Esteva writes: ‘In saying “development” . . . most people are saying the opposite of what they want to convey’ (1992: 6), this has little to do with archaeological discourse analysis, but rather with linguistic structuralism, which links the concept with a static, invariable content, and a (hermeneutic or Marxist) theory of false consciousness, which assumes the people using the concept are ignorant of its real meaning.

In spite of his lucid analysis, Brigg’s (2002: 424f.) reproach that post-development texts were stuck within a sovereign, repressive concept of power is at best partly accurate: it is frequently pointed out that the idea of development owes its success to its ability to relate to the interests and desires of people in the Third World and to create new needs and perspectives (cf. Esteva 1992: 6, 11, 18; Rahnema 1997c; 1997b: ix; Sachs 1999: 5). Rahnema expresses this view claiming: ‘The “power” of development . . . lies in its internalization by the host’ (1997c: 119). However, the power of development discourse is merely conceived as disciplinary conditioning with little or no room for autonomous decisions of individual actors, a point also made by Nustad (2001: 485). A typical phrase is that the ‘victims of development’ ‘adopt as their own the heterogeneous definitions of reality imposed upon them by the developers’ (Esteva 1991: 75) – the subjects remain passive, and resistance to this power is perceived (it even constitutes the starting point of post-development), but cannot be theoretically
explained. This weakness is especially visible in Rahnema’s portrayal of the development idea as a virus infecting and transforming traditional social structures or his description of the modern system of education as a mechanism for brainwashing (Rahnema 1997c: 116ff.). While Nustad is correct in pointing out this weakness and in tracing it back to Foucault’s conception of power in the mid-1970s (2001: 485; cf. Foucault 1979), he overlooks that in later works (on governmentality and the relationship between power and freedom, see Foucault 1982, 1991), Foucault has overcome this narrow perspective.

The ferocity of these and other comparisons (e.g. modernization as Gulag and Holocaust, Esteva and Prakash 1998: 2) draws attention to another point: some of the post-development texts often engage in demonizing industrial modernity and simultaneously in romanticizing pre-modern subsistence communities. These are not subjected to similarly critical scrutiny, but are presented as ‘alternatives to development’ and seemingly conceived as spaces untainted by domination and conflict. In stark contrast to this, Foucault insisted that power does not simply emanate from the state or international institutions, but it is to be found in everyday, local and self-evident relations and discourses, i.e. it is ubiquitous (Foucault 1980a; 1980b). Therefore, the assumption of power-free spaces must remain an illusion. Even worse, the assumption might help to conceal relations of power, for example, in ‘traditional communities’. Apart from that, Foucault explicitly rejected suggesting normative models and concentrated on the analysis of the power relations implicit in such models. As a witness for the superiority of subsistence communities, he is definitely unsuitable.

Consequently, the frequent assumption that post-development amounts to a Foucauldian critique of development has to be rethought. The theoretical merits are for the most part undeserved. However, the criticism on the improper and somewhat vulgar use of Foucauldian concepts has to be restricted to the authors quoted (Rahnema, Esteva and in part also Sachs). Other authors like Escobar, DuBois and Ferguson base their work on a more thorough reading of Foucault (although Escobar’s anti-imperialism frequently prevails over nuanced analyses). Still other writers (e.g. Margin) never claimed to use Foucauldian concepts. At this point, we get the impression that ‘referring to the post-development idea in the singular runs the risk of caricaturing a number of different writers’ ideas’ (Kiely 1999: 49). Unfortunately, this is exactly what the standard criticisms do.

The standard criticisms

Among the diverse commentators on the post-development authors (Knippenberg and Schuurman 1994; Corbridge 1998; Nederveen Pieterse 1998; 2000; Eriksson Baaz 1999; Kiely 1999; Nanda 1999; Schuurman 2000; Storey 2000, to name but a few), the vast majority agree that their ideas have to be dismissed –
Nustad (2001) and Brigg (2002) are exceptions to this rule. In most cases, post-development texts have been interpreted as a cynical legitimation of neoliberalism or a futile romanticization of pre-modern times; more sympathetic critics have at least acknowledged its potential to criticize the shortcomings of development theory and policy, but argue that post-development offers no constructive alternatives.

According to the first interpretation, there is at the least an affinity between post-development and neo-liberalism (Nederveen Pieterse 2000: 184): the proponents of neo-liberal capitalism would welcome the post-development perspective because it has said goodbye to the idea of universalizing Western standards of living, because it rejects the idea of development aid, because it relies not on a strong state, but on ‘civil society’ and the self-help powers of the people, and because it questions the materialist view on prosperity and by implication the necessity of redistributive policies. Post-development would thus allow the unhindered expansion of global capitalism while providing some cheap remedy for those regions irrelevant to the world market for lack of competitiveness, resources and skilled labour. However, what is overlooked by the critics is that the creation of alternatives to the world market could on the other hand also function as a threat to neo-liberal capitalism and lead to the withdrawal of urgently needed labour and goods from the world system. The alleged lack of alternatives to global capitalism after 1989 is the basic premise on which neo-liberal policies are accepted even by those clearly impoverished or disadvantaged by them and thus constitutes a central ideological foundation of neo-liberalism.

Other widespread points of criticism which are voiced by nearly all critics are the following:

1. In post-development, there is an uncritical stance towards local communities and cultural tradition. The post-development texts seem to offer ‘the last refuge of the noble savage’ (Kiely 1999), hopelessly idealizing life in pre-modern communities and projecting romantic images onto the grim reality in these ‘alternatives to development’.

2. On the other hand, the complete rejection of modernity and development ignores the numerous positive aspects undoubtedly closely related to them: starting from the rights of the individual and ranging towards the achievements of modern medicine in lowering child mortality (Corbridge 1998: 145).

3. Post-development authors, in their celebration of cultural difference and their rejection of universalism, conceal or willingly accept the oppression legitimized by these notions (Knippenberg and Schuurman 1994: 95). Female genital mutilation is only one among countless examples.

4. After all, post-development is only another blueprint for a better society to be established which is based on reversed, anti-Western values and practices, but still tells the people how they ought to live and is thus as authoritarian as the concept of development itself (Cowen and Shenton 1996: 457ff., 470).
Almost the opposite reproach is articulated by other commentators: although post-development may be useful in attacking mainstream development theory and policy, there is merely ‘critique but no construction’ (Nederveen Pieterse 1998: 366; 2000: 188), the post-development proponents refuse to lay out alternative ways of social change. In restricting themselves to promoting whatever alternatives are favoured by the social movements and grassroots organizations in question, they fall back to some kind of ‘Pontius-Pilate politics’ (Kiely 1999: 45f.).

Summing up the first four points of the critics, one gets the impression that post-development neatly fits Hettne’s description of neo-populism: ‘Traditional populism was essentially a defence of the territorial community against the functional system created by modern economic growth, both in its original capitalist form and in its derivative socialist form. Neo-populism, similarly, is an attempt to re-create community as an offensive against the industrial system . . . It negates mainstream development and in this negation lies the essence of the Utopian vision, historically expressed by the counterpoint tradition in Western politics, as well as in resistance against the imposition of the non-indigenous nation state on the peoples of the non-European world. . . . Neo-populism resembles classical populism in several respects: the urge for community, the stress on primary production, the distaste of industrial civilization. However, there are significant new elements of relevance in this context: an environmental consciousness, encompassing the global ecological system, and a strong commitment to a just world order’ (Hettne 1995: 117f.). However, a closer look reveals that this description is only partially accurate.

Evaluating the criticisms

All of the criticisms mentioned are not entirely unfounded, neither is the charge of neo-populism. Nevertheless, it is possible to find examples indicating that not all of the post-development writers are justifiably attacked – and in some texts even certain examples supporting the criticisms and others contradicting them. (For a detailed discussion of post-development and its critics, see Ziai 2004.)

Uncritical stance towards local communities and cultural tradition

Although it is true that many post-development authors are overly enthusiastic about their ‘local alternatives and traditions’, some maintain a more nuanced view: In discussing the communities and movements in question, Escobar explicitly rejects the assumption of pure vernacular societies free of domination (1995: 188, 219) and emphasizes the necessity to avoid both extremes: ‘to embrace them uncritically as alternatives; or to dismiss them as romantic expositions . . .’ (p. 170). Nandy and Marglin also point to the fact that in many cultural traditions, especially women and children are subjected to humiliating and violent practices (Marglin 1990: 12; Nandy 1992: 63). (This, however, should
not be a pretext for dismissing the whole culture and forgetting about the victims in modern societies.) But even writers who certainly do romanticize local communities and tradition on occasion admit that deprivation, domination and violence exist in these ‘vernacular societies’ (Rahnema 1997c: 114) and that the return to a ‘state of nature’ is ‘neither desirable nor feasible’ (Rahnema 1997d: 381).

Complete rejection of modernity and development

The fundamental critique of ‘development’ does not necessarily lead to the assumption that all evils in the world are merely results of development (Rist 1997: 3). The possibility, or even the necessity and desirability of scavenging positive elements of modernity from the ruins of development, is stressed by some post-development authors. Rist characterizes the post-development essentials as follows: ‘The idea, then, in spite of “development”, is to organize and invent new ways of life – between modernization, with its sufferings but also some advantages, and a tradition from which people may derive inspiration while knowing it can never be revived’ (Rist 1997: 244). Marglin agrees that the ‘decolonization of the mind will require a critical re-evaluation of both Western and non-Western cultures, and the encounter between them’ (Marglin 1990: 26; see also Nandy 1988: 11). Escobar points to the processes of cultural hybridization and mentions that ‘many “traditional cultures” survive through their transformative engagement with modernity’ (1995: 218). On the other hand, Escobar also writes that the ‘debt crisis, the Sahelian famine, increasing poverty, malnutrition and violence are only the most pathetic signs of the failure of forty years of development’ (1995: 4) – obviously not acknowledging that these phenomena could be traced back not to development but its lack, and that famine, poverty and violence are incidents not alien to pre-modern societies.2

Cultural difference as potential instrument of oppression, rejection of universalism

Whereas the starting point of post-development seems to be the insistence on cultural difference in the face of the alleged superiority of the Western model of development, in some texts there are numerous hints that the implied concept of culture is not an ontological, but a constructivist one.3 In Escobar’s warning that ‘one must be careful not to naturalize “traditional” worlds, that is, valorize as innocent and “natural” an order produced by history…. The “local” … is neither unconnected nor unconstructed …’ (Escobar 1995: 170), he indicates that ‘local, traditional culture’ is a construct derived from the actual practices of the people – and not a rigid set of customs which can be defined by some autocratic ruler. Escobar emphasizes the importance of cultural difference not as a static, but as a ‘transformed and transformative force’ (p. 226). This is in line with Marglin’s postulate: ‘Tradition is actively constructed and dynamic – except when it is artificially frozen in an archaic pattern’ (1990: 15).
The significance of a constructivist in opposition to a static concept becomes clear when we examine the potential for oppression. If culture consists of a given set of rules and practices, deviant behaviour can be punished in the name of cultural tradition, and those who decide about the interpretation of cultural norms are in a dangerous position of power. In this context, a position of cultural relativism easily legitimates oppression. If, however, culture is defined in a constructivist manner as the (changing) practices of a certain group of people, deviant behaviour is a signal that apparently some practices are not any longer consensual, and the attempt by those in power to punish this behaviour appears illegitimate from a position of cultural relativism, because those who are punished belong to the same culture and can be assumed to have a different opinion on the interpretation of cultural tradition. Thus, the constructivist concept of culture takes the danger out of cultural relativism. Nevertheless, this rejection of universalism is implicitly based on a universal right to self-determination: people living together should be able to decide on the norms of their community without outsiders intervening in the name of universal principles.

Therefore, Schuurman’s fierce reaction on the questioning of the universality of the Western model of society in post-development is inappropriate. This questioning does not arise from ‘indifference’ towards and ‘contempt for the poor in the South’ (Knippenberg and Schuurman 1994: 96; cf. Schuurman 2000: 15), but from respect towards culturally different world views, in which Western consumer society is not seen as the ultimate goal, and from the insight that Western standards of consumption are highly oligarchic and cannot be generalized.

**Another blueprint for a better society**

At least to some of the post-development authors, it is clear that if the post-development principles are to be taken seriously, if no outside expert can legitimately define the goal according to which social change is evaluated within a certain culture, then the people have of course also the right to pursue Western-style development. Banuri admits: ‘This may entail a prior emphasis on such conventional objectives as economic growth, consumption, industrialization, equity, or basic needs. On other occasions, other goals may assume greater importance, such as political participation, social harmony, ecological conservation, or the maintenance of social and cultural values. It is not for the outside expert to insist that the goals which he or she thinks worth pursuing are the ones which should be pursued by all societies’ (Banuri 1990: 96). Marglin also stresses this point: ‘Whatever one’s reservations may be about the necessity or utility of radios, televisions, motorcycles, and the like, the division between the necessary, the merely useful, and the wastefully luxurious is not ours to make; it is not our place to argue the virtues of simplicity and abstinence to those for whom material abundance is a distant dream’ (Marglin 1990: 27). Esteva illustrates the paradoxical position that some writers explicitly reject prescribing universal models while promoting one particular model as a cure to all ills. On the one hand, all attempts to educate others or formulate blueprints and universal
solutions are rejected (Esteva 1987: 141; Esteva and Prakash 1998: 8, 36), on the other hand, the complete rejection of modernization, the notion of universal human rights and the individual notion of the self, nation states, modern technologies and the global economy does seem to lead to a universal blueprint of local subsistence communities.

**Critique but no construction**

Consequently, the opposite criticism, that post-development does not present any blueprints for social change, is incorrect in some cases but cannot be denied in others. Post-development often does present alternatives to development in the form of communal solidarity, direct democracy, informal economy, traditional knowledge and so on. Admittedly, little thought is given to how development institutions could contribute to the flourishing of these alternatives, but to expect that from post-development would certainly go too far. The failure to present alternatives in other cases appears less as a flaw but as a merit in the view taken here. If the authoritarian and ethnocentric elements of development theory and policy are to be avoided, it is impossible to define ‘development’ in normative terms (as the state of a ‘good society’ or the process approaching this state). This definition can legitimately only be reached by the people concerned through a democratic discussion leading ideally to a consensus.

**Sceptical and neo-populist post-development**

Obviously, it seems easy to disprove the majority of the criticisms by citing examples from some writers. Nevertheless, this does not mean that these criticisms were utterly unjustified; rather, it seems that under the heading post-development, certain significant differences exist between – and within – the texts. A systematic examination of these differences yields that post-development is divided on four specific points which correlate to the first four points of criticism:

1. While sometimes post-development engages in unhelpful romanticization of traditional culture and local communities, on other occasions it is more sceptical and does not promote them uncritically.
2. While sometimes development and modernity are rejected *in toto*, on other occasions post-development finds some positive elements that can be of use in the age after the development era.
3. While some texts see cultures as static and rigid, others promote a constructivist perspective which sees culture as unstable and changing practice.
4. While sometimes the return to subsistence agriculture is preached, sometimes post-development writers explicitly avoid doing so and reject the idea of formulating blueprints for a better society.

The important point is that these differences do not occur according to some random pattern: it appears that there are two conflicting discourses to be found
within post-development. On the one hand, a discourse which is romanticizing traditional culture, portraying cultures as static and rigid, is based on a complete rejection of modernity and promotes the return to subsistence agriculture. On the other hand, a discourse which is more sceptical in evaluating local communities and cultural tradition, more cautious in criticizing modernity, employs a constructivist perspective on culture and avoids sketching models of future transformations of society. These discourses can be termed the neo-populist and the sceptical variant of post-development. In almost all post-development texts, one can find these conflicting discourses. 6

This division matches Hoogvelt’s separation between post- and anti-development: ‘Postdevelopment theory and practice is different from anti-development sentiments in that it does not deny globalization or modernity, but wants to find some ways of living with it and imaginatively transcending it’ (Hoogvelt 2001: 172). The critics of post-development have so far focused mainly on the neo-populist variant and have more or less ignored the sceptical elements within the school.

The sceptical post-development discourse, the view put forward in this chapter, is based on an implied meta-theory which can be loosely described as postmodern. This assertion is based on the definitions (or rather descriptions) of postmodernism by Rosenau8 and Lyotard9 and in addition on the following points: The impossibility of ascribing any characteristics to ‘development’, ‘modernity’, ‘traditional culture’ and so on (which is, for example, found in the characterization of development as an ‘amoeba word’) and the postulate to regard culture as something which is actively constructed reveals a constructivist and anti-essentialist perspective. The unwillingness to define ‘development’ in a normative sense is typical of the postmodern rejection of the principle of representation, the principle of ‘speaking for others’. The consequence of adopting this perspective is, however, rarely reflected upon in post-development literature: it becomes impossible to reject ‘development’, because the signifier cannot be fixed to a specific signified. Focusing on one of the prominent post-development writers, Crush correctly remarks: ‘Thus, in the very call for banishment, Sachs implicitly suggests that it is possible to arrive at an unequivocal definition [of development]’ (1995: 3). Nederveen Pieterse extends this critique to dismiss the entire post-development perspective: ‘apparently this kind of essentializing of “development” is necessary in order to arrive at the radical repudiation of development, and without this anti-development pathos, the post-development perspective loses its foundation’ (2000: 183). The first part of the statement can be readily agreed with, but it is possible to find a post-development perspective in the sceptical texts which is based on the radical repudiation of the concept of development without necessarily condemning anything that has been given the name of development. The aim of this perspective is to ‘transfer the power of defining the problems and goals of a society from the hands of outside experts to the members of the society itself’ (Banuri 1990: 96) – first of all by rejecting the dominant view of certain societies being ‘underdeveloped’ and in need of ‘development’. Here, the consequence of the line of
argument becomes visible: if a critique of the eurocentrism and cultural imperi-
alisim of ‘development’ is combined with a constructivist and anti-essentialist
perspective, it will inevitably lead to the radical democratic position prominent
in the sceptical post-development discourse.\textsuperscript{10} If the cultural critique is linked
with a static conception of culture, it will lead to a conservative or reactionary
anti-modern position.

Post-development as a programme of reactionary populism

The political implications of a merely anti-modern position become especially
clear in the works of Alvares and Rahnema. Rahnema describes the idea of
development as a virus undermining the people’s immune system – their tradi-
tional culture (Rahnema 1997b). Thus, the culture of the people is conceived as
static, and its change as a result of contact with Western modernity is seen as a
strange illness, a deviation from its healthy original state. In other words, culture
is something independent of people’s actual preferences and practices. This has
the dangerous implication that certain people (who claim superior knowledge
about their culture) may try to stop the ‘disease’ of cultural change with violent
means – beating up women wearing make-up, for example. From an emancip-
atory point of view, however, there is nothing regrettable about the ‘decay of
cultural diversity’ bemoaned by Rahnema or Esteva; opposition is appropriate
only if people are forced to adopt or give up certain cultural practices. The neo-
populist view, however, maintains that the people’s opinion should not be ulti-
mately relevant, because the poor have ‘internalized the developers’ perception
of what they need’ (Rahnema 1997d: 389). Therefore, certain leaders should be
entrusted with ‘the good of community’, ‘the wisest, most virtuous and hence
the most “authoritative” and experienced persons of the groups – those who
commanded everyone’s respect and deference’ (1997d: 388). Thus, the radical
demand for autonomy ends in dismissing (not only liberal, but even direct)
democracy and celebrating the model of enlightened authoritarianism.\textsuperscript{11}

Similarly, Alvares’ critique of the Western model development seems at least
partly based on the reproach that it is an ‘alien model of development’ (Alvares
1992: 34), that is, one that comes from a different culture and therefore is incompat-
ible with people’s traditional culture, or rather with a static, reified conception
of their culture. The eagerness to defend this conception leads to the statement:
‘Our continuing xenophilia compels us to export our best genetic resources at zero
cost to economies abroad while simultaneously importing less than the very best
and often, mostly questionable and inappropriate sources of productivity from
abroad’ (p. 54). This sort of identity thinking regards peoples as unrelated entities
sharing genetic resources and being in competition with one another, it amounts to
nationalism with racist undertones. After this statement, it can hardly surprise that
Ayatollah Khomeini is portrayed as a liberator of Islamic civilization from
Western culture (p. 149). Especially from the point of view of the women’s move-
ment, whose considerable achievements in Iran have been crushed by the Islamic
revolution, this reference can be seen as a definite negation of progressive values.
As Meera Nanda (1999) illustrates with reference to India, the political dangers of post-development are very real. Because it emphasizes the problem of cultural authenticity and largely ignores domination within cultures, Nanda claims, post-development ‘has come to serve as a mobilizing ideology for the relatively well-to-do rural beneficiaries of development . . . without intending to, the postmodern-influenced critiques of modern science and modernization are laying the foundations of a neo-populist movement that seeks to subordinate modernization to the anti-modernist and patriarchal values of the traditional elites’ (Nanda 1999: 6).

Post-development as a project of radical democracy

On the other hand, sceptical post-development can be interpreted not as a neo-populist nor as a neo-liberal project, but as a project of radical democracy in the sense of Lummis and also Laclau and Mouffe. The criticisms and demands of sceptical post-development are quite in line with those of radical democracy:

1. According to Laclau and Mouffe, many social antagonisms cannot be reconceptualized in terms of Marxist categories (2001: ix). The Marxist critique of capitalism is seen as important, but other relations of oppression and exploitation (e.g. in the fields of gender relations, culture and knowledge or ecology) are as significant. Post-development texts wholeheartedly agree, but usually focus on the fields of culture, knowledge and the relationship to nature – gender and the relations of oppression related with it are something of a blind spot in post-development. Escobar, for example, acknowledges the importance of global processes of capital accumulation, but stresses other relations of power in the Third World – ‘new forms of domination and subjection (concerning areas such as education, demography, housing, psychiatry, cultural values, ethnic oppression, etc.)’ (Escobar 1985: 393) – which cannot be reduced to their function in this process (p. 389).

2. The existing democratic structures are seen as inadequate, as curtailing the right of self-determination and as not democratic enough. Laclau and Mouffe describe their project of ‘radical and plural democracy’ as the ‘extension of the democratic struggles for equality and liberty to a wide range of social relations’ (p. xv). Likewise, post-development tries to extend struggles for self-determination in the South to seemingly benign efforts aiming at ‘development’ and in general to various structures of modern societies (state, market and science). The political system of representative democracy is seen as primarily serving the interests of an elite (‘In modern democracies, a small minority decides for the people.... A minimal minority promulgates the laws and makes the important decisions. Alternance in power between competing parties or “democratic counterweights” does not modify that fact’ – Esteva and Prakash 1998: 156), but generally accepted as an ‘umbrella’ under which the odds of social movements’ struggles for autonomy are far better than under a dictatorship (Esteva 1987: 139; Esteva and Prakash 1998: 153).
Consequently, existing power structures have to be radically decentralized and power has to remain at the local level. In the words of Lummis, ‘[d]emocracy is a critique of centralized power of every sort’ (1996: 25). This implies a critique of the system of political representation but is not limited to polity and politics: epistemological and economic structures also come into the picture (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 178, 184; Lummis 1996: 18, 25, 135). Banuri agrees: ‘a vision of the future in the Third World must explicitly be one of a decentralized polity, economy, and society. In addition to the obvious forms of political and economic decentralization, there is also a need for what may be termed epistemological decentralization’ (Banuri 1990: 97ff.; on political and economic decentralization see also Esteva 1991: 78; Esteva and Prakash 1998: 37ff., 103, 152ff.). This decentralization of epistemological structures includes a challenge to the notion of universal, ‘objective’ knowledge (p. 97; Apffel-Marglin 1996: 1). Therefore, not only the principle of political representation is challenged by the radical democratic/post-development critique, but also the principle of epistemological representation: ‘The ability to represent the world conceptually and symbolically enables the disengaged observer to manipulate that world . . . ’ (Apffel-Marglin 1996: 12).

In opposition to most variants of Marxism, any philosophy of history and any essentialism leading to objective interests, universal blueprints and thus to new, knowledge-related structures of domination are to be rejected. Laclau and Mouffe correctly observe that the interweaving of science and politics must lead to an authoritarian politics (2001: 60; see also 21f., 81): ‘there is no radical and plural democracy without renouncing the discourse of the universal and its implicit assumption of a privileged point of access to “the truth”’ (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 191). The critiques of political and epistemological representation converge in the rejection of universal models of society and universal descriptions of reality. The imposition of such models inevitably includes an antidemocratic element, because it neglects the pluralistic conceptions of a good society or the different perceptions of reality (Lummis 1996: 76; Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 183). Accordingly, Esteva criticizes not only the Marxist category of class – because ‘social classes never existed as such’ and society ‘cannot be reduced to the economic sphere’ (Esteva 1987: 146, emphasis in the original) – and its conception of history – because this privileged knowledge amounts to ‘blind faith’ (ibid.), but consequently seeks to ‘give up the idea of educating others’ and ‘combat all proposals for a common discourse’ (p. 141). This rejection of universal models (which has to be based on a universal right to self-determination, Lummis 1996: 138) is just what has led the critics of post-development to the accusation of ‘Pontius-Pilate politics’. So Rist’s statement that ‘[r]espect for cultural diversity . . . prohibits generalizations. There are numerous ways of living a “good life”, and it is up to each society to invent its own’ (Rist 1997: 241) not only articulates a central tenet of sceptical post-development, but also sums up a main argument of the radical democratic perspective.
Therefore, sceptical post-development could be seen as a manifesto of radical democracy in the field of ‘development’ policy and theory. Its main achievement can be described in the terminology of Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 193) as follows: it extends social conflictuality to the area of development policy and development aid through reformulating relations of subordination implicit in development discourse as relations of oppression. In contrast to earlier theories of imperialism and dependency, the critique is not restricted to economic issues but includes the field of culture and knowledge and questions the whole perception of some countries being ‘developed’ and others less so. If progress is defined, as in one of the sceptical post-development texts, as ‘growing awareness of oppression’ (Banuri 1990: 95f.), this achievement is not an insignificant one.

Conclusion

In treating post-development as a coherent school of theory, many critics have failed to differentiate between the heterogeneous points of view subsumed under this name and accordingly to grasp their political implications. Notwithstanding the sharp critique of the neo-populist variant of post-development, it has to be said that the trenchant critique of the Eurocentrism and the power relations implicit in mainstream (and at least partly also in alternative) development discourse remains an important achievement. ‘After post-development’ (Nederveen Pieterse 2000), development theory is certainly not the same as before. As Nustad (2001) and Brigg (2002) have shown, post-development can be a stimulating basis for criticizing development theory and practice and thinking about alternatives. But before celebrating the post-development critique, its ambivalence has to be taken into account. It is of crucial importance to be aware of the dangers of reactionary populism on the one hand while not overlooking the emancipatory potential of the project of radical democracy in post-development on the other.

Notes

1 While Nustad defends post-development theory by pointing out that the ‘lack of instrumentality is not a weighty argument against the analysis itself’ (2001: 479), he shares the assumption that it does not present alternatives.
2 Another point is that Escobar here uses the same indicators of development and underdevelopment which he later convincingly describes as derived from a Eurocentric and technocratic development discourse: ‘Development proceeded by creating “abnormalities” (the “illiterate”, “underdeveloped”, “malnourished”) which it would later treat and reform’ (1995: 41).
3 Given the standard post-development criticism that the concept of development is a construct specific to Western culture (e.g. Rist 1991: 11), anything else would be a serious methodological inconsistency.
4 Of course, the concept of cultural relativism still implies that one has to accept practices in another culture that are indeed based on a consensus by those affected.
5 Equally inappropriate is Schuurman’s remark that ‘Hunger and high morbidity and
mortality rates do not disappear merely by changing the perspective of the people involved’ (2000: 15). None of the post-development writers has ever attributed magic powers to discourse, nor have they denied the existence of misery in the Third World (e.g. Escobar 1985: 389; 1995: 52). What they are stressing is the need for a new conceptualization of misery that is less Eurocentric, technocratic and depoliticizing than development discourse. In this vein, ‘changing the order of the discourse is a political question’ (1995: 216); it is part of the struggles of social movements in the Third World against a politics and a world view that defines them as culturally inferior.

Although, for example, the sceptical discourse is dominant in the work of Nandy and Marglin, relatively strong in that of Escobar, relatively weak in that of Rahnema and hardly discernible in that of Alvares.

Likewise, Rist also differentiates between post-development and anti-development (1997: 248).

‘Postmodernism challenges global, all-encompassing world-views, be they political, religious, or social. . . . [It] dismisses them all as logocentric, transcendental totalizing meta-narratives that anticipate all questions and provide predetermined answers. The postmodernist goal is not to formulate an alternative set of assumptions but to register the impossibility of establishing any such underpinning for knowledge. . . . In the fields of administration and public planning, suspicion of rational organization encourages a retreat from central planning, a withdrawal of confidence from specialists and experts. In political science it questions the authority of hierarchical, bureaucratic decision-making structures that function in carefully defined, non-overlapping fields. In anthropology it inspires the protection of local, primitive cultures and opposition to “well-intentioned” First World planned intervention that seeks to modify (reorganize) these cultures. In philosophy this translates into a renewed respect for the subjective and increased suspicion of reason and objectivity. Postmodernists in all disciplines reject conventional, academic styles of discourse; they prefer audacious and provocative styles of delivery . . .’ (Rosenau 1992: 6ff.).

Post-development is evidently based on incredulity towards the modern meta-narrative of development.

One has to bear in mind that the body of texts referred to as sceptical in this chapter would not be classified as sceptical in the terminology of Rosenau (1992: 14ff.), but rather as ‘affirmative’. This means that these texts cling to the possibility of meaningful political action despite their insights in the relativity of norms and knowledge. While the sceptical post-development texts can be described as ‘Activist affirmative’, the neo-populist texts match Rosenau’s description of ‘New-age-affirmative’ and ‘Third-world-affirmative’. ‘Activist affirmative’ denotes perspectives emphasizing autonomous organization, direct democracy, voluntary association and pluralism (p. 144ff.), while the ‘New-age-affirmative’ view stresses the spiritual, emotional and irrational aspects of human beings (p. 148ff.) and the ‘Third-world-affirmative’ standpoint links the rejection of modernity with a return to the purity of traditional culture and antidemocratic decision-making (p. 152ff.).

However, because the neo-populist post-development texts often employ typically modern arguments (universal models, false consciousness and so on), it seems inappropriate to equate post-development with postmodernism, as some of the critics do.

From the perspective of cultural relativism, it is of course inappropriate to rule out such models as an outsider. If all (all – this is the condition posed by the constructivist view on culture) people in a community favour an authoritarian political system, to prescribe liberal democracy would amount to the same cultural imperialism that has long been practised by development experts or vanguard parties.

Rare exceptions to this rule can be found in Nandy (1992: xvi, 141) and in Escobar (1995: 43, 171ff.).

Apffel-Marglin reminds us that the whole concept of ‘development’ is ‘based on the
premise that the world is objectively knowable, and that the knowledge so obtained can be absolutely generalized’ (Apffel-Marglin 1996: 1). Only because of this premise can the knowledge of experts be exported worldwide and applied in varying contexts.

References


Part IV

Practice
What, then, should we do?
Insights and experiences of a Senegalese NGO

Sally Matthews

If the ‘towering lighthouse’ of development was not already in ruins when Sachs (1992) called for its dismantlement, the sustained attacks it has undergone since have certainly brought some of its edifices tumbling down. But now, the dust is settling, and in the ‘silence after the act of deconstruction’ (Blaikie 2000: 1039) an insistent whisper is becoming increasingly audible: ‘what then should be done?’ If, as post-development theorists suggest, development was not the medicine but rather the disease, what is the appropriate response to the problems development initiatives purport to address – problems such as poverty, inequity and injustice?

More specifically, if, as argued by post-development theorists, the ‘expertise’ of development workers has most often been inappropriate and their desire to ‘help the poor’ coloured by arrogance and misguided paternalism, what role, if any, remains for those of us who seek to be engaged in struggles against poverty and oppression, but who are not ourselves poor or oppressed?

Some post-development theory, with its calls to ‘Laissez donc les pauvres tranquilles!’ ['Leave the poor alone!'] seems to suggest that we ought to withdraw and allow the poor to get on with improving their own lives. Not surprisingly, this aspect of post-development theory has met with hostility, with critics accusing post-development theorists of ‘Pontius Pilate politics’ and of shirking their moral responsibilities (see Corbridge 1994, 1998a, 1998b; Simon 1997; Kiely 1999). Should we, the relatively privileged, be involved at all in struggles against poverty and injustice and, if so, how?

In this chapter, I respond to this question arguing that the relatively privileged do indeed have a role to play in the struggles of the poor and oppressed. I define one possible role we may play, drawing on the insights and experiences of the Senegalese-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) Enda Graf Sahel (henceforth EGS). My discussion is aimed at all those who wonder what role the relatively privileged ought to play in struggles against poverty and injustice, but is of special relevance to those concerned about what role NGOs in particular should play.

Before continuing, two brief clarifications need to be made. First, I should acknowledge that the distinction I make between the ‘poor and oppressed’ and the ‘relatively privileged’ is a fairly vague one. By the relatively privileged,
I refer to the ‘global consumer class’ (Sachs 2002) or the ‘social minorities’ (Esteva and Prakash 1996), while by ‘the poor’, I refer to those who struggle to meet their everyday material needs. I define the oppressed according to Young’s (1990) very broad definition of oppression which encompasses exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. The distinction is meant to be a little more nuanced than that between the ‘First World’ and ‘Third World’, with ‘Third World’ elites, particularly political and economic elites, certainly counted among the ‘relatively privileged’.

Second, I should clarify my position regarding post-development theory. In this chapter, I do not seek to defend or condemn post-development theory, but rather to respond to the debate between post-development theorists and their critics. I am fairly sympathetic to post-development theory, but my aim here is to build on the important insights of both advocates and critics of post-development theory, in particular upon the ideas of those thinkers who have tried to move beyond a critique of past development theory and practice.

The rest of the chapter is broken down into five sections. The first introduces EGS and the second discusses how the support of popular initiatives can be a fruitful way for relatively privileged people to be engaged in struggles against poverty and oppression. The third section describes the ways in which EGS tries to support popular initiatives with the fourth looking particularly at how network structures can facilitate such support. Finally, I conclude by looking at some of the challenges related to the support of popular initiatives and to EGS’s work in particular.

**Enda Graf Sahel**

EGS was initiated in the mid-1970s by the NGO Enda Tiers Monde (Enda TM), which started EGS as a project in which some of Enda TM’s ideas about development could be applied. The organisation has grown very large and complex and is now only loosely affiliated with its founder Enda TM. EGS at first confined its activities to the suburb of Grand Yoff in Dakar which was in the 1970s one of the most informal and marginal of Dakar’s suburbs. Today, its coordinating office remains in Grand Yoff, but it works throughout Senegal and also has branches in several other African countries, as well as a Belgian branch.

EGS is of relevance to debates about post-development because some of its literature reveals concerns about development similar to those of post-development thinkers (see especially Ndione et al. 1994 and EGS 2001). These concerns relate to a period of crisis EGS underwent in the late 1980s when, following the departure of several staff members, remaining staff realised that an honest assessment of the organisation’s work up to then pointed to the inescapable conclusion that their activities had failed to achieve stated goals and that the organisation’s role in the Grand Yoff community was far less important than they would have liked. During this time of crisis, Emmanuel Ndione, who had for some time been joint coordinator of EGS, became the sole coordinator and encouraged a period of reflection on the organisation’s first decade or so of
activity. Up to then, the organisation had followed a fairly conventional development approach: EGS staff diagnosed ‘problems’ within the Grand Yoff community, and then set up projects to address these problems, all the while trying to avoid becoming entangled in the community’s complex socioeconomic networks. On reflection, the EGS staff acknowledged that this approach had failed. Dejectedly, they were forced to admit that EGS was little more than a ‘transfer point in the development aid system’ (De Leener et al. 1999: 7) and that the Grand Yoff community could have done pretty well without the organisation, its personnel and activities.

EGS staff members were thus confronted with a choice: either cease their work or radically alter their approach. Opting for the latter, they slowly began to change their way of thinking, both about the people of Grand Yoff and the ways in which EGS engaged with the community. This process of change is described in detail in some of their publications (see especially De Leener et al. 1999 and EGS 2001); I will only summarise it very briefly here. Perhaps, the most significant change was an attempt by EGS staff members to stop regarding themselves as separate from the Grand Yoff community and to integrate themselves into the community’s networks, and, in so doing, to challenge distinctions such as those between researcher and research ‘object’ and between ‘development agent’ and ‘target groups’.

The EGS staff members also began shifting focus away from initiating projects and towards ‘accompanying popular dynamics’ (EGS 2001: 26), seeking to build upon the community’s ways of addressing their problems rather than presenting themselves as ‘saviours’ of the community, especially its poor. EGS later began to decentralise its own functions in an attempt to allow various sub-units in what had become a rapidly expanding organisation to respond to their particular contexts. Today, EGS describes itself as a ‘network of actors in movement’ rather than an organisation.5 The boundaries of this network are notoriously imprecise; many people are involved in EGS initiatives without being employed by EGS, while EGS itself increasingly plays the role of intermediary between various complex community networks.

Before continuing, I should make clear that while I will be using EGS here to illustrate what could be called post-development practice, I do not mean to imply that EGS affiliates itself directly with post-development theory. While some staff members are familiar with, and fairly sympathetic to, the post-development position, the organisation as a whole does not explicitly draw on post-development thinking – indeed, most staff members know nothing of post-development theory and those who do, such as Ndione, express some reservations about the arguments made by post-development thinkers.

Supporting popular initiatives

If the diverse and sometimes poorly expressed insights provided by post-development theory are to be harnessed to pull us out of ‘the impasse in development’ and towards new ways of addressing old problems, then some kind of
‘post-development practice’ has to be identified. By ‘post-development practice’, I mean nothing more than practices responding to many of the problems traditionally highlighted in development studies – poverty, inequity, oppression and the like – in a way that takes the arguments made in post-development theory into account. One of the least problematic paths seems to lie in supporting popular initiatives, or in EGS’s words ‘accompanying popular dynamics’ (EGS 2001: 26). This approach is compatible with two key features of the post-development literature: its concern with sensitivity to difference and its unwillingness to accept without question the authority of the ‘expert’. Towards the end of his controversial critique of development, Escobar (1995: 222f.) tries to address ‘the question of alternatives’; his suggestion is that we begin by ‘look[ing] for alternative practices in the resistance grassroots groups present to dominant interventions’. Writing almost a decade later, he says that social movements, particularly those that are based locally but are also part of broader trans-local networks ‘represent the best hope for reworking imperial globality and global coloniality in ways that make imagining after the Third World, and beyond modernity, a viable project’ (Escobar 2004a: 207). For Escobar, and many other post-development theorists (see for example Latouche 1991 and Esteva and Prakash 1996), ways forward are thus to be found in the already existing practices of many groups and movements which exist outside or on the margins of the ‘developed’ world.

Optimism about the local and about social movements is not unique to post-development theory. These movements are receiving a fair amount of attention in broader contemporary social analysis. One example is the interest, both optimistic and more sceptical, in the World Social Forum (WSF), which brings together NGOs and social movements from all over the world. Disillusionment with those groups and institutions that were, according to traditional leftist theory, supposed to bring progressive change (trade unions, national liberation movements, the working class, labour parties and ultimately also the state) has encouraged more interest in locally based movements and NGOs, as well as in the emerging frameworks for cooperation between such initiatives, movements and NGOs. Those who, like post-development thinkers, are sceptical about the abilities of ‘experts’ and the effectiveness of global agreements and institutions aimed at advancing development, are looking towards smaller, grassroots movements and also, relatedly, local practice and local knowledge; the hope is that these may open up new ways of responding to poverty and injustice. If these smaller movements hold more promise than mainstream development initiatives, then privileged actors who would like to be involved in struggles against poverty and oppression ought to seek ways in which they may support such movements.

Another reason for supporting local movements and initiatives, rather than introducing initiatives from outside poor communities, relates simply to the ineffectiveness of so many outside projects. EGS’s early experiences led its employees to question the wisdom of trying to initiate projects informed by their ideas about development, influenced as these were by the education they had received at university, but which many in Grand Yoff found to be unfamiliar,
even, on occasion, nonsensical or offensive. Two early EGS publications (Ndione 1992, 1993) speak of these problems in great detail, revealing how the EGS staff members came to recognise, slowly, that it was more effective to support what the community was already doing than to try to push the people of Grand Yoff to join EGS’s projects. EGS thus began supporting popular initiatives partly because EGS’s own projects were ineffective. Put simply, building upon already existing initiatives seemed to work better than trying to introduce projects based on what the EGS staff members assumed to be the development needs of the Grand Yoff community.

There is an important objection that should be addressed when arguing that supporting popular initiatives is preferable to initiating projects ourselves. By supporting such initiatives, we acknowledge that poor and oppressed people are already working towards their own emancipation and that their own way of going about this may be more effective than any initiative we can bring from outside. But if we acknowledge all this, we need to ask whether outsiders should get involved in the struggles of poor and oppressed people at all? Why not just let them get on with it? Or perhaps, limit our involvement to cheering from the sidelines? Post-development literature which stresses the capabilities and wisdom of ‘the social majorities’ risks suggesting that ‘we’, the privileged, really have very little to offer such peoples at all (see for example Esteva and Prakash 1996). While I am not convinced of this, I do still think that before we make any attempt to ‘help’ the poor and oppressed, we ought to acknowledge that many such communities are indeed actively and effectively responding to their situation, and that we may well have little or no role to play in many of their struggles. As Ferguson cautions:

We must entertain the strong possibility that there will be no need for what we do among such actors [referring here to local organisations such as labour unions, peasant movements, religious organisations and the like]. There is no guarantee that our knowledge and skills will be relevant. We must recognize that it is possible too, that different kinds of knowledge and skills will be required, that the nature of our intellectual activity itself will have to be transformed in order to participate in this way. But the possibilities are there to be explored.

(1990: 287)

While we may have something to bring to popular struggles, it is likely that those engaged in such struggles may want different things from us than what we are most keen to offer. During EGS’s early days, staff members were often disappointed when they realised that the Grand Yoff community did not always want their advice about health care, nutrition, waste-water drainage systems and how to save money. In fact, community members seemed more interested in the possibility of EGS providing flexible loans and of bringing EGS into local social networks, thereby improving access of Grand Yoff community members to the relatively powerful and high-status people who were part of EGS staff members’ social circles. EGS staff had to slowly allow the organisation to be drawn into
community networks, with all the expectations of reciprocity implied in membership of such networks, and to respect the Grand Yoff community members’ assessments of both their needs and their expectations of EGS.

Part of this process of adaptation on the part of EGS involved a move to recognise that its staff members themselves were actors with interests in the community, and not a sort of neutral hand of benevolence extending into the community to assist here and there. People in Grand Yoff were sceptical of the notion of a disinterested outsider who had come to help the community but who did not stand to gain anything for him or herself (Ndione 1993: 192). They assumed that if EGS staff members were willing to intervene in the community, it was because they got something out of such intervention, and thus did not feel that they ought to be grateful to EGS just because it was there. Gradually, the EGS staff members had to recognise that this assessment was more or less correct – that they did get something out of being in the community, even if this was often intangible, such as prestige or a sense of achievement or purpose.7

Thus, we need to admit that our help may not be needed and that the ways in which we can support popular struggles may be very different from those we had imagined; we also need to recognise that we seek to gain something ourselves from our involvement. However, it seems reasonable to suppose that once we have acknowledged these things, we may well be able to play a helpful role in increasing the effectiveness of poor people’s battles against that which oppresses them.

A further response to those who wonder if it would not be best just to let the poor and oppressed get on with their own emancipation relates to the interconnectedness of the lives of the privileged and the poor. Collier (1992: 86–87) argues that while the people of, for example, England and India had little obligation to each other in 1600, the economic and ecological interdependence brought about by contemporary trade and international relations means that we now live in a ‘shared world’, and certain obligations arise from this fact.8 As our lives are not separate from each other, our choice is not really one of whether to ignore these distant others, cheer on their emancipatory attempts from a distance or to go in and get involved. Rather, given that we are already involved in their lives, the ethical thing to do is to explore how our lives are interconnected and to seek to discover ways in which we can improve the relations, geographically distant or closer, direct or mediated, between ourselves and those who suffer poverty and oppression. One possible way of improving such relations is to provide what support we can to the struggles of the poor and oppressed.9

Enda Graf Sahel’s attempts to ‘accompany popular dynamics’

Once the EGS staff members had decided to change their approach from a focus upon initiating projects to a focus upon ‘accompanying popular dynamics’, they had to figure out how to make this approach work. What does ‘accompanying’ really entail?
One of the most important roles that EGS now plays is that of putting different community groups in contact with one another and facilitating ongoing contact between them. Because EGS works throughout Senegal and has access to telephones and the internet, it can help to put local organisations in touch with one another so that these groups can then support each other in various ways. An example of this is the fairly new women’s network called *Valorisation des Activités des Femmes* (VAF) [Valorisation of Women’s Activities] which links up various Senegalese women’s organisations, thereby helping to bring diverse smaller regional and occupational women’s networks together so that they can cooperate and provide mutual support.

Another role currently played by EGS relates to funding. Small, locally-based initiatives are often unable to access funding because they are unaware of what funding exists, do not have the skills needed to write funding proposals and may not meet donor requirements. EGS, with its long history of NGO work and high number of formally educated employees, can be helpful here. The organisation links smaller local groups together and then helps them find appropriate funding using its advantageous positioning in NGO donor networks to facilitate this process.

These ways of supporting popular initiatives tend to be fairly reactive in that they involve responding to requests from local organisations for funding or ‘contacts’. But EGS staff members stress that they are also involved in more proactive ways. They often try to expose people to ideas and information about which they would not otherwise be aware, thus providing a different ‘take’ on certain situations. EGS staff members challenge the sometimes parochial approaches taken by local organisations by drawing attention to the extra-local causes and effects of particular situations. For example, EGS is involved in a research initiative called Ecocité which examines the impact growing cities have on the rural and peri-urban areas surrounding them. This initiative encourages dialogue between those living in urban, peri-urban and rural settings in order to encourage greater awareness of, and debate about, the interdependencies between these different groups.

EGS staff members also stress that one of the most important roles they play in providing support to popular initiatives is that they work to revalorise disparaged value systems and ways of living. As a result of years of colonialism, neo-colonialism and other forms of domination, many people in the communities with which EGS works have lost respect for their parents’ way of life, languages and systems of knowledge. EGS staff members who are mainly relatively privileged, formally educated, French-speaking Senegalese nationals can use their ‘in-between’ position to encourage the questioning of dominant worldviews and value systems and the revaluation of denigrated ways of living in and understanding the world. For example, some members of EGS’s Thiès branch, native Noon speakers who have been educated in French, are involved in the promotion of the Noon language which is spoken by about 35,000 people many of whom live near Thiès. Through advocacy aimed at greater official recognition of Noon, Noon literacy classes and the broadcasting of Noon-language
programmes on community radio stations, these relatively privileged Noon speakers hope to encourage fellow speakers not to look down upon their own culture and history.

Network structures and the support of popular initiatives

As mentioned earlier, EGS has recently come to function as a fairly decentralised network in the hope that this will allow it to better integrate itself into the various communities with which it works, and to be better able to provide support to local initiatives. Thus, the decision to change the organisational structure was motivated by a sense that EGS could not accompany popular dynamics without beginning to function in a way similar to that favoured by the communities with which it worked. EGS’s decentralised, and deliberately ‘messy’, network structure facilitates extensive cooperation while allowing for the co-existence of several approaches and modes of functioning. No one person or group systematically controls the activities of the NGO as a whole, although the coordinator, Ndione, plays a pivotal and very influential role.

EGS is not the only organisation which has recently opted to function as a network. Literature on the potential of grassroots organisations and social movements devotes a fair amount of attention to the network forms of organisation which seem to be emerging in local movements, NGOs and the cooperative frameworks bringing such movements and NGOs together. Escobar (2004a: 210–222; 2004b: 351–356), for example, discusses how network structures could point to new ways of organisation and cooperation. Likewise, the attention that the experiences of the Zapatista support network12 and the WSF have been attracting suggests broad interest in network forms of organisation (see Löwy 2004 and Olesen 2004). One feature of such forms of organisation which has received much attention is the use of cyberspace by some social movements and by the Zapatista support network in particular (see Escobar 2004b: 350–356; Olesen 2004 and Russell 2005). Generally, there is a feeling that network structures are commendable because they allow for greater cooperation and mutual support between different organisations and movements without endangering heterogeneity. Another advantage attributed to network structures is that they are said to function in a more decentralised and less hierarchical way. While some commentators acknowledge that network structures are not necessarily non-hierarchical (see for example Escobar 2001: 169), discussions of the new forms of organisation emerging among social movements and within the WSF typically hold up a lack of hierarchy as a commendable feature of network forms of organisation (see for example De Sousa Santos 2004: 338).

An examination of the EGS network reveals both similarities and differences between EGS and the network structures receiving attention in the broader literature on grassroots movements, NGOs and the WSF. Like the networks discussed, EGS is decentralised, and there is no single rigid framework of operation guiding the whole organisation. However, in contrast to the emphasis being placed on ‘cyberspace’ in some literature, the EGS network spreads out through
personal connections and does not include a significant cyberspace element. Despite its geographical reach, it expands through the continual absorption of already existing social networks, rather than through more mediated ways such as the internet. The internet may be used to maintain contacts made, but is rarely used to initiate contact.

A second difference between EGS and some of the network forms of organisation receiving attention in the literature is that EGS is not easily described as being non-hierarchical. EGS builds upon the networking style of the people of Grand Yoff which, while fluid and decentralised, is fairly hierarchical. Ndione’s (1993: 40–45) discussion of a women’s group with which EGS was involved in its early days reveals some of the interesting forms of hierarchy present in these networks. The group in question collaborated to buy goods in bulk and then sell them at a small profit. They chose a relatively high-status woman to be their treasurer and allowed her a lot of discretion in the management of the group’s finances. To the concern of the EGS staff members, who at the time stressed the importance of transparency, the treasurer seemed to be secretly granting loans to some needy group members and to sometimes discreetly pay the contributions of struggling members. All the women seemed happy with this management, praising their treasurer for her willingness to use her relatively advantaged position to move in ‘high places’ on their behalf, helping group members struggling to enrol a child at school or searching for employment, for example. In exchange for such favours, the group members gave her their devotion and loyalty, in this way improving her position of relative high status in the community.

Initially, the EGS staff members tried to encourage the community organisations with which they worked to elect ‘ordinary’ community members to positions of leadership, but the people of Grand Yoff resisted this, insisting on choosing high-profile leaders who, like the woman in the example above, were able to use their position of relative advantage to advance the interests of the group while at the same time seeing their own prestige increase. Evidently, the relationships within Grand Yoff social networks were characterised by reciprocity, but certainly not by egalitarianism.

EGS’s own network functioning has come to mirror several of the features of these Grand Yoff networks. While there is little bureaucratised hierarchy within EGS and while some staff members profess a preference for a relatively egalitarian functioning, the organisation does not actually function in a non-hierarchical fashion. This is especially clear with regard to the role of long-time EGS co-ordinator Emmanuel Ndione, who is viewed as the central and dominating figure in EGS – indeed, one commentator described him to me by saying ‘That man, he is Enda Graf’. However, Ndione often deliberately downplays his role in EGS and refuses to take the lead in situations where others clearly expect him to. The deference people show to him and his apparent ambivalence regarding his position reveal the complexities of EGS’s position on hierarchies.

EGS’s experiences show how careful we should be not assume that decentralised, fluid structures are non-hierarchical or that hierarchies always function to limit the options of the poor. Reflecting on EGS’s first decade of work,
Ndione (1993: 170–171) comments that when EGS first arrived in Grand Yoff, its employees thought that they ought to work with the less privileged majority to the exclusion of, and in opposition to, the more privileged minority. But the poor, who they had set out to save, had other ideas. EGS began to realise that many of the relations between the privileged and less privileged were reciprocal even though they were not egalitarian. The poor had enough ‘room to manoeuvre’ to be able to influence the decisions made by high-status community members, whose status depended upon the continued support of less privileged community members. When discussing network structures and the promises they may hold for new kinds of political organisation, we need to think carefully about the ways in which these structures bring less and more privileged people together and how the hierarchies that may emerge within these structures function. The flexible hierarchies and face-to-face nature of the network structures of the Grand Yoff community, and also of EGS today, allow for the less privileged to make the kinds of claims upon more privileged network members that arguably could not be made in a more mediated or less hierarchical network. I do not mean to argue in favour of such hierarchies here – indeed, I and some at EGS are not comfortable with the forms of hierarchy described above – but I would like to stress that we overlook interesting and important complexities when we assume that networks are not hierarchical, or that all forms of hierarchy function in much the same way.

Generally, the evolution of EGS into a network, and its own observations about the network functioning of the Grand Yoff community, is of value in demonstrating how network functioning can be instrumental in facilitating the support of popular initiatives, but also call into question the focus of some recent literature on networks. As Escobar (2004b: 351) admits, networks are ‘in’ at the moment, and those who are interested in exploring the potentialities of this kind of organisational structure would do well to pay attention to experiences such as those of EGS.

Some challenges

I conclude by pointing to some challenges that are brought up by EGS’s experiences and which need attention if we are to think along the lines suggested in this discussion. First, one of the problems of opting to support ‘the local’ and ‘the popular’ is that such an approach provides little guidance about which groups and initiatives ought to be supported. In any setting, there are likely to be several different, often opposing, groups and initiatives, and those keen to provide support need criteria according to which to identify groups and initiatives worthy of such support. This points to a deeper problem that emerges in much post-development and related literature – how do we prevent sensitivity to difference from becoming irresponsible relativism? The decision to support local and grassroots initiatives is, as mentioned earlier, related to concerns about being sensitive to difference, but supporting just any local or grassroots initiative is arguably politically irresponsible. As many critics of post-development theory
have pointed out, a group’s grassroots credentials are no guarantee that it will indeed improve the lives of the most disadvantaged members of the community in which it operates (see for example Kiely 1999 and Nanda 1999).

EGS has recently held discussion sessions aimed at identifying some common values which they as a broad and diverse network share, hoping that the identification and discussion of such values will help them maintain some kind of unity and character, while still remaining sensitive to the context of the various sub-units within EGS. This process of identifying values may also help in making explicit the criteria according to which EGS decides which initiatives and groups to support. However, it is still too early to see if the organisation will be able to successfully negotiate this hurdle which, I believe, is one of the key challenges facing those who would like to work out some kind of post-development practice. Our concern not to impose particular values in the way many development initiatives have done in the past cannot lead us to embrace a naïve relativistic stance which refuses to favour any group or initiative above any other.

A second challenge relates to the ambiguity regarding what it means to ‘support’ local and grassroots initiatives. It is clear that while some EGS staff members describe their role as one of ‘only’ providing support for what ‘ordinary’ community members are doing, their very presence in the community and the relative power and privilege they command makes it very difficult for them to play a purely supporting role. Furthermore, their role as middle-men in channelling funding from donors to community organisations inevitably puts them in a position of power over groups who depend on them to attract funding. Some EGS staff members, quite rightfully I would argue, do not believe that their role is only a supporting one, stressing that they seek to challenge the worldviews of some groups and to expose them to new ideas and information, rather than simply to support what local organisations are doing. As soon as they do this, however, they arguably cease to play the role of simply ‘accompanying popular dynamics’. On the one hand, it is important to avoid the arrogance and paternalism that have infused much development work; on the other, it would be problematic if EGS staff members, in their eagerness to simply support local movements, allowed parochial or misinformed views to go unchallenged. There is a very difficult balance to be struck here which makes the idea of supporting popular initiatives more complex and difficult to negotiate.

While challenges such as these remain, the experiences of organisations like EGS are of interest to those of us who are sympathetic to post-development theory, but who are also attentive to concerns that the adoption of a post-development position may amount to the abdication of responsibility for the situation of the poor and oppressed. There is no obvious and problem-free way in which those of us who are relatively privileged may oppose poverty and oppression, but the EGS staff members’ attempts to integrate into the communities with which they work and to provide already existing initiatives with support suggest one promising way forward.
Notes

1 This chapter is based on research towards a PhD currently being undertaken at the Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham and funded by a Commonwealth scholarship. I am grateful to Reg Cline-Cole, my PhD supervisor, for comments on an earlier draft.

2 I am indebted to Blaikie not only for the phrase indicated, but for the general metaphor being used here.

3 This phrase was used in the title of one of the sessions of the colloquium ‘Défaire le développement, Refaire le monde’ [‘Unmake development, Remake the World’], held in February 2002 in Paris.

4 My discussion of Enda Graf Sahel is based on information gathered while doing an internship with EGS as well as on various EGS sources – see especially Ndione (1992, 1993), Ndione et al. (1994), De Leener et al. (1999) and EGS (2001).

5 This exact phrase (translated from the French) is taken from a poster prominently displayed at EGS’s coordinating office, and similar terms are used in several recent EGS documents.

6 See for example Amin (1993: 76–78), Löwy (2004: 21) and Waterman (2004: 58–60). It should be acknowledged, however, that some on the traditional Left are radically opposed to these ‘new social movements’ seeing them as deviating from the path of more important anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggles – see for example James (2004).

7 The experiences that led to this shift in approach are discussed in Ndione (1992), see particularly the preface and Chapter 7.

8 Corbridge (1998b: 44) makes a similar point.

9 This is, however, by no means the only promising way in which to respond to our privileged positioning. I hope to discuss other possible responses elsewhere.

10 EGS vice-coordinator, Babacar Touré, and Enda Graim co-ordinator, André Wade, both stressed this point in interviews with me.

11 Thïès is Senegal’s second largest city. The branch in question is called Enda Graim with ‘Graim’ standing for ‘Groupe de Recherches d’Appui aux initiatives Mutualistes – Research group for the support of associative initiatives’. I am grateful to André Wade, Ferdinand Mbaye, Victor Tine and Charles Wade for discussing Enda Graim’s activities with me.

12 By ‘Zapatista support network’ I refer to the large network of those professing support for the Zapatista movement, rather than to the Chiapas-based members of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN).

References


What, then, should we(3,4),(998,992)
10 Surplus possibilities
Post-development and community economies

J. K. Gibson-Graham

Post-development

In recent years, development practitioners, anthropologists, geographers and others who are observers ‘on the ground’ of the failures of the one-size-fits-all model of development have begun to generate a ‘post-development’ discourse (Rahnema with Bawtree, 1997). By this, we mean a set of thinking and doing practices that are guided by a distinctive ethical stance. Post-development discourse is aligned with the long leftist tradition of critical analyses that accompanied the global consolidation, immediately after the Second World War, of a hegemonic mainstream development project. But while sharing a dissatisfaction with mainstream development, this emerging post-development discourse effects a radical rupture with a style of thinking that underpins much of the critique of development. In this chapter, we aim to give a taste of how we are broaching the practice of post-development thinking in a linked set of projects – a language project of representing the economy as diverse, a collaboration with an NGO that is involved in what we see as post-development interventions in the global trade in labour and an action research project negotiating post-development pathways in place in a Philippines municipality.

Writing from the standpoint of the global south, Boaventura de Sousa Santos provides an incisive and powerful account of the absences produced by Enlightenment thinking about development. He distinguishes five modes by which modern science with its core notions of rationality and efficiency produced forms of ‘non-existence’ that can be seen to call forth development thinking and practice as a logical response. The forms of non-existence derive from five monocultures (2004: 238–239):

1 the monoculture of knowledge that turned ‘modern science and high culture into the sole criteria of truth and aesthetic quality’ and produced non-existence ‘in the form of ignorance, or lack of culture’;
2 the monoculture of linear time that produced non-existence ‘by describing as “backward” (pre-modern, under-developed, etc.) whatever is asymmetrical vis-à-vis whatever is declared “forward”’;
3 the monoculture of classification that distributed ‘populations according to
categories that naturalised hierarchies’ thereby producing non-existence in the form of inferiority and subordination;

4 the monoculture of the universal and the global from which derived ‘the logic of the dominant scale’ that produced the local and particular as a ‘non-credible alternative to what exists’;

5 the monoculture of capitalist productivity and efficiency that ‘privileges growth through market forces’ and produced non-existence in the form of the ‘non-productiveness’ of non-capitalist economic activity.

These monocultures, Santos argues, have produced ‘the ignorant, the residual, the inferior, the local and the non-productive’ that needs development by ‘the scientific, advanced, superior, global, or productive realities’ (p. 239).

This compact genealogy of development thinking offers a thumbnail sketch of the formidable challenges posed to a post-development discourse. It is not too difficult to identify targets for deconstruction. In previous work, we have identified the deconstructive project of post-development thinking as focused on unhinging notions of development from the European experience of industrial growth and of capitalist expansion; decentering conceptions of Economy and de-essentializing economic logics as the motor of history; loosening the discursive grip of unilinear trajectories on narratives of change; and undermining the hierarchical valuations of cultures, practices and economic sites (Gibson-Graham 2004: 411).

Santos’ work pushes us, however, to go beyond the genealogical and deconstructive. He suggests that we pursue a sociology of absences that confronts ‘the modes of production of absence’ (2004: 239), replacing each monoculture with ecologies of knowledges, temporalities, recognition, trans-scale and productivity:

In each of the five domains, the objective of the sociology of absences is to disclose, and give credit to, the diversity and multiplicity of social practices in opposition to the exclusive credibility of hegemonic practices. The idea of multiplicity and non-destructive relations is suggested by the concept of ecology.

(2004: 240)

The task of a sociology of absences is to focus on what has been ‘disqualified and rendered invisible, unintelligible, or irreversibly discardable’ and to make the non-credible, the non-existent present as ‘alternatives to hegemonic experience’. The aim of such a sociology is to have the credibility of these alternatives ‘discussed and argued for and their relations taken as objects of political dispute’, thereby creating the ‘conditions to enlarge the field of credible experiences’ and widen ‘the possibilities for social experimentation’ (pp. 238–239).

While obviously grounded in a critical attitude towards mainstream development thinking, the project of developing ‘epistemologies of the South’ (p. 236) that Santos outlines goes beyond critique, venturing into a creative field in which the possibilities of reconfiguration and experimentation are linked to con-
tingency and unpredictability. This is, we believe, the stuff of a post-development discourse – a mode of thinking and practice that is generative, experimental, uncertain, hopeful and yet fully grounded in an understanding of the material and discursive violences and promises of the long history of development interventions.

The post-development agenda is not, as we see it, anti-development. The challenge of post-development is not to give up on development, not to see all development practice – past, present and future, in wealthy and poor countries – as tainted, failed and retrograde, as though there were something necessarily problematic and destructive about deliberate attempts to increase social well-being through economic intervention, as though there were a space of purity beyond or outside development that we could access through renunciation. The challenge is to imagine and practise development differently.

As one at the forefront of post-development thinking, Arturo Escobar has taken up the issue of imagination and research practice. In a recent paper, he puzzles about the ‘tremendous inability on the part of Eurocentric thinkers to imagine a world without and beyond modernity’:

_Modernity can no longer be treated as the Great Singularity, the giant attractor towards which all tendencies ineluctably gravitate, the path to be trodden by all trajectories leading to an inevitable steady state. Rather, ‘modernity and its exteriorities’ . . . should be treated as a true multiplicity, where trajectories are multiple and can lead to multiple states._

(2004: 225)

In this work, we are widening our knowledge of economy through an exploration of the diverse ecologies of productivity. We have conceived of our research as creating a discourse of economic difference as a contribution to a politics of economic innovation. In action research interventions, we aim to show how enlarging the field of credible experience might become a prelude to increasing the possibilities for economic experimentation around development.

This chapter outlines our idiosyncratic negotiation of post-development thinking and practice in one place, Jagna Municipality, situated in the island province of Bohol in the southern Philippines.1 In our negotiation, we take inspiration from Santos who speaks of not only the need for a sociology of absences but also a sociology of emergences, that is, an ‘inquiry into the alternatives that are contained in the horizon of concrete possibilities’ (p. 241). The sociology of emergences consists in undertaking a symbolic enlargement of knowledge, practices and agents in order to identify therein the tendencies of the future (the Not Yet) upon which it is possible to intervene so as to maximise the probability of hope vis-à-vis the probability of frustration. Such symbolic enlargement is actually a form of sociological imagination with a double aim: on the one hand to know better the conditions of the possibility of hope; on the other,
to define principles of action to promote the fulfilment of those conditions. The Not Yet has meaning (as possibility), but no direction, for it can end either in hope or disaster.

(2004: 241)

Central to this sociology of emergences is replacement of the idea of determina-
tion with that of care, and substitution of the logical dynamics of certainty with path-dependent relationships of potentiality. The post-development thinking and action that is embodied in the sociology of emergences is an explicitly ethical practice radically separated from what usually passes as conventional intellec-
tual or interventionist practice with its grounding in ‘reality’ and belief in the possibility of an objective policy response. It is clear to us that we are building a post-development pathway as we travel through territory that is largely uncharted.

**The Jagna Community Partnering Project: enlarging the field of credible experience**

The municipality of Jagna is where we began the process of imagining and enacting a post-development practice. Jagna is a small, income-poor municipal-
ity in the island province of Bohol, a place known for its pleasant rural charac-
ter, unique limestone topography and tourist highlights including the Chocolate Hills and the tarsier, Asia’s smallest monkey. Bohol has historically occupied a relatively subordinate position in the unevenly developed political economy of the Philippines. It was never the site of major economic investment by Spanish planters or crony industrialists owing both to its unsuited topography and geology and to its fabled history of resistance to direct Spanish rule. In 1996, the small volume of exports of the province (galvanized iron, limestone, copra, rice, prawns and handicrafts) were valued at P1.82 billion, while imports stood at P2.78 billion, and while touted as ‘the rice granary of the Central Visayas’ the province during the 1990s has been importing more rice than it has exported (Bohol Provincial Development Council, n.d.: 11–12).

Situated one hour’s drive by sealed road from Tagbilaran, the capital of Bohol, Jagna is one of the province’s major port towns, offering the main link to the city of Cagayan de Oro in northern Mindanao. The municipal population of 30,643 live in 33 barangays, or subdistricts, half in the town of Jagna and half in small rural settlements scattered around the agricultural hinterland. Farmers grow wet and dry rice, coconuts and bananas, and in the higher areas, cooler-climate vegetables and flowers. Along the coast are fishing settlements where people are struggling to make a living from the depleted near-shore fish stocks. The vast majority of the people are Christians and natives of Jagna, and there is a small population of migrant Muslim families from Mindanao who are traders near the port. Incomes are low, and economic development is squarely on the agenda of the Mayor of the municipality whose second term has just been secured.
For those in the mainstream, development in the Philippines is seen to depend on getting into the globalized economy by promoting economic growth derived from exports. This largely means attracting foreign industrial investment into export processing zones, supporting export-oriented agriculture and the export of contract labour. For the garden province of Bohol, this means continuing to promote the export of migrant labour as seamen and domestic helpers, attempting to attract international eco-tourists and, most recently, promoting a shift towards what is presented as the new panacea for rural backwardness – the export tree crop, oil palm. With the transfer of administrative power and budgetary responsibility to the municipality that accompanied decentralization, local governments are now in the front line of responsibility for development agendas (Legaspi 2001). The message that comes through loud and clear from the national government, the IMF and the World Bank is that localities are only going to survive if they can insert themselves into the global arena, competing with others to get a piece of the pie.

In Jagna, at least one-sixth of the population is dependent on incomes generated by overseas contract workers (OCWs), the new international cadre of indentured and quasi-slave labourers. And while there has been a small amount of oil palm planted on converted coconut lands, the topography and geology of the municipality is not suited to larger-scale expansion of this export tree crop.

Jagna’s local government unit is interested in exploring the possibility of alternative development pathways that build on what the municipality has rather than what it lacks, that strengthen the resilience of the local economy and that reduce dependence on external forces like currency fluctuations (in the case of remittances) and the ups and downs of international commodity prices (in the case of agricultural commodities). In this context, our action research intervention is designed to work with the local government and community to explore alternative pathways.

In the year prior to our project’s commencement, each barangay had completed a Barangay Development Plan with the assistance of local teams trained in participatory rural appraisal methods. The plans documented detailed information on the diverse economic and social profile of each subdistrict using the format that has become a standard tool of community and rural development. The data in these documents included information on some key indicators of development that were deemed to be good approximations for income: the percentage of (1) malnourished infants, (2) houses without water-sealed toilets, (3) school drop outs, and (4) households with access to potable water. On the basis of these indicators, the barangays were ranked in order of dis/advantage. Each document concluded with a list of development goals for the next five years and an outline of what was needed to achieve these goals which, in almost all cases, amounted to finance, infrastructure and local leadership. In an insidious way, this ‘neutral’ information gathering and mobilization exercise executed a subtle conversion of a rich and diverse presence of barangay attributes into a monotonously stylized representation of lack for which outside assistance was the only solution. Initial discussions with barangay councillors and members of the
public reiterated and elaborated upon this vision. From these meetings, what clearly emerged was a detailed ‘needs map’ for the municipality. Many comments and judgements were made about the ‘mentalities’ of local people that stood in the way of realization of any of their development goals – for example, the ‘dole out’ and ‘colonial’ mentalities, the ningas cogon syndrome\textsuperscript{2} or the attitude of bahala na (to leave things to chance). In an intriguing example of the hold of monocultural logics, the participatory and potentially inspirational barangay development planning process ‘produced’ development’s object – the locality as inferior, residual, non-productive and ignorant.

During our barangay visits, the research team attempted to shift the conversation towards the assets of the area that could be utilized or built upon and tried to elicit stories of community action around projects of collective development.\textsuperscript{3} We attempted to identify and reflect back to the meeting instances where community capacity was exercised and assets were mobilized. On the basis of these discussions, a very different map of the ‘assets’ of the municipality was drawn up. Many of the features of this asset map, especially those concerning the natural environment and physical infrastructure, had been highlighted by barangays as potential foci for future development (e.g. the port, the environmental attractions and the vegetable-producing capacity). This is not surprising given that the standard participatory rural appraisal method that informed the planning process focuses on local communities as defined by place and attachment to physical resources. Our questioning tried to bring to the fore the capacities of barangay residents and the dense networks of flow between people that contribute to community resilience, identity and well-being. We were concerned to highlight these social, as opposed to physical, assets as a step towards reflecting the multiple ecologies of economic productivity at play in Jagna.\textsuperscript{4}

Our challenge to the mainstream development project focuses on the singular vision that the only viable economy is a capitalist one and that the only dynamics that will produce economic development are those of capitalist productivity – production of commodities for the global market, capital accumulation and export-led growth. To counter this hegemonic view, we have posed a new identity – the diverse economy – in which what is usually thought of as the mainstream economy – market transactions, wage labour and capitalist enterprise – is joined by all the economic ‘others’ that sustain material survival and well-being. Our vision of the diverse economy is arranged according to three sets of economic relations – transactions of goods, services and finances; the performance and modes of remuneration of labour; and the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus within different kinds of enterprise (Table 10.1).

Among the transactions, we include the immense variety of ways in which goods, services and finances flow between economic actors via transactions in which commensurability and incommensurability are variously negotiated. Not only do we find alternative market transactions but a variety of prevalent non-market ones, including gifts, state allocations, poaching and theft, gleaning, indigenous exchange and household flows, arguably equal in volume and frequency to market transactions. Among the ways in which labour is performed
and remunerated, we find not only many forms of alternatively compensated labour, but also unpaid labour, which we recognize from the feminist literature as constituting at least one-third (and probably more) of GDP in both rich and poor countries (Ironmonger 1996; Luxton 1997). Among the forms of enterprise organization and the ways in which they differently organize the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus (in all its forms – surplus labour, surplus value or surplus product),\(^5\) we distinguish alternative capitalist businesses with an environmental or social ethic and non-capitalist businesses such as worker collectives in which workers appropriate their own surplus, self-employed people, also self-appropriating and thus not exploited, feudal enterprises in which the surplus labour of peasants is appropriated in kind and enterprises utilizing slaves without freedom of contract who produce goods and services for a market, but not under capitalist relations of production.\(^6\)

One effect of this representation of a diverse economy is that capitalist activity (i.e. production by wage labour of commodities for the market within enterprises that privately appropriate surplus from workers) is knocked off its perch, so to speak, and with it goes the ordered certainties associated with development dynamics. In the diverse economy, relationships are contingently rather than deterministically configured, economic value is liberally distributed – not attached to certain activities and denied to others – economic dynamics are proliferated not restricted to a set number of governing laws and logics and multiple temporalities and storylines are untethered from one linear narrative.\(^7\)

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**Table 10.1 Diverse economy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Enterprise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wage</strong></td>
<td><strong>Capitalist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternative market</strong></td>
<td><strong>Alternative paid</strong></td>
<td><strong>Alternative capitalist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale of public goods</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>State enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical ‘fair-trade’ markets</td>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>Green capitalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local trading systems</td>
<td>Indentured</td>
<td>Socially responsible firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative currencies</td>
<td>Reciprocal labour</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underground market</td>
<td>In kind</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-op exchange</td>
<td>Work for welfare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal market</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Non-market</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unpaid</strong></td>
<td><strong>Non-capitalist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household flows</td>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>Communal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift giving</td>
<td>Family care</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous exchange</td>
<td>Neighbourhood work</td>
<td>Feudal/Peasant</td>
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<tr>
<td>State allocations</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gleaning</td>
<td>Self-provisioning labour</td>
<td>Slave</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theft, poaching</td>
<td>Slave labour</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^5\) Surplus possibilities
In Jagna, the vast number of enterprises are independent agents – self-employed farmers, fishers, traders, drivers and handymen who produce and appropriate their own surplus, if indeed they are able to make any above what they need for their own and their family’s subsistence needs and for meeting the cost of inputs and machinery upkeep. A sizeable proportion of farmers are still tenants and thus are working in a feudal peasant relationship where their surplus is appropriated by a landlord and their labour is rewarded in kind with 50–75 per cent of the harvest, depending on who pays for farm inputs. The businesses registered in Jagna are very small family trading, merchandising and manufacturing enterprises that straddle the line between self-employment and use of family labour, with perhaps a handful of waged workers. Apart from the larger merchants and the one bank, there are no significant larger capitalist enterprises unlike, for example, the adjoining municipality of Garcia-Hernandez where a Japanese cement company mines, crushes and exports limestone. The port is the largest and most capitalized enterprise in the area. It is state owned and run by the Philippines Port Authority with a few paid employees. The vast majority of port labourers are self-employed porters who are members of a highly regulated labour association. There are no worker collectives and only one cooperative water supply business. The small number of not-for-profit enterprises include public schools and a handful of NGOs, including an alter-trade enterprise that organizes the export of bananas from Jagna growers to Japanese consumer cooperatives.

In Jagna, labour is performed in many different contexts. The majority of waged workers are government employees with a small number of landless farm workers and general labourers. The range of forms of unpaid labour is large, particularly in the agricultural hinterland where there is a culture of sharing and cooperation attached to the intensive hand labour of rice cultivation. A rich language replete with specific terms and understandings of exchange, reciprocity, in-kind payment and interconnectedness exists to describe complex practices of reciprocal labour exchange and voluntary gifting of labour. Different forms of reciprocal labour exchange include the group practice of hungus, where a group of rice farmers band together to do voluntary planting, weeding or harvesting work on one person’s farm with the expectation that this favour will be returned when needed, and the individual practice of badsanay in which labour services are exchanged upon verbal agreement. In-kind payment for labour includes the sagod system, a labour arrangement introduced after agrarian reform whereby landless labourers perform weeding on another’s land and are granted the exclusive right to harvest that same plot for a percentage of the crop, usually one-sixth if the crop is threshed and cleaned, guno, the harvesting of corn in return for one-seventh share of the total and hagpat, helping a fisherman pick out the fish from the net in return for one-third of the catch. Voluntary gifting of labour includes the well-known bayanihan, the indigenous practice of voluntary helping out, for example, moving a nipa house or making a school garden, the weekly or monthly performance of tingub which involves maintaining irrigation channels and irrigating rice fields, citizen’s voluntary action (CIVAC) whereby,
under the leadership of the Barangay Captain or a youth or women’s organization, everybody in the community offers labour for road fixing, cleaning the residential surroundings and other community work.

In terms of the transactions and exchanges involving goods, services and finance, there again appears to be a vast mesh of activities that do not intersect formal markets where the rules of competition govern behaviour and outcomes. In alternative and non-market relations, transactions are mediated by social and cultural understandings and agreements that help negotiate different registers of value. Barter between coastal communities and the rice-growing uplands is still current with coastal people travelling to rural areas during harvest time to barter dried fish, wine, clay pots, salt and cigarettes for rice. Rice farmers engage in a barter system called *tihap* in which they receive money or fertilizers before or during the land preparation period and repay the donor in rice, with interest added in, after the harvest season. The alter-trade network negotiates exchange between the banana growers’ cooperative in Jagna and Japanese consumer cooperatives who guarantee a steady market and aim to offer fair prices despite fluctuations in world banana prices. There is a vibrant trade in second-hand clothes at *ukay ukay* stores often sourced from overseas aid agencies.

As with many cash-poor communities, there are a vast variety of mechanisms for obtaining money outside of formal bank lending. In 2002, Jagna had six registered lending and pawnshops that offered high rates of interest (*Bohol Provincial Medium-Term Development Plan 1998–2003*). In addition, there are many communal forms of saving and borrowing targeted at specific individual or household purposes – ceremonies and rituals like weddings, funerals and fiestas – or family livelihood projects – like house building or land acquisition. The *dajong*, meaning ‘to carry together’, is the practice of mortuary assistance organized at a neighbourhood level. Upon death of a neighbourhood resident, member families donate money and/or other services such as carrying the coffin, offering labour for digging the burial hole and preparing food for the members of the *dajong* who are required to attend during the burial ceremony. The *gala* includes a group of families who offer money, rice, wood or anything that will reduce the financial burden on the member family with a wedding to arrange. Another specific type of *gala* takes place during or after fiesta time and involves the offering of dances and money in honour of a patron saint and as a form of fundraising for any church-based celebrations or other activity. The *kubaway* is a group of people that agree to save money to procure carabaos for fiesta time and that allows members to access the joint savings with interest payable up to a month before fiesta celebration. The *repa-repa* is a revolving credit group in which members regularly contribute a set amount of money which is pooled and drawn upon sequentially by one member each month. This practice is used to access money for big projects such as house improvements, buying major appliances or land. The *tampuhay* is a savings group in which members put away an amount of money and then divide it among their group at the end of the year. The *suki-ay* is a reciprocated practice of giving goods or money to a family celebrating fiesta. The *suking tindahan* is credit
offered by small sari sari stores so the cash poor can obtain basic goods, and dory is credit offered with no interest as a sign of gratitude.

This initial documentation of the diverse economy of Jagna indicates that there is a thin veneer of capitalist economic activity underlain by a thick mesh of traditional practices and relationships of gifting, sharing, borrowing, volunteering, reciprocated individual and collective work. A network of bonding and bridging relationships creates complex interdependencies within and across kin groupings and neighbourhoods. Daily needs are met, life course and cultural events are celebrated and community is enacted. This rich meshwork of relationships are the economic practices that have been rendered non-existent, ‘non-credible alternatives to what exists’ by the monoculture of capitalocentric thinking (Santos 2004: 238). They are the substance and process of what we have termed the community economy – those economic practices that sustain lives and maintain well-being directly (without resort to the circuitous mechanisms of capitalist industrialization and income trickle-down) – that distribute surplus to the material and cultural maintenance of community and that actively make and share a commons.8

While the majority of people in Jagna are being sustained by activities in the community economy, there are still those for whom secondary education for children is a luxury that must be forgone when cash incomes are down and for whom housing standards are basic with no potable water or water-sealed sanitary toilets. These kinds of shortfalls in meeting what could be considered subsistence costs create an incentive for family members to seek employment overseas. It comes as no surprise to find that most of the remittances sent by OCWs back to their families are spent on education costs and housing improvements – replacing natural fibre with iron roofing, building an indoor bathroom and toilet and, for the longer term OCWs, a new concrete structure. Many households look to overseas migration as their only pathway towards increasing their standard of living.

At the same time as reflecting on and valuing the strengths of Jagna’s community economy, we cannot also ignore that it exists in constant change and contradiction. Crucial elements of the community economy are being actively undermined or even destroyed at present. Most detrimental is the destruction of the marine environment and the commons upon which the fishers of Jagna have relied over generations. A parallel situation exists in the uplands where proclamation of a protected forest zone to combat erosion and pollution of water sources has outlawed the slash and burn agricultural practices of small upland indigenous communities and denied them access to their traditional common land. In both coastal and upland areas, new livelihoods are being sought.

From the perspective of mainstream development discourse, Jagna would be well advised to deal with its deficiencies by exporting more labour or promoting the shift away from coconut and copra production to a more viable export agricultural commodity as a way of generating cash income to meet subsistence needs. From the perspective of building a community economy, the options open out in many different directions. A full audit of livelihood practices includ-
ing the contribution of non-market and unpaid labour transactions allows for reflection on what the community is nourished by (rather than what it lacks) and public discussion of which of these practices could be strengthened or extended. There is the opportunity to review and decide what to do about the more oppressive aspects of some of these practices, for example, the way that they might maintain and heighten status and hierarchy divisions within the community, or might foster flows of labour that could be experienced as exploitative. And there is the chance of locating where and for whom real shortfalls in meeting necessary subsistence are taking place and discussing community-wide strategies (other than watching the best and brightest leave to take up menial jobs as OCWs) to address these. By starting first with an appreciation of the diverse ways in which the Jagna community economy already produces a culturally rich and largely sustaining lifestyle for the people of the municipality, a new decision space is opened up – the choice can be made to build upon this base and ensure that it is not inadvertently depreciated by mainstream development interventions that offer the fantasy of sufficiency.

Exploring possibilities for social experimentation: strengthening the community economy

The work of making this diverse economy (or ecologies of non-capitalist productivity) visible and valuing its contribution is but one step in a post-development practice. In the Jagna Community Partnering Project, we are concerned to go beyond the representational moment and begin to strengthen and enlarge the community economy. The process of working with community members and the municipal government towards defending, strengthening and enlarging Jagna’s community economy involves taking seriously the legitimacy of pursuing a diversity of development pathways and seeking out the ‘alternatives that are contained in the horizon of concrete possibilities’ (Santos 2004: 241). This involves the cultivation of affective orientations and thinking practices that are generative, experimental and hopeful. It means tolerating not-knowing, contingency, uncertainty, and yet still intervening to take back the economy as a space of decision.

In Jagna, we are actively working on developing an ‘anticipatory consciousness’ that will take on uncertain possibilities that already exist and nurture them by building and sustaining relationships (emphasizing diverse dynamics rather than monocultural logics) (Santos 2004: 236). The challenges facing the community economy in Jagna include

1. sustaining and strengthening the diverse practices that support subsistence and produce well-being directly;
2. reclaiming, safeguarding and enlarging the commons that provides a base for survival, subsidizing subsistence and creating community;
3. generating surplus and marshalling and distributing it to foster expansion of the productive base and increase standards of living.
Confronted with these challenges, we are interested in extending the scope of certain community practices in the direction of constructing locally based enterprises that marshal and distribute surplus in ways that will strengthen and expand the capacity of the existing community economy.

As we have seen, individuals in Jagna perform surplus labour that is deployed in the practices of gifting, sharing and the reciprocal exchange of goods and services that sustain the young, aged, infirm and disadvantaged as well as institutions like the church, schools and associations. It is a real question, however, as to how much surplus is currently generated from enterprises in the region. The self-employed sector, for example, can be seen as barely making a living – generating an income that will just meet costs of labour and materials. At present, there are no communal or collective enterprises that are able to generate a large pool of surplus that could be distributed towards expanding the productive capacity of the community economy or improving well-being and increasing living standards.

The possibility of a surplus-focused economics of community development has been illustrated for us by the practices instituted in the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, one of the world’s largest worker-owned cooperative complexes located in the Basque region of Spain. In these cooperatives, the choice was made to limit wage growth as cooperatives grew and prospered and thus to allow the expansion of cooperative capacity and the ability to employ more and more owner workers. This ethical economic decision has instituted a crucial set of practices that have promoted community well-being at large over individual gain. So too has the decision to limit access to the surplus generated by owner workers until their retirement, and meanwhile to marshal it into a cooperative bank that can then finance and support new cooperatives, as well as distribute it directly to the provision of social services for the whole community (Gibson-Graham 2003).

In Jagna municipality OCW remittances have the potential to provide a source of funds for alternative investments in the community economy and therefore are a community asset to be mobilized. Migrant savers are interested in redefining portions of their wages earned overseas as a surplus that can be invested in migrant and community-based business in the Philippines. Rather than treating their wages as a consumption fund to be spent increasing the standard of living of their household and family members to a level far in excess of the local community (bigger houses, all modern appliances and conspicuous consumption goods), OCWs who are interested in capping household consumption and investing in enterprises are organized and assisted to employ local people, develop local products and improve the viability of local economies. The dividing line between consumption and saving, or in the Marxian terminology, necessary labour costs and surplus labour, is a crucial one when it comes to questions of development. While surplus remains unseen and unaccounted, it is easy to obscure the ethical choices that can make or undermine community economies.

The community-based enterprises will experiment with different organi-
zational structures that include cooperative ownership. In a political climate where 'co-ops' were largely agricultural credit and marketing organizations sponsored by the state and renowned for corrupt practice and coercion (Mayfield 1985: 166–167), the cooperative ideal must be renegotiated and translated into ethical principles that have meaning in the local context. At present, the project is working with a group of porters who are looking into the feasibility of a trucking business that could, amongst other things, connect upland farmers with urban markets. The porter who is one of our community researchers was very interested and inspired by the idea that the capital of the porters’ credit co-op could be used to extend the porters’ work into another transportation service that would benefit the community. He had previously only considered that the credit would be used by individual families to start small stores that the wives and children of the porters would run. With possible assistance from migrant investors, this business has the potential to generate extra employment and income for the part-time porters and to improve produce movement from upland farmers to the port and encourage higher productivity of agricultural production. Other ideas for enterprises being researched include the sewing and hiring out of ceremonial robes such as togas for school graduations, wedding and bridesmaids dresses by women in Jagna and the development of value-added production and marketing of ginger and coconut products at the port and farther afield by primary producer families.

In discussing the development of people’s capacities, or the cultivation of ethical dispositions, Francisco Varela points to the important process of extension whereby ‘we learn to extend knowledge and feelings from situations in which a particular action is considered correct to analogous situations in which the correct action is unclear’ (1992: 27). This practice of extension has the potential for use in expanding the community economy. The building of community-based enterprises that are capable of generating surplus and redeploying it into further job creation can draw on and extend everyday practices that are already enhancing the well-being directly in the community and contributing to the expansion of the Jagna commons.

One example of extension that provides inspiration for us is the case of a Barangay Bunga Ilaya where, as in every other barangay, councillors are traditionally expected to save up to purchase a hog to be donated to the yearly fiesta for all to enjoy the taste of lechon (spit-roasted pig), a traditional Filipino treat. Recently, the councillors discussed the possibility of redirecting their savings to the purchase of water pipes that would improve the water quality and accessibility for all in the barangay, and they proposed to the community that they extend their donation to something that would have long-lasting effect, rather than celebratory but short-lasting impact. The community agreed to this change, and the water system has begun to be installed.10

Another example is the case of Barangay Cambagusaron in which the bayanihan practice was extended to a larger project that usually would be seen as within the jurisdiction of the municipality. In Cambagusaron, the community sealed a road that was crucial for farm to market access. Instigated by a returned
seaman, a group of people donated funds to buy the inputs and hire the machinery and volunteered their own labour to cement two kilometres of roadway and increase accessibility to markets.

In both these examples, traditional practices – ritual expenditure in one case and mutual support in the other – have been redirected towards improving standards of living for all and contributing to the enlargement of the commons. Well-being was promoted by providing a year-round access road and potable water on tap. These decisions to reshape the form of the gift to the community and to take on a volunteer labour project that also involved a considerable financial donation reflect choices to privilege longer-term investment in the community’s future over shorter-term, cosmetic or consumption effects.\textsuperscript{11} Such decisions are what constitute the economy as a political and ethical space. In our action research project, we are working with community groups to identify where these kinds of decisions are possible and to make transparent some of the effects of choices either way with respect to community economic development.

How the projects fostered by the Jagna Community Partnering Project will fare, what kinds of governance they will develop, what sort of links with the municipal government will emerge and what concrete contribution they will be able to make to strengthening the community economy of Jagna are yet to be determined. The pathway that is being built has similarities and differences with previous community-based interventions. The main point of departure is that the Jagna Community Partnering Project is starting in the community, building on what is there and producing the steps of the process as it goes, not applying a model taken from the shelf of an aid agency, government bureaucracy or university. There is recognition that it is the ethical decisions made and not the alignments with economic structures that will ensure success of these projects. Activating the decision space that the community economy offers is no easy task. The discomfort and uncertainty associated with this process is palpable, as is the excitement and pleasure associated with shifts in subject position from passive victim/recipient of the dole-out system to active shaper of new relationships and local knowledges.

Reluctant subjects

Compared to other Asian cultures, however, ‘Pre-Western Filipino culture was not an advanced and sophisticated culture. It has not attained those specialized organizations and institutions for religious, political and economic life that produced complicated structure in the pre-Western civilizations of the Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu peoples of Asia’.

\textsuperscript{158} (Corpuz 1965: 76 cited in Abueva 1988: 22)

The monocultural logics of scientific knowledge, linear time, hierarchical classification, global scale and capitalist productivity that Santos asks us to challenge are not only the product of western scholarship nor are they solely used to ‘understand’ differences between the so-called developed and developing worlds
but, as shown here, are put to work creating absence and lack by scholars of ‘the south’ as well. In the Philippines, where ‘nation-hood’ is inseparable from a project of Christianization and colonial occupation that dates from the mid-sixteenth century, the hold of epistemologies of the ‘north’ is deeply ingrained. Perhaps the greatest challenge to a post-development agenda lies not so much with generating new theories and strategies, but with the subjects whose constitution through development practice, Enlightenment thought, and Spanish and then US colonization are reluctant to ‘become’ anew. Just as the state electricity worker who has been retrenched because of privatization in the Latrobe Valley of Australia, or the manufacturing worker whose factory has closed because of Argentina’s economic crisis wants his old job, not an alternative economy, so the rural Filipino tends to want the dole out, not a role in the community economy.

If, however, we look to the horizon of concrete possibility, we see the emergence of new economic subjects among the unlikeliest population – the indentured migrant labourers and quasi-enslaved migrant domestic workers, the Filipino OCWs, who are becoming investors and community entrepreneurs. Through a long and slow process of subjectivation (or value formation in the language of the NGOs concerned), these migrant workers are beginning to see themselves anew. As we work in the Jagna municipality on strengthening and enlarging the community economy, new kinds of economic subjects will inevitably emerge. In the process of making credible the diversity of practices that support subsistence and sustain livelihoods, participants in workshops held thus far have come to appreciate and value what they have, awakening to the possibility that they can start from where they are and build upon this substrate. In the process of expanding what is seen as part of the community commons to include not just the natural environment but shared traditions and knowledges, new ways of tending, reclaiming, replenishing, creating, enlarging and sharing the commons are being discussed. In the process of researching the feasibility of beginning new community enterprises that focus on surplus generation, participants are becoming aware that the economic interdependence of individuals and groups in Jagna is a strength to be creatively deployed.

Recent work within economic geography on the social economy (Amin et al. 2002), informal economy (Williams 2004), alternative economic spaces (Leyshon et al. 2003) and diverse economic dynamics (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2004, 2006; Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003) provides a vibrant backdrop to the post-development project of imagining and enacting multiple ecologies of productivity. This work, largely generated with respect to ‘First World’ contexts, is challenging many of the monocultural logics that have oppressed peoples of the south and north. As we hope to have demonstrated in this chapter, a post-development discourse may well offer a timely end to the false division that has separated ‘area studies’ from ‘disciplinary studies’, the ‘rest’ from the ‘west’. This might be the least important of the surplus of possibilities a post-development discourse can offer, but for those of us interested in reconfiguring our geographic practice, it signals exciting times ahead.
Notes

1 This is one of four sites that are the focus of an ARC-Linkage Project Katherine Gibson is involved in with ANU colleagues Deirdre McKay, Kathryn Robinson and Andrew McWilliam and doctoral students Amanda Cahill and Jayne Curnow (Australian Research Council Grant No. LP0347118 ‘Negotiating alternative economic strategies for regional development in Indonesia and the Philippines’). The action research project is being conducted in partnership with Australia’s official development assistance agency (AusAID), four municipal governments (two in each country) and a key NGO in each site. In the context of recently decentralized governance, the four-year research programme is testing out the utility of the Community Partnering model, an approach that was piloted as part of an action research project in the Latrobe Valley of Australia (Cameron and Gibson 2001, 2005). This model envisions diverse community economies mobilized for sustainable regional development.

2 *ningas cogon*, the flaring up of dried grass, to blaze brightly for a moment, and then to die’ (Tinker 1965: 57).

3 This emphasis on collecting stories of community successes, strengths and capacities is a central aspect of the Assets Based Community Development (ABCD) method developed by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993). See Mathie and Cunningham (2002) and Cunningham and Mathie (2003) for discussions of the use of ABCD in the ‘development’ context.

4 Many of the practices we were able to document would be described in contemporary ‘development speak’ as ‘social capital’, that is, relations that ‘bond’ family members, close friends and neighbours, that ‘bridge’ horizontally to distant friends and other neighbourhoods and that ‘link’ vertically to people who are more powerful or command resources (Woolcock 2001: 13).

5 An economics of surplus is another of those absences or impossibilities that is delegitimized by the monoculture of economic knowledge. The category of surplus is central to the Marxian analysis of class processes (see Gibson-Graham et al. 2000, 2001, for applications of a surplus-oriented economics in settings as diverse as the household, the industrial corporation, tenant farming and elite educational colleges).

6 Any one economic actor (either person or business) might participate in many of these economic relations, for example, a non-capitalist cooperative enterprise engages in formal as well as alternative market transactions or a worker in a state enterprise might also engage in neighbourhood barter and perform unpaid family labour.

7 Our early interventions have attempted to elaborate what Santos calls an ‘ecology of productivitiy’, that is, the practice of ‘… recuperating and valorizing alternative systems of production, popular economic organizations, workers’ cooperatives, self-managed enterprises, solidarity economy etc., which have been hidden or discredited by the capitalist orthodoxy of productivity’. He goes on to note: ‘This is perhaps the most controversial domain of the sociology of absences, for it confronts directly both the paradigm of development and infinite economic growth and the logic of the primacy of the objectives of accumulation over the objectives of distribution that sustain global capitalism’ (2004: 240).

8 The commons of this community is shared in the yearly fiesta in May when, barangay by barangay in systematic succession, households of all status and wealth levels redistribute any surplus they have, offering food and hospitality to all others over a period of two to three days. This event is the focus for saving of money, hoarding of goods and feeding up of stock for months prior. To use Gudeman’s terms, through the fiesta the ‘common base’ of the community is extended to all – those that have more to give, give more, those that have little to give, still give (2001).

9 Commercial profits are surely being made by merchants operating in Jagna, but these are privately appropriated and do not enter into the community economy arena.

10 Cahill (2004) reports that the water system is not yet completed. The community has
embarked on a staged development that is still dependent on volunteer labour and contributions from community members. Thus far, this process has supplied all houses with water-sealed toilets, which was a major problem before (personal communication).

11 With the opening of one possibility, another is closed, and it could be argued that the demise of ritual, ‘unproductive’ expenditure, or the practice of sociable and relatively resource-neutral bayanihan efforts, could undermine the very sense of community upon which the community economy is based. Mayfair Yang’s exploration of the relationship between ritual and economic development in Southern China is interesting in this regard (Gibson-Graham 2000). She argues that the resumption of excessive expenditure in ritual practices since its prohibition by the Communist government has accompanied the rapid growth of small businesses and suggests that there might be some connection between the release offered by ritual and the renewed vibrancy of local entrepreneurship. At the same time, we need to be aware of the possibility that the extension of community economic practices could take a coercive turn as happened in Indonesia with the appropriation of the traditional practice of voluntarism, ‘gotong royong’, into state ideology where it acted as justification for the forced ‘donation’ of local labour to state-building projects (Bowen 1986). A similar move was attempted in the Philippines with appropriation of the bayanihan spirit for state-led community development activities as Tinker implies (1965: 54).

References


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11 Plachimada resistance

A post-development social movement metaphor?

K. Ravi Raman

Theoretical premises

Three major theoretical resurgences, closely related yet distinct, have thus far taken place in the broad discipline of social science since the early 1960s. These have come to be known as neo-marxism, post-structuralism and post-marxism, respectively. While the neo-marxists are credited with the dependency/world system approach, it was the post-structuralists who floated the post-development paradigm, and the post-marxists the project of radical democracy and identity struggles. Throughout their forays into the realm of knowledge and practice, reflections on development and its historical implications have ever remained at the forefront. Even so, the post-development approach, though in itself lacking coherence on many grounds, offers an intellectual space for an insightful and radical critique of the way in which the idea of development is conceived and practised. Deriving as it does social insights from as wide a range of disciplines as political economy, social anthropology, human ecology and identity politics, it offers scope for a confluence of various theoretical streams. More importantly, the new social movements on which it anchors hope find themselves allied with such varying concepts as ‘anti-systemic movements’, ‘counter-hegemonic struggles’ or ‘movement of movements’. The present chapter attempts to explore the nuances of the inherently synthesising modes of the post-development approach, which, though, is not immune to criticism, and to build up a case for what could be termed a post-development social movement (PSM), as is evident in this study of the cola-quit movement in Plachimada, which has ceased to be a mere name; it is now a post-development resistance metaphor that not only portrays but also defines the reality.

With its penetrating analysis of a historically generated inequality in power relations across the world and of the mechanisms of exploitation and their impact at least from the long sixteenth century, the dependency/world system theory (see Frank 1971; Amin 1974; Wallerstein 1976; Chase-Dunn et al. 1997) had provided a radical critique of pre-existing ones, particularly the modernisation approach, and had argued that development was the monopoly of the West, which it achieved at the expense of the peripheries, through the expansion of the world capitalist system. While they challenged the idea that capitalism
rendered development inevitable and established its outcome as the ‘development of underdevelopment’, post-development theorists (Escobar 1985, 1995; Esteva 1987, 1992; Sachs 1993; Ferguson 1995; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997), on their part, put the very idea of development in the dock (see Levine 2001; Ziai 2004). And even as the neo-marxists probe alternative development strategies as part of radical alternations in global power relations, the post-development theorists led by the Foucauldian notion of power/knowledge/regime of truth (see Foucault 1977, 1980) argue that the very idea of development remains firmly ensconced within global power relations and, hence, constitutes the problem rather than the solution.

The post-development approach is in itself broadly delineated along two lines, as being viewed by many scholars: the alternative to development and the alternative development, the boundary between the two, however, being not only hoary but ambiguous as well. When Escobar (1995) calls for ‘the abandonment of the whole epistemological and political field of postwar development’ and Rahnema (1997) and Ferguson (1995), to a certain extent, say that development did not fail because it was implemented poorly but rather it was ‘the wrong answer to needs and aspirations’, they all mean the same: that blind faith in development is in itself to be rejected, and alternatives to development sought. Having failed to come to grips with real-life situations and practical scenarios save a few (see Ferguson 1995), this band of post-development theorists remains true to pure theoretical constructs, bringing to a halt their journey to an anti-essentialist goal. Further, though new social movements have been acknowledged, post-development literature has either shown little regard for the grassroots-level experiences and movements or failed to situate the same in the larger world system.

The other strand of the post-development perspective, though sharing the view that the idea of development needs to be repudiated, does not condemn all that is associated with the theme of development (Escobar 1985; Banuri 1999; Hoogvelt 2001; Nustad 2001). Instead, it is theorised that rather than submitting to external forces, the true development of a society lies in acknowledging its cultural commonsense and the soundness of everyday experience in the generation of ‘knowledge as emancipation’ (see Santos 1995) and its practice. However, this development is required to address the complex relations existing in society, as interpenetrating social identities and spheres in terms of race, caste, gender, environment and technology, each playing its own crucial role on how power is distributed and how the larger social transformation is oriented. Any development that evolves otherwise is bound to elicit its own resistance movements, both at the local and at the global levels. If a critique of cultural imperialism and developmentalism as practised by the West is read in a constructivist and anti-essentialist perspective, it would thus qualify as ‘sceptical post-development discourse’, as against the ‘neo-populist variant’ of post-development (Ziai 2004), wherein all that is termed development becomes subject to criticism and is doomed to be abandoned in imaginary landscapes.

That development that is shaped by radical democracy would coincide with
the agenda of post-marxist theory, which, as the very name suggests, grows not from a rejection of neo-marxist thought but rather from its partial endorsement (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Lummis 1996).² It implies that the issues related with development cannot be reduced to the restricted domain of economic aspects or imperialist-dominant power relations alone, a pre-occupation of the early writings of the neo-marxists, but encompasses as wide a range of realms of thought and issues as culture, knowledge and identity. It not only addresses the unequal power relations across the regions as the neo-marxist theorists do, but also explores the relations of oppression at multiple levels, global, local and a still micro-level, and thus arrives at a contemporary understanding and ‘growing awareness of oppression’ (Banuri 1999: 95), making the ‘sceptical post-development texts’ more meaningful and relevant (Ziai 2004: 1058). Post-marxists, influenced by the Gramscian tradition, consider new social movements as integral to the process of radicalisation of democracy. The new social movements in such cases are largely the livelihood and human rights movements (see Pollack 2001), which combine the local efforts to resist the expansion of capitalist initiatives or state-led development projects that destroy local forms of economy, society and ecology, which in turn leads to the ‘fusion of human ecology with political economy’ (Escobar 1999; see also Peet and Watts 1996; Bryant and Bailey 1997; Kiel et al. 1998; Brosius et al. 2005).

When we find the world system theorists themselves evincing serious interest in what they call ‘anti-systemic movements’ (Arrighi et al. 1989), and the ‘movement of movements’ (Wallerstein 2002), the radical democracy project comes full circle. With its insatiable appetite for the world market, which has been in evidence since the sixteenth century, global capital found new routes for accumulation by the late 1960s and early 1970s through an intensification of the diffusion of cultural products and ‘cultural practices’ (see Tomlinson 1991; Petras 1993; Appadurai 1996; Petras and Veltmeyer 2005) and generating its own counter-cultural movements. The invasion of even the remotest villages of the peripheries by McDonalds, Starbucks and Coca-Cola has brought the world to a state of cultural globalisation. In the bargain, the TNCs would appear to have purchased the rights to anti-labour practices, resource theft, ecological degradation and human rights violation, which are on a steady rise with the strengthening of, to employ Kapferer’s usage, the ‘oligarchic-corporate formations of power’ (Kapferer 2005). Resistance to globalisation in general and to the MNCs in particular has consequently become not only inevitable but has changed character to suit its foe. The global campaigns against McDonalds and Taco Bell restaurants, as well as a very successful campaign against Shell and a variety of environmental movements in the global south (see Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997), clearly reflect this change. Farther afield, similar but far more diverse movements erupted: the Zapatista uprising in 1996, the movements in Seattle in 1999, in Quebec and Prague in 2001, Genoa in 2002 and Muthanga in India in 2003 (Ravi Raman 2004), to name a few. This is yet another justification of this study, as it is at one level precipitated by the corporate–state structures, which in turn were spawned by the new economic order in the neo-liberal
phase where corporate power/violence and the market-driven developmentalism rule over the state (Boswell and Chase-Dunn 2000; Starr 2000; Sklair 2001; Brecher et al. 2002; see also Frundt 1987; Hutt 2001; Carty 2002; Gledhill 2003). At another level, it is the ‘subaltern other’ who addresses the concerns of human ecology and political economy as the direct outcome of the kind of corporate-led market-driven developmentalism.

The theoretical framework of the chapter is built on the bedrock of the Cola-Quit Plachimada Campaign in the Indian state of Kerala, which, in all its aspects, represents what can be termed a PSM. It is a new social movement in that it is defined in terms of collective social bargaining which carves out a political space for itself between state and civil society, often conscientising both, and in the process breaking free of the cramped enclosures of the traditional left–right domains. It is a post-development movement in that it evolved in response to market- and/or corporate-driven developmentalist ideology that explicitly worked towards a furthering of the interests of global capitalism. It is a post-development social movement in that it exposes the way in which western-centric developmentalism is conceived and practised, and the way in which a counter-hegemony is being articulated in both discursive and non-discursive domains having a larger impact on the society. In fact, the PSMs, as conceived in this chapter, signify a gradual and a steady progress from the premise of ‘resistance ethics’ (see Foucault 1977) to that of development ethics. PSMs thus serve to expose the insidious spread of corporate power, which leads to multiple oppressions by the same corporate capital and/or corporate oligarchic conglomerates of the present-day global capitalism, often aided and abetted by state-led ‘scientific’ knowledge and the legal system as part of power politics. And even as they lay bare the tortuous secret of corporate violence, they also pose a challenge to it, a challenge thrown by the local communities with their ‘micro-politics’, building, after Gramsci, a transverse solidarity bloc that surpasses narrow identity politics and comes together on the question of re-asserting the social right to development ethics.3

Cola-nising Plachimada

Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt. Ltd (hereafter Coca-Cola), an Indian subsidiary of the US-based Coca-Cola, was turned out of India in 1977, when the then ruling Janata government decreed that foreign capital could own no more than two-fifths of the shares of their Indian subsidiaries and that all foreign firms including Coca-Cola make known the ingredients that went into their products. Coca-Cola was reluctant to disclose its ingredients on the one hand and neither was it keen on a dis-investment of its equity in favour of Indian shareholders. However, the multinational was permitted re-entry in 1993 when India changed its foreign direct investment rules in the wake of neo-liberalism, on condition that it would divest 49 per cent of its stakes to resident Indian shareholders by 2002 (see Clairmonte and Cavanagh 1988). Immediately following its re-entry in 1993, Coca-Cola began to expand its global commodity production chain
through a process of concentration and centralisation of capital, grabbing a market share of more than 61 per cent, leaving 36 per cent to its nearest rival Pepsi and only the remaining 3 per cent to the local soft drink industry.

Coca-Cola set up factory chains throughout India, mostly in the rural peripheries, where water, land and labour were cheap. Plachimada in the northern district of Kerala, southern India, adjacent to Tamil Nadu, was geo-strategically selected for such an abundance of resources. In obsequiousness to developmentalism and foreign direct investment, the left government of Kerala spared no effort to prepare the ground for the entry of Coca-Cola in Plachimada. The company was permitted to acquire 34 acres of land to set up the factory; this in itself was in violation of the Kerala Land Utilisation Act, 1967, which restricts and prohibits the conversion of areas under food crops to non-food crops or for any other purpose. The multinational commissioned its factory in March 2000, with an investment of Rs80 crores, adding to the already existing investment of around Rs4000 crores across the country. Permission for the functioning of the plant was granted by the local Perumatty Panchayat, led by the ruling Janata Dal and a political ally of the LDF, in January 2000, in keeping with the provisions of the Kerala Panchayat Act, 1994. The permission was granted quickly enough on an assurance that waste water and emitted gases would be appropriately disposed of, also in anticipation of the massive revenue and the local-level employment it was expected to generate. However, while the revenue expected was almost achieved, the employment generated was meagre – only 130 permanent workers were recruited, the remaining 270 being employed on a contract basis. Hardly any permanent labour was recruited from the local community, and even among the contract workers the local representation was low and the wage rate meagre. About 5.61 lakh litres of soft drink – Coca-Cola, Limca, Fanta, Sprite, Thums Up, Maaza and Kinley Soda – were manufactured per day requiring huge extraction of ground water every day, from half-a-dozen borewells and other open wells sunk in the factory premises.

Multiple violation, multiple oppression

In India, Coca-Cola has come under attack broadly on three counts: it causes water scarcity among the local communities due to over-extraction of ground-water, it pollutes drinking water due to the disposal of sludge and treated effluents and the soft drink it manufactures itself contains pesticides that are harmful to health.4 Plachimada is the most telling example of corporate capital appropriating the local riches and, indeed, the very livelihood of the people without ever consulting them on the matter. Particularly hard hit are the adivasis and the dalits, the women folk of the surrounding areas having to travel longer distances to fetch potable water. It is not uncommon to see convoys of cola-bottle loads move out of factory sites to the urban centres, while women, with their children, walk home laden with pots of precious drinking water they fetch from far-off places. Some of the key demands of the Cola-Quit Plachimada Campaign are that the cola plant in Plachimada be shut down permanently by the government,
that all affected community members be compensated for losses incurred as a result of Coca-Cola’s indiscriminate practices, that all cases filed against the activists be dismissed and that Coca-Cola initiate a rehabilitation programme for the workers who have been laid off.

To date, the movement against Coca-Cola has passed through four phases. The first phase saw local adivasi and dalit families protesting against the rapid depletion of water from their traditional sources, including wells, with gross contamination of whatever little was left; they brought this to the notice of human rights’ activists in the area. The Coca-Cola Virudha Janakeeya Samara Samithi (Anti-Coca-Cola People’s Struggle Committee) that was immediately constituted, and comprised both Gandhian as well as moderate-radical groups such as the SUCI, Porattom and Ayyankali Pada, the latter Maoist outfits, took a decision to blockade and picket the factory on 22 April 2002; the protest was inaugurated by C. K. Janu, who was to launch the Muthanga resistance movement at a later date. The People’s Struggle Committee erected a thatched shed in front of the factory, declaring an all-out war until Cola Quit Plachimada. The struggle moved into its second phase by 9 June 2002, when the agitators – men, women and children, mostly adivasis and dalits – dumped the foul-smelling, dry, sedimental slurry waste that the factory had been either disposing of in the lands surrounding the factory or supplying to the farmers as fertilisers in the factory premises. Police brutality in its most cruel form was unleashed on the mob; the protesters arrested and beaten up, in open violation of the laws encoded in the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Far from being intimidated by such measures, the villagers pressed on, now with a great deal of participation from various NGOs, leading to the constitution of the Plachimada Solidarity Committee to aid and strengthen the original movement initiated by the People’s Struggle Committee.

Decisive action was instituted in the third phase of the struggle, with the local people insisting that the Perumatty Grama Panchayat – the local self-government institution – cancel the licence granted to the multinational. This was a historic move that generated a spate of legal wrangling between the multinational and the local self-government, the latter having gained added muscle amidst the larger process of decentralisation. Moreover, this decision from below had the Left Democratic Front taking a stand against Coca-Cola and Pepsi, the latter engaged in production in the nearby industrial zone of the Puthusseri Panchayat. The current phase of the movement, which may also be categorised as the fourth, began with a massive networking of NGOs and public institutions both within and outside India. It was marked by a series of interventions by the NGOs’ alliance with the local village panchayat and the counter-discourses generated both within the legal and non-legal domains, and an articulation counter to the formal knowledge systems. Certain social NGOs such as the Navadhanya-sponsored Global Water Conference in Plachimada and the scientific and social probe into corporate irresponsibility by the Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) and the Thrissur-based Jananeethi – to name a few – continued to articulate social and scientific knowledge that the Campaign began to rely upon. The Cola Quit Plachi-
mada Campaign (hereafter the Campaign), an amalgam of organisations acting in
defence of the local community, includes the People’s Struggle Committee, the
Plachimada Solidarity Committee, the Panchayat, the Solidarity, the large number
of NGOs and the National Alliance of People’s Movement. The formation of a
human chain around all the cola factories across the country in January 2005 was a
fitting culmination to the extensive integration among the various organisations
fighting against the global cola giants.

The legal war between Coca-Cola and the local panchayat/people began
when the single bench of the Kerala High Court (HC) ruled on 16 December
2003 that the company would have to seek alternative sources of water for its
bottling plant in Plachimada. The HC maintained that ground water belonged to
the people and that the government did not possess the right to allow a private
party to extract it in such huge quantities, it being ‘a property held by it in trust’.
By this time, the movement had grown to attract world attention and succeeded
in persuading institutions and scholars to conduct studies not only on the water
shortage but also to establish whether the functioning of the factory had really
caused any water pollution in the nearby wells. The company’s claim, echoed by
state-sponsored studies that pollution of ground water, if any, could not be attri-
buted to the discharge from the factory, was found to be baseless6 considering
the fact that the wells with excess total dissolved solids were actually those that
were in close proximity with the factory – an incriminating piece of evidence
that Coca-Cola and the state institutions appear to have concealed. ‘Face the
Facts’ on BBC Radio on 25 July 2003, based on a study carried out by David
Santillo, University of Exeter, revealed high levels of two toxic metals in the
solid waste discharged by the multinational.7 Following the BBC report,
an analysis of sludge and effluent conducted by the Kerala State Pollution
Control Board (KSPCB) indicated, in a reversal of its own earlier verdict, that
the concentration of cadmium in the sludge was high, making it worthy of class-
ification as hazardous waste. The Board instructed the company not to let the
sludge out of the factory premises and to desist from supplying it as fertiliser. The
multinational denied all charges originally made by the panchayat and now sup-
plemented by the public institutions. The Panchayat, however, asserted that since
the company refused to abide by the conditions for renewal of licence, the latter
stood cancelled from April 2003. Further, the entire area around the factory having
been declared drought-prone, the government directed the company to stall opera-
tions. Though the decision of the panchayat was challenged by Coca-Cola, the HC
ruled in the government’s favour and the factory has remained shut since March
2004.

However, the Campaign suffered a setback when the division bench of the
Kerala HC on 7 April 2005 issued a verdict virtually entitling Coca-Cola to
resume operations in its cola factory in Plachimada. It was largely based on an
expert committee report, led by the Centre for Water Resources Development
and Management (CWRDM), that the division bench of the HC ruled that under
normal rainfall conditions, the planned groundwater withdrawal by the company
would not adversely affect the availability of groundwater in and around the
factory complex. The local panchayat, however, asserted that the CWRDM had first of all overestimated the groundwater availability in the area, given that the natural recharge of rainfall was barely adequate to meet domestic and agricultural needs, and, second, that it had under-reported the daily consumption of water by the multinational giant. The division bench of the HC maintains that, having granted permission for the company to operate in the first place, it is unfair to refuse to ‘quench its thirst’. But it has, in effect, put the Judiciary in the dock. The Judiciary, perhaps by its close adherence to the written word alone, has failed to comprehend the fact that the local people have been seeking justice without violence and that the movement they have initiated spills over from the realm of human ecology to those of political economy, indigeneity and cultural identity. The panchayat and the Campaign had declared that they would continue their struggle both within the court – they have now appealed against the HC decision in the Supreme Court of India where the final verdict is awaited – and out on the streets.

**Ripple effect of the movement**

Amid all these developments, the Campaign continued to gather momentum, uncovering as it progressed many related concerns which in turn strengthened the movement itself. The most significant issue was that of the ethics involved in the apparent double standards regarding health norms in the West and the Third World. A study conducted in August 2003 by the Delhi-based CSE revealed that 12 brands of soft drink manufactured by PepsiCo and Coca-Cola contained toxic pesticide residues, the ingestion of which are potentially hazardous and may be capable of causing, in the long run, even cancer. The residue levels far exceeded the maximum limit for pesticides in water used as ‘food’ set down by the European Economic Commission. The study stated that the companies used chemicals for which admittedly no licence had been obtained by them from any of the authorities including the local self-government. The CSE’s report indicates that Coca-Cola and PepsiCo comply with the highest quality standards in the US and rely largely on the guidelines of the World Health Organisation, whereas in India, the products of these very same companies contain 37–42 times more pesticides than are allowed by the EC norms. It may be emphasised here that repeat studies conducted three years later in 2006 have reconfirmed these facts.

The CSE intervention paved the way for the constitution of a 15-member Joint Parliamentary cum Scientific Expert Committee (JPC), to assess its findings and to suggest the criteria for norms that would outline safety standards for soft drinks, fruit juices and other beverages in which water is the main constituent. To the CSE’s credit, the JPC report, which was tabled in the Indian Parliament on 5 February 2004, upheld the allegations raised by it on pesticide residue in carbonated water, with respect to three samples each of the 12 brands of PepsiCo and Coca-Cola. The JPC further pointed out that the explanations tendered by PepsiCo and Coca-Cola were unsatisfactory in the context of pesticide residues in their brands. The Committee’s findings have disproved the
government’s earlier claim that pesticide residues are removed during washing, peeling, cutting and extraction of juices. It has called for a fixing of separate pesticide residue limits for juices and other beverages, independent of norms for soft drinks, a suggestion regarding which almost all the corporate organisations such as the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India expressed reservations. It must be noted that multinationals often market products that are banned in their home countries in emerging new markets elsewhere; but the story of Coca-Cola in India goes much deeper than the toxic colas being served to the public, and no measure of public relations gimmicks can solve this problem. It is worth noting that Coca-Cola recalled its entire bottled water product line in the UK, Dasani, at the first news that it contained contaminants. But in India, they continue to sell the products despite scientific evidence that their products contain higher levels of pesticides than those allowed by the US and EU standards. While the Indian parliament has banned the sale of Coke and Pepsi products in its cafeteria, it has refused to enforce a similar ban in the rest of the country, revealing the double standards of the Indian ruling class. However, the Kerala government has been driven to ban the sale of these soft drinks in the light of repeated disclosures regarding the pesticide residues in the beverages as well as the gathering public opinion against Coca-Cola. This was a decidedly significant victory for the Campaign opening as it did a fresh encounter in the cola war.

Meanwhile, the Coca-Cola company had to face yet another historic defeat from the High Court of Rajasthan (RHC) in connection with the complete and full disclosure of the composition and contents of their productions including the presence, if any, of the pesticides and chemicals therein, so that the consumers can make an informed choice before buying and consuming the products. The company, on the other hand, responded that they are not obliged by law to disclose the presence or absence of pesticides in their products. The HC ruled that the consumers have a constitutional right to the full disclosure of the composition and contents of the beverages. In October 2004, the HC directed Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and all other manufacturers of carbonated beverages and soft drinks to disclose the composition and contents of the products, including the presence, if any, of the pesticides and chemicals, on the bottle. Quite predictably the soft drink giants refused to comply with the RHC verdict; for Coca-Cola, this refusal is but a continuation of its trade war in the US Court (see Clairmonte and Cavanagh 1988).

**Transverse solidarity and sites of resistance**

New social movements sprout from the seed of local discontent against capitalist penetrations to branch out and gradually encompass first the state-centric (see Tarrow *et al.* 2005) and then the ‘transnational public sphere’ (Ray 1993; Evans 2000; Guidry *et al.* 2000), targeting multi-level structure authorities, including the nation-state, multilateral institutions and transnational capital. While the US
and Western Europe see the emergence of new social movements as being directly linked to the failure of the democratic system to guarantee individual freedom and equality within the neo-liberal format, Latin American movements still lay stress on the primacy of crises in the social structure, collective identities and economic and social contradictions as the root cause of their social ill-health. It was always the lower class, and often the marginalised races/castes – the subalterns – who became the harbingers of new social movements in Latin America, with women playing an active part (see Frank and Fuentes 1987), and a parallel could certainly be drawn with respect to the new social movements in Asia, as this study on the anti-cola movement in Plachimada informs us. We thus gather that the new social movements taking shape across the continents do not necessarily conform to any single theoretical framework but rather rely on methodological interactionism as a privileged mode of enquiry, engaging with various epistemological positions in the disciplines of political economy, sociology and political and applied anthropology. It is this inclination to draw upon various disciplines by the agencies involved in the movement which could be seen as characteristic for the PSM. Another one is the very heterogeneity of the social actors from different political-ideological camps that have coalesced to give form to the movement. Yet another feature of this concept of PSM is the combination of discursive and non-discursive forms of counter-discourse staged by the subaltern classes/castes as part of questioning the ideological and practical base of the existing vistas of developmentalism. It grows with everyday forms of protests\footnote{11} that do not lend themselves to post-modernist privileging of identity but rather to the everyday concerns of livelihood and human rights that are as important for those who launch the struggle as for the rest and equally relevant to the present as to the future.

The Campaign qualifies as a PSM on many counts. With respect to the actors involved in the movement, there is something that compels the coming together of political-ideological spaces in such a way that all those with varying ideologies but sharing concerns regarding sustainable livelihood systems join forces to fight a common enemy. The anti-cola consciousness in India has apparently brought together a curious mix of social activists – the Gandhians, the moderate environmentalists and the radical Maoists. But it is not difficult to trace the common thread that keeps these groups together in this struggle; it is not a single issue but rather multiple issues that are at stake here with development ethics being the overarching concern. The problem of water shortage, the pollution of wells and the large-scale environmental damage that has occurred have all worked to bring together these seemingly disparate groups, who ultimately share a common ideology of collective ownership of common resources as well as the sustainability of these resources.

When the very idea of Graha Swaraj – the avowed policy of the Gandhians – stands violated in spite of constitutional amendments to the opposite effect, leading to a further erosion in rights and rights-based development, there seems every reason for the Gandhians to join the radicals, including the Maoists, who believe that self-reliance in development requires an ecologically sustainable
resource base and an ethically oriented development paradigm. Moreover, the violence in these regions having been spawned by the growth of corporate capital, the solidarity among these groups can hardly be considered an oddity. Of late, Solidarity, a junior collective of the Jama It Islami has also joined the struggle, working towards an anti-cola consciousness, partly pushing their agenda of outstaying the US interests during the US–Iraq war.

Resistance to cola, indeed, is simultaneously a resistance to the homogenisation of global culture in an era when the commodity production is increasingly becoming a cultural phenomenon (Jameson 2000) with the US advancing its hegemony. Countering not only commodity production but also the cultural symbols associated with it becomes integral to ‘imagining a post-development era’ (Escobar 1995). In this respect too, the Campaign has advanced its terrain of resistance. The modes of resistance adopted against Coca-Cola were as varied as the smashing of cola bottles in wholesale/retail shops, picketing of the movement of loads of cola and raising public consciousness about the health hazards caused by the consumption of cola. Even within the state of Kerala, Plachimada is not the only site of power and resistance; the movement recognises the multiple sites of resistance that fanned the fire of the protests – protest marches against the retail shops and wholesale centres, the blocking of cola vehicles, the mass rallies in front of the state secretariat and so forth. The resistance continued to expose the ground reality that the accumulating corporate empires are built over the ashes of a large number of home-grown soft-drink-manufacturing units in which large numbers of families used to find sustenance. The movement also succeeded in persuading certain village panchayats in the state to declare their villages cola-free and often helped to substitute cola by coconut – ‘God’s Own Cola’. In a sense, it provided a platform of solidarity for both radicals and Gandhians, the latter seeing in the movement a politics of swadeshi, a critical weapon they had used during the nationalist movement against British imperialism.

It is noteworthy that the Campaign has not lost momentum over an extended period of nearly four years, during which time it has evolved from a local-level community resistance into a nationwide movement. This is hardly surprising considering the attitudes adopted by the state authorities and the judiciary and even the state-funded scientific bodies that have each in turn negated the progress made by the Campaign. The Campaign on its part grew from strength to strength, gathering as it moved on a heavy burden of vexing issues and concerns that gradually but inevitably came to light.

Apart from the inadequacies in the Panchayat Act, the gross incompetence or negligence of public institutions in India stands painfully exposed in this context. Neither the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act nor the Essential Commodities Act nor the Bureau of Indian Standards prescribe any safety standards as regards pesticide residues in water used in the manufacture of soft drinks, fruit juices and other beverages. These agencies became alive to the matter only after the intervention made by the CSE. The differences in the results from the Central Government scientific institutions before and after the intervention of the JPC cannot be quite so lightly explained away. The state-led institutions like
the Kerala State Pollution Control Board and Kerala Ground Water Department were also caught giving contradictory results as part of their own business of constructing the ‘regime of truth’, in a way the new social movement has thus helped focus attention on ‘scientific knowledge and its social roles and functions, reconnecting to earlier challenges to the hegemony of science and technology’ (Eyerman and Jamison 1991).

An equally important point worth noting is that the law and judicial field continues to retain its power in a modern sovereign state and the truth claims they make are as potent in affecting the entire social field as are those of the disciplinary sciences and their professional experts. Further, the entire angle from which the Judiciary, which has approached the problem, seems questionable; rather than passing legislation to protect the local community, it resorted to a hair-splitting legal logic maintaining that the said restrictions on the extraction of water if applied to a legal person – in this case Coca-Cola – must necessarily apply to a natural person as well. To draw a parallel between individual extraction and large-scale extraction of groundwater is nothing short of absurd (Ravi Raman 2005). When an individual draws water from their own well, it hurts the neighbour in no way at all. But when the company draws water the neighbourhood runs dry as has been happening in Plachimada. The HC ruling to the contrary seems inexplicable. One is also at a loss to explain the eagerness of the Judiciary to support a multinational instead of its own people. The face-off is between an indigenous community that struggles for its livelihood and the corporate capital that seeks to accumulate further. ‘Knowledge as emancipation’ comes from the ground-level organic truth: when one hears that the innocent assertion made by the people of Plachimada that they had never known water scarcity prior to the arrival of Coca-Cola goes unheeded. To quote Milamma, one of the most committed of the women protesters, ‘we have been living here for the last 25 years. We never went out to bring water. But today we walk a distance more than two kilometers to fetch water’.12

**Blazing the trail: the Plachimada metaphor**

The Campaign synchronises well with those world-wide movements, particularly in peripheral nations like Bolivia, Uruguay, Argentina and Ghana, which face local resistance against commodification of water and ‘corporate theft’ (Barlow and Clark 2003). The local people of Cochabamba in Bolivia forced the state to revoke its decision to allow privatisation of water by MNCs like Bechtel in March 2000; the people of Plachimada have echoed quite the same sentiments. The Campaign is, most of all, a fitting repartee to the ever-deepening process of privatisation and sequestering of community resource, largely through the offices of global capital, in this case, the world water corporations, soft-drink giants with the GATS providing the facilitative services,13 making the task of new social movements such as the Campaign more complex. Knowing well that the Plachimada concerns are not unique but rather a part of the global threat to community living and sharing resources, the Campaign has made crit-
ical links across the cultural contexts the world over, and this is yet another lesson learnt from this movement. The *Plachimada resistance* is reproduced, every now and then, in response to global capitalism.

Within India, several other movements have been initiated against the soft-drink industry in India – in Shiva Ganga (Tamil Nadu), Hajipur and Patna (Bihar), Varanasi, Ballia, Dasna, Hathras and Bijnor (UP), Paniput (Haryana), Mandideep (Madhya Pradesh), Ahmedabad and Khera (Gujarat) and Thane (Maharashtra) – and the Campaign has succeeded to a certain extent in expressing their solidarity with the Plachimada movement. An international campaign is now on, aimed at rendering Coca-Cola accountable for its alleged human rights violations, and it has joined forces with the Colombian trade union, Sinaltrainal. To quote Edgar Pacz, the International Affairs director of Sinaltrainal,

| the Indian and Colombian struggles to hold Coca-Cola accountable are part of the same struggle. In India, communities are fighting for their lives because of Coca-Cola’s aggressive use of the water, and in Colombia, workers and communities are fighting for their lives because of the violence that Coca-Cola employs to get its way.14 |

To quote Srivastava, who heads one such international campaign: ‘we will take this battle to where it hurts Coca-Cola the most – the US and the European Union, its largest markets.’ Earlier, on 18 January 2004, a large number of people joined hands at the World Social Forum asking Coca-Cola to quit India. New social movement activism the world over considers this a major step against cultural homogenisation and the implications thereof, often propounded by the multinationals in this era of neo-liberal reforms, and this was largely inspired by the Campaign. The movement has to travel still more in terms of its own democratisation process among those social agencies involved, with a fair amount of transparency, making their agenda clear and making the links among cola, globalisation, the US interests and above all their challenge to the local communities. Some of these issues, however, form part of a strategy critique of any PSM, which by itself merits separate attention.

The struggle had had its beginning with the local indigenous community complaining of shortage of water and the pollution of the remaining water; evidence also suggests that the latter was due to the effect of treated effluents from the factory. More importantly, the factory was forced to bring down its shutters owing to the fact that the water was polluted and the discharge of the factory contains hazardous materials. Interestingly, the issue of ground-water pollution or the treated effluents has not figured either at the HC or in the enquiries of the JPC; this basic question seems to be sidelined: whether the application of new technologies would settle such issues or whether the multinational would take appropriate measures for the disposal of effluents and whether they use low-quality/high-toxic-content raw material are related questions that remain undressed. It implies that the original demand of the affected communities or their fundamental criticism of the company are as marginalised as they themselves
are. These questions are more important, perhaps more so than ensuring the supply of piped drinking water, as the former meets the fundamental requirement of the local communities, their autonomy over their resources, and above all, make heard their own original voices without mediation, distortion or representation. This is one dimension of the post-development movement that makes it different from the hitherto conceptualised and actually existing new social movement. As new issues cropped up, the movement was capable of incorporating them as part of strengthening its cause and moving forward, inviting more and more new constituents and agencies that are ready to fight against the unethical practices of corporate power. The movement to a large extent succeeded in linking up the issues concerned – from water shortage to water pollution to the polluted drink that the corporate capital offers to the public. In other words, the movement moved step by step, based on the knowledge as emancipation, inspired by itself, to raise the issues of local community living, community health hazards and public health concerns. At each stage, the question of value and ethics are being raised; each site of power is being turned into a site of resistance in illustration of the transformative potential of any PSM.

All this would obviously call for a larger critique of the development practices of the state of Kerala, which has been making overtures to MNCs in the name of increased FDI and as a solution to the problem of the massive unemployment in the state. It is indeed a pointer to the fact that investments, global or local, must not be assessed solely on their economic merits, if any, but identifying and, if necessary, quantifying the social and political loss owing to such corporate-led developmentalist ideology. The Campaign worked to convince the public that FDI in environmentally non-friendly industries is not the answer to the problems the state faces; the growth-first paradigm without development ethics is neither desirable nor allowable – Plachimada sends the message home across cultural boundaries.

Throughout the agitation in Plachimada, the demand that rang loudest was the one for an immediate closure of the plant or, what one could convincingly argue, an ‘unmaking of the process of development’ (Escobar 1995: 217). Other issues naturally erupted, as a committed investigation into the cola industry threw up hidden truths that the public had been completely unaware of. The state and its institutional apparatus continue to aid the corporate discourse through tailored official ‘scientific’ studies and other manipulations, while the gut feelings of a rural community and its cry for survival go unheeded. Though Coca-Cola has been forced to agree to install a plant for hazardous waste discharge and has also agreed to adhere to the revised standards for soft-drinks, the counter-discourse articulated by the movement unmeets any ‘terminal’ until such time that the precarious water situation in the area has been righted and autonomy over the local resources are established. The villagers of Plachimada will settle for no less a solution than the permanent closure of the factory that has spelled disaster for their village. It may be pointed out that the post-development theory does not ask for a complete rejection on the score of an absence of ‘alternatives to development’. However, in cultivating a dichotomy
of ‘alternatives’ – an alternative to development and alternative development – the post-development theorists err not a little. While inhabiting a grey zone of merging categories, they fail to suggest a cogent alternative to the problem they address as well. Though at first glance, the two strands of post-developmental thought appear disparate, a closer look would see them merge into a single whole – an alternative to development would be an alternative development itself. The chapter has also been an attempt to take an unambiguous stand on the issues of alternatives, which need to be evaluated in a ‘case-and-context-specific’ mode with development ethics being the central concern. And it is the development ethics that are at stake in this neo-liberal era that the PSMs seek to reclaim. The Plachimada resistance has thus come to be a metaphor of our times.

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Notes

1 The early critique of the post-development approach has argued that neither a concretisation nor a detailed mapping of such alternatives has been undertaken by these scholars, their arguments thus amounting to mere ‘rhetoric’ and inviting upon themselves the label of ‘misnomer’ (see Pieterse 1998; Kiely 1999; Watts 2003; Simon 2006; also see Storey 2000; Nanda 2004; for a summation of earlier criticisms, see Ziai 2004).
2 For a critique, see Geras (1987).
3 For a critical appraisal of the question of ‘ethical development’ by examining the various positions of A. K. Sen, M. C. Nussbaum and J. P. Griffin, see Qizilbash (1996).
5 After a protracted land struggle violation of constitutional rights and agreements, the adivasis of Kerala, under the banner of Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha, occupied the Muthanga fringe of the Wynad Wild Life Sanctuary in 2003. The armed police forcibly evacuated them, the resulting violence even leading to the death of one of the men and women who resisted; a policeman was also killed, see Ravi Raman (2004).
6 This is based on author’s ethnographic evidence; also see the documents with the Plachimada Study Committee, Plachimada.
7 To quote Santillo, ‘the lack waste that we received contains very high levels of toxic heavy metals, namely cadmium and lead. Cadmium is particularly toxic to the kidney in humans, also to the liver; it’s also known to be a human carcinogen. Lead is known to be a very potent developmental toxin and it’s particularly toxic to the developing nervous system in children . . . the use of contaminated sludges as fertilizers and that’s really a cynical exploitation of the farming community in order to dispose of the company’s industrial waste’, ‘Face the Facts’, BBC Radio 4, for details see Coca-Cola/India Update, www.killercoke.org/bbccokeindia.htm.
9 See news.bloc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/3458365.stm.
10 For instance, Dow Chemical, which owns the Union Carbide factory of the Bhopal gas tragedy fame, is now actively promoting sale of the pesticide Dursban in India, when the US Environmental Protection Agency is vehemently opposing its use in the US. See www.csa-india.org/downloads-pesticides; www.bhopal.net; www.innovest-group.com; www.corporatepredators.org.
11 It was the work of Scott (1986) that brought the concept of ‘everyday forms of resistance’ to the larger academia, which, however, is not free from limitations. See Brass (1999: 257–259).
13 Even so precious a natural resource as water has come to be treated as a tradable commodity under the GATS rules of the neo-liberal regime; this implies a moving of all barriers on water trade placed by member countries, by the WTO.

References


Around 1990 the monolithic discourse on development broke apart. Apart from environmental and feminist issues, it was mainly the discussion about culture which succeeded the topics of development discourse. One group of the culture-discussion proponents wants to prove that culture is detrimental to the development process and has to be overcome. The other group, on the contrary, defends the view that the notion of development itself is culture-specific and, to a certain degree, does not even interest the people affected. These critics, most of them anthropologists, influenced by Michel Foucault and the poststructuralist/postmodernist movement, have in the 1980s and early 1990s contributed to the deconstruction of the ‘social fantasy’ (Sato 2006: 274) called development by making visible mechanisms of power within the apparatus of development.

It is argued that the development discourse acts as a regime of representation or hegemonic worldview which systematically shapes and constructs identities of the so-called Third World peoples and does not allow people to think of alternative organizing principles for the attainment of well-being.

(Rao and Walton 2004)

So, what does that mean in a concrete case?

Gustavo Esteva, the known Mexican critic of development and recognized representative of post-development, brings it to a point. Concerning food questions he argues in favour of a cultural perspective on it and states:

There is no English word for *comida*. Meal is a cultural word, like *comida*, but it seems to refer only to the time and condition for taking food. *Comida* instead is something like food in context. The context is necessarily the social context, the whole human world which *comida* embeds, the very heart and soul of *comida*.

(Esteva 1994: 69)

By emphasizing on the cultural context, Esteva proposes a systemic position which goes far beyond the well-known reductions of development and is evidently linked to the postmodern theories. Representing the culturally arguing
post-development discourse it is worth to ground such a statement empirically. This is one of the main targets of the following text.

Systemic thinking alludes to a vision of a social context which is neither determinate nor homogeneous but depends on the speaker’s perspective, construction and peculiar dialogical narrative. It gives up the idea of an objective order or inherent structure of components of reality or respective processes to follow. A system is not something which could be presented to an observer, but it can be cognized (Maturana 1982: 175). So, a system only exists in relation to an observer. Such a position challenges the naïve realism of our everyday’s certainties. The epistemological background of it is constructivism, identified with Heinz von Foerster, Gregory Bateson, Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela, Ernst von Glaserfeld and so on. Their core question is how much active influence an observer has on his own perceptions and creations by constructing them himself. They do agree that reality is at least partially always constructed by its observer. So for them it makes sense to regard a system as a process under permanent construction and deconstruction. Recognizing these assumptions drawn from scientific experience, it can be argued that a social system comes into being by the individual construction processes expressed in words, behaviour, artifacts, visions or set of beliefs. It functions like Esteva’s con-text: the ‘text’ can be called the manifestation of the social construction. The ‘con’ refers to everything else belonging to this manifestation. So even though they have different origins, here – as a working hypothesis – the notions context and system can be used interchangeably, because they both do express a creative social act, be it individually or collectively. This takes into account that the social ‘reality’, or rather a social system, always originates in a dialogue.

To make a long story short, we can conclude that a system itself constantly constructs contexts or realities as a provisional consensus on how things have to be seen and understood. So, every culture can be decoded in one or many systems, in which each perspective relating to the system represents and forms it at the same time. The advantage of such a position consists, on the one hand, in overcoming the static idea of more- or less-developed cultures, grading some with the term ‘civilizations’ and degrading others as ‘minor cultural expressions’. On the other hand, it convincingly meets a serious critique of any cultural approach, prominently expressed by Carlos Castaneda. He claimed to abstain from the modern expert’s attitude, which relates every perception, every sensation and every act to the self-complacent world vision of the dominant scientific knowledge (Castaneda 1972: 23), identified here with the assumptions of development.

In any debate about development the first issues which always arise concern material factors, and development is subsequently measured in how far a given population can be supplied with goods and services: The accessibility of food and housing, as well as the condition of the health and educational systems are decisive for determining the level of development. Topics on food and nutrition in so-called developing countries are frequently analysed from a strictly scientific point of view, either the physiological or the economic approach. Both of them agree in the necessity of people requiring professional assistance to satisfy
their need for food. The field of social and cultural studies on food habits widens the perspective on this main developing agenda but does not replace it (Lomnitz-Adler and Adler de Lomnitz 1987).

As I analysed the discourse within specific cultural systems Gustavo Esteva’s demand for ‘re-embedding food in agriculture’ (Esteva 1994) became helpful. This was because any developing attempt concerning food and nutrition threatens the culturally rooted practice of comida, which forms part of the daily practices both in Mexican cities and in the rural area. Esteva stated that food is a word which is part of the economic perception of the world, the world of scarcity. Comida, however, alludes to an everyday practice, into which the economist’s construction of social reality does not fit. The assumption of a single reality is as dangerous as to suggest that only one truth exists. The same happens to the concept of scarcity. Ivan Illich was the first to reveal the manipulating effect of scarcity for modern societies as well as for those that long to accomplish the same distressful development path. He noted that

scarcity defines the field in which the laws of economics relate (1) subjects (possessive, invidious, genderless individuals – personal and corporate); (2) institutions (which symbolically foster mimesis), and (3) commodities, within (4) an environment in which the commons have been transformed into resources private or public.

(Illich 1982: 19)

To write about comida without arguing from the common food/scarcity discourse formed the challenge for my oral-history study realized between 1992 and 1997 in the semi-proletarianized village of San Pablo Etla, Oaxaca, in the south of Mexico (Kaller-Dietrich 2002). I interviewed older women, who were considered to be ‘the women who know’ (las mujeres que saben), about the abundant field of comida. They have been involved their whole lives long in the process of preparing comida, including the generation of ingredients, the making of fire, cooking and backing, and the organization of the entire social life in their kitchens, which were usually located around a fireplace. In our conversations they did not refer to a lack of food, but constantly to their abilities to transform their knowledge and their creativity into comida in relation to their community.

In conversation with Doña Elvira

People say that the corn has died, and that all its strength is gone because the shell of the seedlings breaks. Today I don’t wash it out completely so that the dough is good and the tortillas become soft. If it is washed too much it won’t cook and often break.¹

Doña Elvira

Doña Elvira is an abuela, una mujer que sabe – a grandmother, a wise woman – from San Pablo Etla, Oaxaca. I guess she is around 80 years old. Her entire life
she has cultivated the field. From the fruits of her work she has prepared the food for herself and her family. She has control over what goes inside the pot and what is served on the plate.

The signs of time are marked in her town with modernization. Expensive food from the store or from the supermarket in the city, which is only half an hour away from San Pablo Etla, is given preference. The corn, the beans, the pumpkins and the wild vegetables, which grow on Doña Elvira’s soil, do not count in the world of scarcity.

Before, everything here was in crop. I am used to working the fields, because if we don’t have money, I tell my son, what am I going to do? I used to sow in April, on the 15th and 20th of April. Once, when I already had sown in April, my corn stayed in the earth for three months, but when it rained my whole milpa [traditional Mesoamerican corn field] was born and I got a very good harvest because it had beans, corn, quelites [wild growing type of amaranth and botanically familiar plants], but I feed the earth.

Doña Elvira reveals the secret of her success:

I always had good harvests, but I give my milpa to eat. I feed my milpa, the same food we eat, tortillas, beans with epazote [Mexican herb, botanical name: Chenopodium ambrosioides] and other herbs and I tell the earth: ‘here it is, receive it, and enjoy it.’ Also to the water I give to drink, I give it atole [a drink made from corn starch]. I do not need artificial watering, I only use the water from the sky.

As she points out herself, Doña Elvira is being recognized in town because so many different kinds of fruit grow so well on her fields:

‘This is why people admire me’, says Doña Elvira with confidence, ‘and they ask me how I do it. Then I say: ‘Only God knows it’. A comadre [indispensable, close female friend considered to hold a kind of parental position, e.g. a godmother] asked me ‘how do you do it? We did not have such a good harvest.’ Then I told her, that what I do is give comida to the earth. ‘Really?’ the comadre says surprised. ‘Well, since they are from the Church, they do not know any better’, excuses Doña Elvira the ignorant behaviour of her friend.

Neither did I know, and asked Doña Elvira how often she would give food to the earth and water to drink. ‘Once is too little. By eating only once nobody is sated, but I don’t do it too often either, because I have to make sure that we have enough for ourselves. And well, I know when the earth is hungry.’ – Again and again I asked her this question, but Doña Elvira obviously did not want to entrust me with this part of her secret. Once she said that if I stayed in the
village, spending the whole time from the sowing to the harvest of the *milpa* in San Pablo Etla, then with the time I would learn when it would be necessary to feed the earth and give it water to drink. She did not mention any fixed rules or conventions and obviously also did not want me to think in such categories or write them down. In our conversations she always stressed that the mestizo conventions – be it the Catholic Church or the ‘modern life’ – meant little for her.

Doña Elvira is an analphabet. She asks herself in her own words, what would happen if the people stopped cultivating their fields: ‘this is why I say and believe that the time will come in which we won’t eat corn anymore. Those who come now, who knows what they are going to eat?’ Doña Elvira already has recognized the dramatic loss which we are heading towards, of variety in the fields, in the gardens and woods and, consequently, on our plates (Mooney and Fowler 1990: 10). She looks after her seeds: she diligently takes care to improve variety and she realizes the worrying trend in town – that always fewer people are tilling their fields but prefer to enter wage labour relations: ‘Now there is nobody who wants to cultivate the land anymore, they are already dead; there are children, there are grandchildren, but they do not want to work anymore, they all only want to go to the offices.’

**Development in an economically weak region of Mexico**

Also in Oaxaca, one of the economically weakest regions in Mexico, one notices an enormous social pressure for change: increasing mechanization and mobilization mould the life of the people in the village. At the same time, the increasing concentration of land and of the rights of use on water and forest add to the worries of the villagers. Since the 1940s, migration has been the reaction to the development of the region (e.g. Teresa Ochoa 1996: 189–240). Those, however, who do not leave the town are no less threatened by the development of all their areas of life and therefore the petrifaction of their way of life in apparatuses and bureaucracies: development in the village can best be observed in two areas which are exclusively male fields of activities: *la construcción y el transporte.* For constructing houses today steel and cement are preferred, and doors and windows made in metal. For road construction machines are used for digging and levelling. This costs money, but, so it is argued, money can easier be raised than doing the work in the *tequío*, the customary, communal services. Development therefore depends primarily on the availability of money. The government disposes of a lot of money, this is why the government also constructs the school and sets up the public health station. Development means that those who have raised the money decide what happens in the public buildings. The children’s school education and medical treatment are outside the sphere of influence of the villager and, therefore, outside the local *autoridades* (locally recognized political and societal powers), the elected community representatives. If San Pablo is considered from its development dynamic, it is transportation (public transportation inside and out of the city) and schools which set the rhythm for the people
and surely not the rhythm of vegetation along which only the town festivities are
still oriented.\textsuperscript{2}

The great changes in the village, in which agriculture and animal raising were
pushed back by the increase of wage labour in the construction economy and
trade, began to take effect at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the
1970s. For most of my conversation-partners this period meant a serious incision
into their way of life. The women often complained that the men ‘no longer
wanted’ to work the fields and were lured by the money from wage labour. We
are talking about a time in which the turning away from the explicit goal of a
national self-sufficiency through the ejido-system (the Mexican Constitution Act
of 1917, valid until 1994, and the Ley Federal de la Reforma Agraria provided
for the right of use and enjoyment of a lot of land, which is assigned by the state
to a person [ejiditario] and a family who work this land) led to the inter-
nationalization of Mexican agriculture. This development weighed heavily on
the ejiditarios and minifundistas, and already at the end of the 1970s did
Mexico’s extreme dependency on staple foods, which had to be acquired in the
world market, cause massive social problems. The attempt to increase the
national self-sufficiency through state-aided foods via the Comisión Nacional de
Subsistencias Populares (CONASUPO) and a specific plan of subsidies for agri-
culture and distribution structures, the Sistema Alimentario Mexicano (SAM),
succumbed to the economic crisis since the beginning of the 1980s (Barkin and
Suárez 1982; Austin and Esteva 1987; Barkin 1987).

Agricultural cycles

When we speak about the agricultural cycles, whose rhythms were eclipsed by
transportation and schooling, we are also dealing with an overruling, or respec-
tively an over-appreciation of men’s spheres of work and life over the commu-
nally oriented areas of sustenance, which are mainly directed and fulfilled by
women. When Doña Elvira complains that nobody wants to work the milpa
anymore, she also remembers this normalized loss of autonomy. She personally
has not experienced this loss yet since she still works the field and does not
follow the rhythm of the means of transport. Since she does not sell her corn and
is no longer a seasonal farm worker, Doña Elvira does not need the means of
transport, she says. She also would not need the whole development in the
village either, since ‘the modern, lo moderno, makes us forget our fields, and
from what are we going to live of if nothing grows there anymore?’ she asks.

Not only does development break with the agricultural rhythms, it is also
reflected on the plates and in the stomachs of the people. Very few have time for
working the fields, for cooking and for eating. In this developed world, Doña
Elvira might be considered an anachronism: She sees herself fortified against the
modernizing zeal of her children. She has her field, her milpa. She tends to it and
experiences herself in community. Through her hands and through the trust in a
cosmic answer to her efforts her context or system of life proves consistent. She
assures herself, whenever she gives food to the earth and offers a drink to the
river, of her own belonging to the earthly processes of transformation. For Doña Elvira earth and water are part of her community. Consequently there is no doubt that also the earth and the water get their food from the pots of people. A plausible definition of subsistent peasant communities assumes that all those who eat from the same bowl are members of the same family (Shanin 1990: 41). This understanding distracts from the reductionist view, that the ‘merely subsisting’ agrarian communities form a ‘family’ in the sense of blood ties. Following Doña Elvira’s words, her perception of the community is enlarged in the sense of eroding the patriarchal understanding of family as well as the opposition towards nature as the alien other. The earth and water belong for Doña Elvira in her practical work and in her cosmos of imagination to the family, which we can think of as bounded by kinship.

Cooking

Doña Elvira’s relations are also present in her cooking: Doña Elvira transforms the fruits of the earth into food. This transformation is not symbolic, but sensually graspable. Whenever Doña Elvira cooks for the earth, she performs an everyday act. Through this she establishes a connection. She gives the earth and the waters their share. She discloses herself. Corporal partaking and pargiving form a dependable tissue, which time and again is renewed in communal meals. Doña Elvira incorporates the earth into her community, for whom she cooks and in togetherness with whom she eats and exists. ‘No, I do not cook separately for the earth. I also would never cook for just one person. To use all the wood in the fire for just one, that doesn’t make sense. If I cook beans and have baked fresh tortillas, then the earth partakes, that is how I have always done it,’ Doña Elvira assures. She therefore decides that the earth is more like a person and also has to be treated like a person which takes a seat at the common table, the context, as to say Doña Elvira’s system.

Doña Elvira’s certainty to find an answer to her work in the cosmic order is independent from a mere symbolic order. It is around such an order that the current academic debate on gender relations in non-patriarchal societies revolves. Vandana Shiva, starting from female principles which derive from the conceptual relation between biological and societal gender, would probably not think the concept of order together with the female body, sexuality and thinking, because order in the last instance can only meaningfully be associated with the dominant order (Shiva 1999). However, the forms of living which are correspondingly identified as female are in Western patriarchy consistently relegated to the Other, chaos or colony. – Doña Elvira establishes in a self-willed, self-determined and uncontrollable manner, what has to be done in order to produce a good harvest or a delicious comida. Although she lives in a world, in a village, in which the fissures, the divisions and the rule of development are omnipresent, she nevertheless produces her own views of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ in practice. But from there she does not derive a universal sense of order. Doña Elvira’s distinctiveness cannot be contained in the dominant norms and can also not be
interpreted as a ‘counter-order’. She eludes all normativity because she finds herself through the practical configuration of relations within her system and not through universal laws.

**Commitments**

Doña Elvira experiences herself embedded in forms of living and their vegetative counterparts which we neither can nor want to imagine. She lives in a materially visible and at the same time spiritual relation in and to her system. The own body, the children, the parents, the members of the community of sustenance, the connections on the local level; her house, her field, the river, the mountain – it is always about simultaneously pargiving and partaking, about bonding and their renewal in commitments, *compromiso*, the obligation, which also exists towards the earth. This mutual relation and the reciprocal connection allow us to guess how Doña Elvira sees and recognizes herself and her context, which together form her system. At the bottom of her cognition lies an awareness of belonging. This belonging contradicts the distanced, scientific awareness, which has reinterpreted ‘nature’ as the Other, the soulless, dead material.

The view that the earth can be included at the company at table contradicts that which modern science prescribes for us: namely, that nature is a mere object which can be reduced to measurable Cartesian units. These soulless units could be controlled and managed in the sense of an equation of truth and utility. Mumford points out that from the beginning the implementation of the mechanistic worldview has had predominantly self-serving, occupatory interests and he therefore pointed at the societal comforts which from the sixteenth century onwards played an ever more important role in the whole development of Western civilization: in discovery and colonization, in military conquests and within the economy, in efforts to become ‘masters and owners of nature’ (Mumford 1967: 424).

Scientific thinking through this act of separation created a bodily ‘Non-I’, which was opposed to the mind, the subject of cognition: on the one side there is thinking, reflexivity and the mind and on the other side there is work, production and the body. The principles of cogitation, of reflexivity, follow mechanistic beliefs, which have been defined on the basis of the construction of work and body. Reflexivity appears as separated from the own body experience. Such a disembodied reflexivity would solely recur to the act of thinking itself. Cogitation, which would manifest itself as a form of awareness of self-determination and self-will, no longer encounters discrete possibilities to shape life, but always only again encounters thinking. The reflexivity in acting deteriorates to a mere reflection – to cogitation – about the already thought. Cogitation therefore stands detached from the own as well as the social body. The relations, from which reflexivity originates, are severed with reflection. Doña Elvira’s perception, in which the earth takes the position of a person, becomes a stumbling block before this understanding. The earth cannot be treated distanced or fundamentally different to a person to whom one maintains a relation.
Doña Elvira’s act of feeding the earth does not hold any meaning in the light of this normative order. Her systemic approach to her context, her world might be conceived as an obstacle. Her worldview would at best be interpreted as ‘animistic precursor’ to the projective, separating, unrelated thinking about the world, in which material appearances have already lost their soul and their spiritual content. Insights which would satisfy a scientific rationality cannot be won out of it. Therefore, in extension of the natural sciences’ frame of cognition, it could be postulated: the earth does not eat and least of all from the fare of people. It would be clear that the earth is part of soulless nature and obtains definable nutrients from water and fertilizers. Nature, from this (natural scientific) point of view, counts as an accumulation of inert matter, buzzing around endlessly and without purpose. Such matter has to appear dead. Carolyn Merchant (1980) in her historical examination arrives at an identical conclusion through proving that in the wake of the violent destruction of women and female knowledge in Western Europe a perception of reality has become dominant which presupposes the deadening of nature.

In a sober light and – if you will – empirically confirmed, the precondition of a dead nature to which no person has a relation, proves to be absurd for Doña Elvira. Because it is not ‘nature’ which does not take part in the cyclical order anymore, but the people who stopped tilling the soil. They no longer follow the vegetative cycles and no longer give the soil its part of the common food. Doña Elvira sees herself belonging to the community and the cosmos, and so inherently defines a very abundant system being her personal context. She conversely recognizes herself as part of a livable network of relations. From there she derives her direct responsibilities of mutuality towards the soil and the water. Therefore it is also necessary that she participates and accepts that world which is prepared for her and that she is attentive towards it.

Throughout her life, Doña Elvira was a part-time farmer or, to be more precise, she worked in a semi-proletarian household (Wallerstein 1983) and so to speak has one foot in subsistence and the other in the production of goods (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1982). All through her life she also has worked as day-labourer on other people’s fields to provide for her family. The little piece of land which she has taken over from her mother was not enough to provide for her family. Her husband, with whom she had four children, worked as farmer in the beginning and also tilled the soil on other fields with his team of oxen. Soon he started working as unskilled labourer at road constructions and later on as temporary worker outside the village. In this sense he exactly followed those steps, which in the village over the past 30 years are identified with development. He himself took along the food for the first half of the week, for the second half Doña Elvira sent it to him through other villagers. This is a commonly visible sign in the village, that although a member of the community is absent, this member does not stop taking part in the common meals and does not stop to belong. Economically speaking it could be said that Doña Elvira is providing for the most part of her husband’s livelihood. She therefore is part of the majority of Mexican women in the countryside who are the providers for their families.
Female work

From an economic point of view, women like Doña Elvira are exploited, since they notoriously are made responsible for filling too many stomachs (e.g. Fowler-Salamini 1994: 159–242). But this argumentation misses that those women are in reality responsible for the maintenance of a specific context or system, understood as a multiple network of relations, as the women I talked to in Oacaxa about food stressed. They stated – even if not in that emphatically a manner as Doña Elvira – that their responsibility also means something. This ‘something’ can in the majority of cases be understood as an emotional motivation and bonding to their systems. It is noticeably expressed that through the preparation of meals, nearness, attention and appreciation can also be expressed and bonds are formed or renewed.

Since Doña Elvira became a widow, she irregularly entertained some abonados, occasional boarders. In that manner she was able to now and then buy additions for the household. She herself worked occasionally as farm labourer. There she regularly got her food. Doña Elvira describes her working conditions as a form of mutual exchange and reciprocity:

They helped us and we helped them. To us mozos, unskilled workers, they gave beans with nopales [prickly pear], or beans with a garlic sauce or now and then a piece of fried beef or poultry, and we prepared a yellow mole [a variety of a local sauce type]. During the rainy season we ate all the wild vegetables, which shot up in the fields.

She always took plenty of food home: ‘Yes, especially the locusts we liked and from the river beetles we prepared a soup. Cetembolcoates those beetles are called, they are plenty in the irrigation channels and rivers,’ she remembers.

Throughout her life, Doña Elvira was simultaneously mother, farmer, field worker and host for seasonal workers. In the family she has always provided for food. In retrospect she sees herself as centre of a family network of connections, which is also confirmed by the other members of the family. But for Doña Elvira those family relations extend far beyond a biological, bourgeois or even physically recognizable family. Through food Doña Elvira keeps contact with the earth, the water, and the female and male ancestors.

A system beyond development

For a couple of years now Doña Elvira has been living at her daughter’s. This implies that she no longer cooks the daily food. Still, she continues to cultivate her milpa. She had to leave her hut made of wood and clay, with the open fireplace, but she still regularly visits her lot beneath her former house, to till the field, to tend to it, and for harvest. Whenever Doña Elvira goes to her hut and occasionally lights a fire, like the neighbours give account of, one can hear her talking, although there obviously is nobody with her. On first sight I met a
woman who obviously has sunken into talking to herself and does not have anything left to say. The way she cowers in front of her fire and occasionally shifts the embers around the little clay pot she has brought along, she is at best a relict of the past and is already so far removed from us that we can no longer understand her. In her remembrance she sits with her whole family – with her parents, siblings, ancestors and descendants, the earth and the water – at the fire: she treats the invisibly present with tortillas, salt and meshed beans. Through this she assures herself of their favour and she delights in their presence. Inevitably I think about a feast, a ceremony with subsequent revelry. The bonds of belonging are sealed. And Doña Elvira talks to them. She would do exactly the same with the earth and the water, whom she gives food and drink, she once told me.

Doña Elvira heats her meshed beans in a little pot of clay, stirring with a short, shrivelled corncob. The smell of stale smoke is in the air. Slowly the room fills with warmth and a soft, sweet fragrance of beans. Doña Elvira has not noticed my arrival yet. I am standing in the low entrance and see how she cooks, how she keeps the fogón going and the glowing embers arranged around the little clay pot. When she lifts the lid, it is prepared. She shares her food with her invisible allies and talks to them. This happens almost silently, but at the same time very empathically. Without having uttered one word, I sit with her on the floor on a mattress of straw, jam a tortilla, reheated on the comal, between my right thumb, index finger and middle finger, and bend it in place in the shape of a spoon. I reach into the little clay pot with the meshed beans, which tastes strongly of epazote and quelites. As she sprinkles some salt onto it, which she has taken out from somewhere under her clothing, she looks at me, obviously delighted that another guest has arrived. I take my place next to Doña Elvira and join the already present. For some time we have not spoken one word with each other. Food and fire did not diminish. The visitors would not leave anytime soon.

Doña Elvira is respected in the village. She has passed on her pots a long time ago, and whenever she still kindles the fire in her hut, she no longer does it for her living relatives. She belongs to another, disappeared world, one could think. Or is this just what I think, because in my regressive fantasies I dream about a closed and magically interrelated world? Whenever I watch her and when she talks to me, I realize that all that surrounds her belongs to her. This world which Doña Elvira prepares through cooking is hers, and we are able to ingest it, whenever we eat from the food she prepares. This woman belongs to the surroundings in which I meet her – the stones with which her fogón (fireplace) is built, the two pots of clay standing around, the soot-covered kitchen, the two pumpkins from her field and the little bowls full of red beans from the coffee bush behind the hut. But what would those things be without their transcendence and the recollection of persons and stories, which Doña Elvira keeps in memory and in actuality in this world? – An empty space, which always has to be refilled, or perhaps the cosmos, the place one knows oneself to belong to, which this old woman brings closer to me, offers me through the taste of her meshed beans.
Conclusion

With my reflection on the interview with Doña Elvira I try to understand a culturally embedded, very local expression of *comida* through exclusively referring to one interview conducted with an old woman some years ago in a village in Southwestern Mexico. It has to be said that she does not represent the village nor anybody else. Through to *comida* she describes her referential system, the context she belongs to. Family ties, social networks, plants, water, earth, ancestors – all together show this system; somehow it seems to be the whole cosmos which belongs to her and to which she refers in terms of personal relations. Such a way of thinking and speaking goes far beyond the dominant, for example, scarcity assumptions of development and obviously is disproportionate to the structural analysis of the development discourses, especially when it faces the universal concept of nutrition and food policies. By being the discourse on *comida* systemic it not only contrasts structural analysis but refers to a post-modern way of comprehension and expression, and hence belongs to post-development attempts to understand each other without representing culture but constructing it systemically.

Notes

1 The original Spanish version of the one-on-one interview with Doña Elvira is published in the endnotes 46–54, 56, 68, 78 and 83–84 in Kaller-Dietrich 2002.
2 Vokral 1989 ascertained the contrary in the case of an indigenous community in the south of Peru.
3 See also Rengifo Vázquez who writes about the understanding of ‘family’ in the Andes: ‘Relatives – the family – are all those with whom our caring and affection is most intense and our solidarity is rich that pests do not emerge or prosper’ (Rengifo Vázquez 1998: 92).
4 Peasants from the Andes express their concept of family in a practically identical manner. Grillo Fernández quotes from a study about the family of the Cajamarca tradition in the Peruvian Andes in which a man explains who and what counts as family, as *ayllu*. The relatives, starting with their own and extending to the children in law, the grandparents and the deceased, the domestic animals, the field, the water, the birds, the pig and small animals. Parts of the family are furthermore the seeds, the customary enclosures made of stone and the stone itself, with which the furnishing of every house starts and on which the dogs are being fed and the chickens get their water (Mires Ortiz, Alfredo 1991: *Proyecto enciclopedia campesina: la familia en la tradición cajamarquina*; Cajamarca: 15–16 quoted after Grillo Fernández 1998: 221–224).
5 I don’t concur with the use of the term ‘family economy’, because it suggests a direct link between the blood relations and the community, which probably would not hold up to most empiric studies.

References


Part V

Perspectives
13 Post-development
Unveiling clues for a possible future

Ana Agostino

Introduction

Post-development has the merit of unconditionally criticising development and declaring the impossibility of its reformulation. This is unique to this current of thought. No other authors or movements have proposed the abandonment of development. Even the anti-globalisation movement, probably the widest and most heterogeneous opponent to the current predominant socio-economic model in the world, while opposing corporate-led globalisation, capitalism and neoliberalism, make no explicit reference to opposing development. Post-development, on the other side, says that ‘the idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape; development has become outdated . . . it has grown obsolete’ (Sachs 1992: 1). The immediate question that arises in the development debate is: what comes after development? The expectation is that the answer will constitute an alternative discourse to that of development. But, is this possible? And more important, is it desirable?

In this chapter, I shall argue that post-development raises questions, motivates new debates, presents alternative examples, but does not necessarily constitute an alternative discourse. It can be seen as a discourse in construction, open and permeable, sensitive to day-to-day realities and analysis. Post-development’s particular way of presenting alternatives will be linked to the Sociology of Absences and the Sociology of Emergences put forward by Boaventura de Sousa Santos. The question of whether there is a post-development theory and practice will be analysed within that framework.

A clear NO to development

John Holloway’s starting point in the presentation of his thesis on how to change the world without taking power is negation. He has argued that:

at the beginning it was not the word but the scream. Facing the mutilation of human lives by capitalism, a scream of sadness, a scream of horror, a scream of anger, a scream of refusal: NO. The starting point for theoretical reflection is the opposition, the negation, the struggle.

(Holloway 2002)
According to Holloway, it is from the rejection to a world that we feel is wrong, a world that resembles non-truth, where we can take hold. Because of the extent of what is wrong, of what needs to be changed, this original scream and refusal becomes a powerful force aware of its own lack of power in the existing order. But, by the same token, it becomes a powerful force in order to understand that whatever changes might be implemented to that unjust order, they cannot use its categories, power and logic. In this way, the original NO, the founding opposition, becomes the guarantee to avoid reform and to search for alternatives within different frameworks and logics, and even different languages. The word development, even if many authors that criticise post-development writers argue that they have failed to see the different options that the term and its qualifications offer (e.g. alternative, sustainable, people-centred),¹ is strongly charged after more than 40 years of implementation. As argued by Wolfgang Sachs, culture-specific languages of diversity, which used to express people’s needs and describe people’s lives, have been replaced in many cases by development terms, resulting in a ‘loss of language of desire and language of culture to express what we want in non-globalist, non-universal terms’.²

**Questioning the main characteristics of the development discourse**

Even though various theories and alternative theories of development have come into existence throughout the decades, the main characteristics of this normative discourse have remained. Rejecting development implies to question these central features.

*Development discourse defines and leads more than half of humanity to perceive them as underdeveloped*

This can be seen not just in how governments from the South refer to their countries and present development as the overarching objective of their policies, but in how ordinary citizens talk about themselves and the others, that is, the developed world. The two concepts (development and underdevelopment) are used as if carrying a universally agreed-upon truth. There is an intrinsic power and direction present in the words. Language, of whatever kind, does not just describe reality. It creates it. As Steve de Shazer argues, ‘language is reality’. This way of thinking suggests that we need to look at how ‘we have ordered the world in our language and how our language (which comes before us) has ordered our world’ (de Shazer 1994: 9). And furthermore, words that present problems ‘within a given system of understanding’ can only find solutions ‘born of that system, and assertions from alternative systems will remain unrecognised’ (Gergen 1994: 253). This implies that when human beings from so-called underdeveloped countries search for options, solutions and alternatives to their current realities, they do so from their own perception of failure, of what they were not able to achieve, and aiming at becoming what the development discourse has already put in words and programmes.
Development aims at the elimination of diversity

The colonisation of the so-called New World confronted the Europeans with the diversity of humanity. But, this diversity was seen as backwardness and the challenge taken on by the colonisers was to eliminate it by converting the ‘barbarian’ into a civilised European. With the passage of time, this challenge was institutionalised into the idea of progress understood as ‘an irreversible movement from an endless diversity of particularities, wasteful of human energies and economic resources, to a world unified and simplified into the most rational agreement’ (Shanin 1997: 65). Shanin argues that the word ‘progress’ changed with fashion into modernisation, development or growth, but the central idea remained: diversity was produced with different stages of development of different societies. As those considered to be at the lower levels move into the example shown by those who had already reached the highest achievement of progress to date, diversity would disappear (Shanin 1997: 66–68). This means that other ways of doing things are not valued as the manifestation of responses to particular realities anchored in an endogenous imaginary, in ancestral particularities, but as expressions of the inability to perform, according to the standardised values of Western society.

In the report ‘In larger freedom, towards development, security and human rights for all’, the United Nations’ Secretary General says: ‘each developing country has primary responsibility over its own development’. But, that responsibility does not imply a free choice in the measures to take, because they are already outlined in the report. They are:

- strengthening governance, combating corruption and putting in place the policies and investments to drive private sector-led growth, and maximise domestic resources available to fund national development strategies. [It adds]: without dynamic, growth-oriented economic policies supporting a healthy, private sector capable of generating jobs, income and tax revenues over time, sustainable economic growth will not be achieved.

(UN General Assembly 2005: para 32, p. 12)

The diverse responses that the multiple cultures of the world could think of – and are actually implementing – do not find space in the report.

Economic growth as a synonym to development

As clearly stated in the recent report of the UN General Secretary, development is about ‘more’: more investments, more infrastructure, more production. The response, given to the multiple and diverse difficulties and problems heterogeneous societies face, is always of an economic character aimed at creating dependency from goods and services offered only in the market. According to Arturo Escobar, ‘the economic view has undoubtedly been the most pervasive influence on development thinking, and has tended to “economise” not only development but also life’ (Escobar 1987: 115).
Centrality of economics

One of the major criticisms from post-development authors to the socio-economic model promoted by development is the centrality of economics in all aspects of life, particularly of market-economics. They question what Karl Polanyi called the ‘most controversial of modern mythological figures – economic man’ (Polanyi 1977: 21). Gustavo Esteva believes that the transformation of autonomous man and woman into homo economicus was a precondition for the emergence of economic society (Esteva 1992: 18). Ivan Illich calls homo economicus the protagonist of scarcity, who in pursuit of the satisfaction of needs, assumed to be unlimited through means that are assumed to be scarce, has been transformed from homo sapiens into homo miserabilis (Illich 1992: 88). According to Illich, in the current consumer society, human beings are dependent for the satisfaction of their constructed needs with a blind eye to cultural differences. The result of the imposition of these packages is the killing of subsistence ways of satisfying needs, due to the belief that ‘useful activities by which people both express and satisfy their needs can be replaced indefinitely by standardised goods and services’ (Illich 1977: 7–15). As stated by Majid Rahnema, ‘this particular perception of reality tends to reduce human beings and their societies to their economic dimension alone’ (Rahnema 1992: 169).

J. M. Keynes had already questioned the assumption of infinite needs and distinguished between the two types:

those needs which are absolute in the sense that we feel them whatever the situation of our fellow human beings may be, and those which are relative in the sense that we feel them only if their satisfaction lift us above and make us feel superior to our fellows.

(Daly 1980: 27)

According to Keynes, only the second type of needs may be insatiable. The existence of such needs and their satisfaction presupposes a stratified society where human beings are classified according to their material possessions. This individual possession of means, which in modern society already places human beings within a particular category (those who can satisfy their unlimited needs through marketable products) relates to a distinction between honour and dignity, made by Charles Taylor:

I am using honour in the ancient regime sense, in which it is intrinsically linked to inequalities. For some to have honour in this sense, it is essential that not everyone have it. . . . As against this notion of honour, we have the modern notion of dignity, now used in a universalist and egalitarian sense, where we talk of the inherent ‘dignity of human beings’, or of citizen dignity. The underlying premise here is that everyone shares in this.

(Taylor 1991: 46)
This can be related to the distinction introduced by Polanyi with respect to a formal and a substantive meaning of economics: the first one relates to the scarcity principle, based on the assumption that means are scarce and that these insufficient means must be allocated in the best possible way to provide for man’s endless needs. The substantive meaning relates to man’s dependency for survival upon nature and fellow human beings. From this point of view, the interaction between human beings and their environment is also the economy (Polanyi 1977: 20).

Following this line of argument, one could say that the formal meaning of economy relates to the old concept of honour in the sense that each individual should cater for him or herself, and the privileged space to do this is the market. Those who obtain the greater benefits, at whatever costs for those who do not obtain any or even lose, have learned to play the game, and are, in a way, honoured by it. The substantive meaning of the economy, on the other hand, depends on reciprocity and interaction. For one to benefit, the others must benefit too, in the same way that dignity is acquired as a member of a particular society or people and not as an individual. This way of understanding the economy has been shadowed by the predominant market economic view.

**The importance of rejecting development**

From the points analysed in this section, it is possible to draw a first conclusion in relation to post-development and conclude whether or not it constitutes an alternative discourse. It can be said that one of its trademarks is the presentation of numerous and grounded arguments in relation to why no substantial improvements can happen in people’s lives within the framework of development. Post-development writers have described the cultural, social and economic implications of development as a power discourse, and as the concrete implementation of plans and programmes aimed at reaching a predetermined model. Once the impossibility of reforming or improving development and its logical consequence – the call to move beyond it – are proclaimed, opportunities are opened to value not just other responses to already defined problems of what has been called by mainstream discourse ‘the underdeveloped world’, but to understand this world (and other worlds) differently. These proposals do not constitute an institutionalised way of thinking, but they do offer values, statements and examples that stand in opposition to those traditionally promoted by development. Post-development is a form of critique and its main contribution derives precisely from highlighting development’s internal contradictions. It can be argued that the way in which this criticism has been formulated offers clues for the identification and construction of alternatives.

**Enlarging horizons: reality is more than what exists**

When post-development writers reject development, they are opening up possibilities for other ways of understanding the society and the economy. This can
be better understood within the framework of the Sociology of Absences and the Sociology of Emergences, put forward by Boaventura de Sousa Santos.

**The Sociology of Absences and the Sociology of Emergences**

Boaventura de Sousa Santos describes the Sociology of Absences as a form of ‘enquiry that aims to explain that what does not exist is in fact actively produced as non-existent, that is, as a non-credible alternative to what exist’. He refers to the Sociology of Emergences as ‘the inquiry into the alternatives that are contained in the horizon of concrete possibilities’ aiming at enlarging knowledges, practices and agents, in order to ‘identify therein the tendencies of the future’ (Santos 2003).

The production of non-existence takes place through what Santos has called *monocultures* resulting from hegemonic criteria of rationality and efficiency, which dominate the development discourse. They are the monocultures of:

- knowledge;
- linear time;
- naturalisation of differences;
- dominant scale (the universal and the global);
- productivity.

Each of these monocultures is a mode of production of non-existence, of what dominant Western rationality sees as non-valuable alternatives. To each of them, the sociology of absences confronts *ecologies* aiming at making these alternatives visible and present.

The *monoculture of knowledge* turns modern science into the sole criteria of truth, and all other forms of knowledge are created as nonexistent in the form of ignorance or lack of knowledge. It is confronted by the *ecology of knowledges*, for which there is no ignorance or knowledge in general, because all ignorance implies the lack of certain knowledge and all knowledge implies the overcoming of certain ignorance. The dialogue between different knowledges is the response to the incompleteness of each of them.

The *monoculture of linear time* presents history as having a unique and known direction for which different words have been used in different historical times: progress, revolution, modernisation, development. Linear time, in this context, can only lead to the Western way of life, its knowledge, its institutions and its social organisation. Nonexistent in this case is the residuum, what according to the Western modern view has remained behind, and is therefore considered primitive, traditional, pre-modern and underdeveloped. This monoculture is confronted by the *ecology of temporalities*, for which linear time is just one concept among many others. Accepting the variety of concepts of time leads to see the activities of members from different cultures not as residual, but as contemporary to those of Western society. The relevancy of ancestrality in certain cultures, for example, ceases to be a manifestation of backwardness and becomes an expression of their understanding of time and of their ways of insertion in the world.
The monoculture of the naturalisation of differences consists in classifying populations according to categories that legitimise hierarchies. According to Santos, the sexual and racial classifications are the most salient manifestations of this logic. In this case, non-existence is expressed as inferiority and impossible to overcome because it is presented as natural. It is confronted by the ecology of recognition that leads to a new type of articulation between equality and difference, allowing for mutual recognition.

The fourth logic is that of the dominant scale: the monoculture of the universal and of the global, by which the scale defined as fundamental makes all the other possible scales irrelevant. Within the framework of Western modernity, the global and universal are dominant vis-à-vis other realities that depend on local particularities. Globalisation is the scale that carries relevancy, rendering the local and particular as non-existent, that is, as unable to offer viable alternatives to the global. To this logic, the sociology of absences opposes the ecology of trans-scale which reclaims what in the local scale is not the result of hegemonic globalisation. That means, it is not what is of interest for the global scale which is relevant in the local realities, but there is an intrinsic value in them responding to whatever challenges appear at that scale, recognising in turn that there is an articulation and mutual challenge between the two.

Finally, the logic of productivity which resides in the monoculture of capitalist productivity and efficiency, presents economic growth through market forces as an unquestionable rational objective. Therefore, productivity is a central criteria applied equally to nature and human labour. Following this logic, non-existence is produced as non-productiveness, which in the case of nature is seen as sterility, and in the case of labour as unskilled, redundant and superfluous populations. This one is confronted by the ecology of productivities that values different systems of production (cooperatives, economies of solidarity, barter networks, etc.) not guided by the market logic of constant production and growth, but by criteria of sufficiency and reciprocity. Santos argues that the ecology of productivities contests the paradigm of development and infinite economic growth and the primacy of the objectives of accumulation over the objectives of distribution that sustain global capitalism. One could confront here the concepts of efficiency and sufficiency as suggested by Wolfgang Sachs:

Efficiency is a word that comes out of a growth world, because once you are efficient you use what you gain as a new investment for a new growth. Sufficiency contains the other heritage. It asks what is right for me, what is good quality. If I have to put it in a formula, efficiency asks how to do things right, and sufficiency, how to do the right things.3

What these five ecologies share is the interest in unveiling the diversity and multiplicity of possible ways of doing things and in announcing that reality cannot be reduced to what it exists. This is so because it also includes what has been actively created as non-existent and in the process made to be seen as
unable to offer alternatives. Reality is more than what it exists, also, because it includes tendencies and clues that have been ignored by the hegemonic rationality, but that help to build an anticipatory consciousness of future possibilities. Here is where the second sociology comes in, that of emergences, which aims at identifying and enlarging the signs of possible future experiences under the guise of tendencies and latencies. It focuses on clues that can guide possible interventions so as to maximise the probability of hope. As Santos argues, the Sociology of Emergences focuses on possibility, thereby replacing the idea of determination by the idea of care (Santos 2003).

Unveiling clues

The concept of attentiveness relates very closely to the Sociology of Emergences. Majid Rahnema stresses on the need to be open and always attentive to the world and to all other humans. . . . Attentive implies the art of listening, in the broadest sense of the word, being sensitive to what is, observing things as they are, free from any preconceived judgement, and not as one would like them to be, and believing that every person’s experience or insight is a potential source of learning.

(Rahnema 1997: 4–9)

While the development discourse has actively created other ways of doing things as non-existent, post-development is about giving them back the possibility of becoming visible and present. In doing so, these practices and beliefs recover their capacity to offer alternatives. As Gustavo Esteva put it, ‘the virtues I want to speak about, which may be at the centre of the topology of the mind, beyond development, can be affirmed in our time, only after a radical opening to surprise’ (Esteva 1993: 14). To be open to surprise means to accept that one does not know; that there are no predetermined ways; that one has to be attentive to the multiple possibilities and have the wisdom to learn from them. This can explain why, in a series of talks Gustavo Esteva gave at the Universities of Oldenburg and Bremen in Germany, in 1993, he introduced himself as an ‘itinerant storyteller’. He was not proposing alternatives; he was sharing life stories (about city dwellers in a popular neighbourhood in Mexico City, about peasants and indigenous communities). From those stories, the audience could draw some insights in order to explore, be open, be sensitive and be hospitable, to other ways of doing things. Thus reflective spaces over alternative practices were generated.

In the same light, in a text written in 1971, Ivan Illich suggested that the search for alternatives lied in questioning what is obvious to the eye and the broadly accepted solutions, arguing that it is easier to talk about alternatives than to formulate them with precision. He added:

It is not my purpose either to paint a Utopia or to engage in scripting scenarios for an alternative future. We must be satisfied with examples indicating
simple directions that research should take. Some such examples have already been given. Buses are alternative to a multitude of private cars. Vehicles designed for slow transportation on rough terrain are alternatives to standard trucks. Safe water is an alternative to high-priced surgery. Medical workers are an alternative to doctors and nurses. Community food storage is an alternative to expensive kitchen equipment. Other alternatives could be discussed by the dozen.

(Illich 1997: 99)

Ivan Illich’s statement reinforces the idea that alternatives are happening; they do not need to be created. Reading post-development literature, one can find examples of these alternatives in the discussions around sufficiency, sustainability, re-embedding the economy into society and the practices of new social movements, among others.

By acknowledging existence of what has been actively created as ignorant, residual, or underdeveloped, post-development is contributing to the formulation of alternatives. The above quoted statement by the UN General Secretary that ‘without dynamic, growth-oriented economic policies ... sustainable economic growth will not be achieved’, becomes but one statement in relation to how people’s lives can be improved. It also becomes clear that there is no universal validity to this statement and not even to the need of economic growth as a pre-condition for improving the quality of life. Relying on relations of reciprocity such as those practised in certain forms of barter networks or economies of solidarity ceases to be seen as mere survival strategies and they are perceived as economies in their own right reflecting and resulting from other weltanschauungen. The same can be said of different forms of care, housing, transport, production and others. These ways, in turn, pertain to culture-, geography- and time relevancy.

The WSF, post-development and the Sociology of Absences and Emergences

The World Social Forum (WSF) is a space for international co-ordination and articulation of social groups and movements that around the world oppose neoliberalism and corporate-led globalisation. According to Boaventura de Sousa Santos, the WSF is a broad exercise of Sociology of Absences, in the sense that its aim is to disclose and give credit to a variety of heterogeneous social practices (Santos 2003). The Sociology of Emergences, which as stated earlier, consists in identifying clues, signs, pathways that give indication of possible future experiences as contained in tendencies of the present, is also reflected in some of the practices shared at the WSF.

There are similarities between the WSF and post-development in what they oppose and in what they stand for: the respect and promotion of diversity; the importance assigned to local practices and local knowledge; the questioning of the centrality of the economy in human life; the strong opposition to capitalist
development. It can be similarly argued, that none of them formulates clear paths to follow for the construction of ‘a better possible world’ (the motto of the WSF). Post-development and the WSF, in spite of their differences (the main one being that no explicit rejection of development has emerged from the forum though the capitalist model has been questioned; sustainable and other forms usually called alternative development are part and parcel of the variety of examples and practices offered by the WSF) share in a spirit of openness, variety and multiplicity. The WSF is an expression of a myriad of practices brought together by the will to question the neoliberal order. Post-development, in turn, reflects upon certain practices (within and outside the WSF), analyses the significance they can have on realities outside their territorial and cultural boundaries or horizons and places them as examples of ‘the ethos beyond development’ (Esteva 1993: 26). The WSF cannot place itself beyond development because it is a contested terrain where participants’ positions vary from those who call for improvement in the amount and quality of development aid, to those who call for closing down of the international financial institutions. These different positions have to do with whether the movements or organisations opt unconditionally for ecologies or in some cases maintain the logic of the monocultures (Santos 2003). There are also hierarchical and power tensions within the movements that explain one or other option. But its strength as a space for articulating other ways of doing things, of exercising power, of valuing clues and signs as relevant forms of knowledge, remains. Post-development builds on some of these examples with the specific intention to demystify development, to denounce the mechanisms by which it has become a tool for Western domination, and it affirms unconditionally that alternatives must be found (and are taking place) outside of it.

After development

In the previous section, I argued that post-development offers clues for identifying, unveiling and valuing other ways of doing things, that constitute, by their own formulation and implementation, alternatives to the universalistic measures that the development discourse wants to impose. But, post-development cannot be seen as a discourse that replaces (or aims at replacing) development. This one has become part and parcel of modern society, is promoted by governments and institutions at national, regional and international level, instruments have been created to measure it, compare societies on the basis of it. Development has entered the realm of ordinary life in ways that few other concepts have. Post-development, in turn, aims at criticising this overrated concept and proposes its abandonment. While doing this, it re-values existing forms of relations, practices and world-views which have been neglected or suppressed by development. But, it is not institutionalised, does not exist in clearly identified policies and is not promoted by any government or international agency. The emphasis is on ideas and on the motivation to find clues in concrete practices.
Hospitality

One of the concepts put forward by post-development is that of hospitality. Gustavo Esteva wrote this during the early conversations on ‘After Development, What?’

I was forced to synthesise in one word what is the opposite to development. I used, then, the word hospitality. To be a host to others is not to follow them, to opt for them, or to affiliate your soul to them. It is just to acknowledge and respect others, to be hospitable to them. Hospitality implies a notion of horizons, not of frontiers. A horizon is not a geographical or topological concept, but a historic and cultural metaphor. It is a collective conscience completely independent of geography, a ‘collective memory’ in continual transformation.

(Esteva 1993)

The concept of hospitality (‘friendly and liberal reception of guests and strangers’) distances itself from a fundamental feature of development – its interventionist character. Development has always been normative, assuming that there are those (the developed ones) with the right – and the duty – to intervene on the lives of others – the underdeveloped – in order to change their lives according to the values and norms of Western society. This implies that development aims at changing the lives for the recipients of the transitive action that those intervening perform. These ones will not see their lives affected. The belief in mainstream development discourse is that very little needs to be changed among developed societies. Hospitality, on the contrary, cannot leave any of the protagonists unaffected. Being hospitable to others, the different, the unknown, must necessarily change the host. Being hospitable only to the known – for example, telling underdeveloped countries that they are responsible for their own development, but dictating the way it should be done because it is known to me and I believe it is the only way to develop – is not, in fact, hospitality.

In his analysis of the concept of hospitality, Jacques Derrida says:

Must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, in all its possible extensions, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country? If he was already speaking our language, with all that that implies, if we already shared everything that is shared with a language, would the foreigner still be a foreigner and could we speak of asylum or hospitality in regard to him?

(Dufourmantelle and Derrida 1997: 17–18)

He further argues that,

absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of
being a foreigner, etc.) but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names.

(Dufourmantelle and Derrida 1997: 25)

For the construction of alternatives to the development discourse, many clues emerge from this concept of hospitality:

The fact of not knowing: not knowing the other, but in spite of that being hospitable to him/her; not knowing the answers for his/her particular predicament, and therefore not trying to impose on him/her what might be an appropriate answer for myself.

Giving place implies changes on the side of the host. Hospitality is a form of encounter, based on the recognition of the differences and of the possible transformation of the parties involved. One could relate the idea of ‘giving place’ to that of reducing the ecological footprint of the global North; of changing patterns of production and consumption; of moving towards sustainability which fundamentally questions constant growth.

Being hospitable does not demand that I understand the other or that she moves to my way of understanding the world. Derrida says in fact ‘without asking even their names’. Going back to the ecologies and monocultures introduced by Santos, the challenge is to recognise diversity and that each knowledge system, each temporality concept, each scale of operation and each mode of relation to nature has the ability to enquire and offer responses to situations that need to be changed.

Some implications of hospitality in North–South relations

As mentioned earlier, hospitality implies changes for the host as well as the guest. It can be further argued that in a relation based on hospitality, both parts find themselves alternatively at the giving and at the receiving end, as host and as guest. This means that both sides are transformed by the encounter. While the development discourse understands the current world order as one in which the ‘underdeveloped’ part of humanity must undertake measures to achieve development, post-development understanding refers to changes that all societies in their regular evolution and as part of their social responsibilities, must undertake.

Wealth alleviation

The book Greening the North. A Post-Industrial Blueprint for Ecology and Equity (Sachs et al. 1998) addresses the need for changes in industrialised societies. This book came out of a larger project on how to make Germany sustainable. It includes guidelines for a transition from the current modes of production and consumption to alternative ones. The proposals extend from renewable
energy sources, ecological tax reform, slower speeds and shorter distances, to the shared use of electrical appliances. It emphasises regionalism, rather than parasitical cities; rural diversity, rather than monoculture; organic cycles, rather than intensive linear production; healthy food, rather than the processing industry; regional farmers’ markets, rather than the global supermarkets; fair trade, rather than free trade, among many other suggestions.

These suggestions addressed to the population of a highly industrialised country, are an indication that improving the life conditions of millions of people around the world poses challenges for humanity as a whole. As Wolfgang Sachs argues in The Jo’burg Memo prepared by the Heinrich Boell Foundation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, there can be no poverty alleviation without wealth alleviation (Heinrich Boell Foundation 2002).

Respect for autonomous paths

Development, and development aid in particular, respond to a logic opposite to that of hospitality: conditions are set, outcomes and outputs pre-established, methods and tools imposed. Donors set trends and recipients follow them in many cases, irrespective of the relevance to their particular predicaments. In contrast to the relationships of power and domination characteristic of development, hospitality implies a recognition and support of autonomous paths, irrespective of whether they are known, recognised or valued by the government, institution or organisation, from which support is requested.

Conclusions

I have argued that post-development’s main contribution is its unconditional criticism of development and that in the way this criticism is formulated, clues and signs can be found towards the formulation of alternatives. I have also argued that concrete examples are offered with the intention of generating debates and contribute towards the construction of an ethos beyond development. As part of this debate, central ideas have been put forward that do not aim to replace the development discourse, but to generate ecologies – in the sense of the Sociology of Absences and the Sociology of Emergences – that oppose the monocultures resulting from the hegemonic criteria of rationality and efficiency that dominate development. These ecologies contribute to the unveiling of other ways of doing things and restore their ability to constitute themselves in valid alternatives.

Do these ideas, examples, clues and ecologies form part of a theory of post-development? Is there a common practice that can be identified? When during an interview with Wolfgang Sachs I referred to the school of post-development he said:

Don’t put it too much as a school. It is the others which classify you as a school. It is not my naming. You might have noticed that I hesitated to say we and ourselves. Because there is no natural agreement in a certain way.
There was a common search, there is a common search, and certainly there is a common kind of notion, of course. But are the others who put you a label on.5

In spite of Sachs’ argument, a considerable amount of literature has accumulated and debates have intensified with respect to whether it is possible to talk about post-development theory and practice. From my point of view, the answer to this debate is ‘Not Yet’, in the sense used by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Santos 2003) in his description of the sociology of emergences. He relates to a concept put forward by Ernst Bloch to refer to what exists as possibility, as tendency, as capacity and therefore as anticipatory consciousness towards the future. The ‘Not Yet’ acts on the field of expectations allowing for recognition of what it might be and not just what it is. It relates to what Sachs mentioned of recovering culture-specific and languages of diversity, rather than depending on development terms (and associated practices). It does not rely on what is known and proven, but on clues that help to unveil possibilities for the future. This does not mean that there is a vacuum after development. What it means is that no standardised mode of intervention in social reality can be sought, as it has been the aim of development. It implies to move away from the traditional concept of ‘problems to be solved’ and replace it by ‘utopia to be reached’ recognising that utopias are necessarily diverse and in constant transformation. For this very reason, it is unlikely that post-development will become a unified discourse. Its uniqueness, as a form of narrative that promotes the recovery of people’s own language of desire and culture, depends on its ability to be permeable to diversity, to what it does not know, to the horizons that lie beyond what it has already described and shared. Its contribution resides as much in what it says as in what it provokes others to be sensitive about and explore, including the weaknesses and contradictions of post-development.

Notes
1 See, for example, Gasper (1996), Nederveen Pieterse (1998) and Parfitt (2002).
2 Wolfgang Sachs in conversation with the author of this chapter, Porto Alegre, Brazil, February 2003.
3 Ibid.
4 The Concise Oxford Dictionary.
5 Sachs: ibid.

References


14 Development, internationalism and social movements

A view from the North

Friederike Habermann and Aram Ziai

Why post-development perspectives also need the view from the North

‘There is . . . no such thing as theory in itself, divorced from any standpoint in time and place. When any theory presents itself as such, it is all the more important to . . . lay bare the concealed perspective’ (Cox 1981: 87). This statement certainly applies to post-development theory as well. In contrast to mainstream development theory, which is still (even if less so than in earlier decades) dominated by mostly male scholars from ‘developed’ countries writing about ‘underdeveloped’ countries, the most prominent of the post-development protagonists come from Colombia, Mexico and Iran.1 Others, however, come from industrialised countries, and it is to their merit that they reflect on rather than brushing over this fact,2 not pretending to be one of those excluded by ‘development’, but well aware that they belong to a privileged minority. But even the post-development scholars from the North usually focused mainly on the South: on the destruction caused by some ‘development’ projects and on the attempts of various groups to make a living beyond the promises and principles of the development era. If ‘development’ was to be implemented in the South and failed in the South, it is there that we have to look for alternatives to the present system – so this line of thinking seems to imply.

This is not necessarily wrong, but we see two problems with this approach. First, it may entail the danger of projection. In the 1960s and 1970s, many self-declared revolutionaries in the core were hopefully looking towards the South, expecting a transformation of the world capitalist system through liberation movements in the periphery – only to be disappointed by the not-so-liberating nature of the regimes that followed the regime change, or by the fact that the world capitalist system easily survived all of the socialist movements that came to power in numerous countries. In some post-development texts, similar hopes seem to be nurtured, that are also shifting the focus of system transformation to the South. This leads to the second point: the search for alternatives is confined to one part of the world, and the actions and positions by social movements in the North and their potential for social transformation are largely ignored. If, however, post-development is interested in becoming a global perspective for
liberation and emancipation, it should not confine itself to a certain geographical area, but has to offer a perspective to people active in the North beyond gazing dreamily at the alternatives in the South. These alternatives in the North can of course not be created at the scholar’s desk, but have to arise out of the practice of social movements.

Therefore, we, as scholars and activists from this part of the world, want to examine social movements in the North and their relationship to the concept of development: what are their principles and goals? And what can it mean for people in the North to reject the paradigm of development? These questions will be discussed in the section ‘Development and internationalism in Germany’, mainly in relation to a case study of the BUKO, an organisation of grass-roots initiatives in Germany concerned with North–South relations. We argue that the internationalist left has abandoned the concept of development and that its points of reference are those of global solidarity beyond the dichotomy of developed and underdeveloped. Especially relevant for post-development perspectives are the strategies of ‘politicising subsistence’ and ‘undeveloping the North’, which are discussed. But of equal importance is that – not only within the BUKO – many active people have turned away from the classical strategies of Third World solidarity work and embraced new areas of action (migration, feminism, etc.), in which they formulate political agendas that are no longer reflecting the tenets of development discourse, agendas demanding open borders and global social rights and rejecting national identities.

In the section ‘International activism, the Zapatistas and PGA’, we proceed to the principles and strategies of internationalism of global social movements. We trace the progress in international networking in the 1990s, the initiatives of the Zapatistas in Mexico, the global network Peoples’ Global Action (PGA) and the growing importance of questions of identity and representation.

**Development and internationalism in Germany**

*The BUKO: from development to internationalism*

The BUKO was founded in 1977 as the Bundeskongress entwicklungsaktivistischer Aktionsgruppen, the federal congress of development action groups. The initiative (and the funding) came from the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, BMZ), which was concerned with the growth of grass-roots groups dealing with the Third World, development policy and international solidarity, of which about 1,000 were estimated to exist in Germany. A centralised organisation would have been a possibility to exert at least some influence over these groups during the late 1970s, in which social tensions about left-wing radicalism and terrorism were at their peak. As a result of the widespread commitment to direct democracy, the organisation turned out to be far less centralised than anticipated and served mainly as a platform for the local groups to convene and discuss strategic questions once a year. But the main reasons for the deteriorating relations to the
BMZ (which soon ended the flow of money from the ministry) were the sharp critique of German development policy, the campaign to provide weapons for the guerrillas in El Salvador in their war against the military dictatorship supported by the United States in 1981 and, lastly, the blockade of the BMZ itself as a protest against the North–South politics of the German government in 1982 (Thielking 1996: 7–16; BUKO 1996: 16).

However, what is most relevant here is that despite the great political distance between the BUKO and official government policy, the former was also very much concerned with ‘development’. Of six seminars that the BUKO organised in 1979, three dealt with ‘development aid – criteria for projects’, ‘perspectives of development policy work’ and ‘methods of public presentation in development policy’ (BUKO 1996: 9). The idea was to improve official development policy and aid and to devise alternative development projects, not to question the idea of development itself. Although the titles of the congresses in 1982 and 1983 (‘development means liberation – liberation from what?’ and ‘development means liberation – development towards where?’) indicate the critical view that misery and ‘underdevelopment’ are caused more by oppression and power relations than by lack of economic growth and industrialisation, the Third World was still seen as being in need of ‘development’, ‘development’ being a positive and unilinear process. During the next years, the focus of attention within the BUKO shifted from solidarity brigades and alternative tourism (which had been issues at the 1984 congress) increasingly towards questions of global capitalism: the congresses in 1987 and 1988, for example, centred on the debt crisis and prepared the demonstrations against the International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank summit in Berlin in 1988, where 80,000 demonstrators protested against the meeting. But more and more, the concept of ‘development’ itself was also being critically discussed. While in 1986 a major topic was entitled ‘Development aid – aid to impoverishment?’, alternative forms of development policy work were still being discussed. In 1989, the topic ‘Cultural invasion through development aid and solidarity work’ was also on the agenda. A year later, the development policy of the European Communities (exemplified in the agreements of Lomé) was discussed under the heading ‘Model or neo-colonialism?’. Redefinitions of the concept of development were attempted in 1991. The critique of ‘development’ became more frequent and more fundamental and was increasingly linked to refugee policy, population policy and racism. The 1995 congress was entitled ‘Development mania – patriarchy and solidarity movement’ and explored the links between patriarchal concepts of control (over society and nature) and the identity of those interested in Third World development, including the solidarity movement. The process of separating the organisation from the concept of ‘development’ was completed in 2001, where the Bundeskongress entwicklungspolitischer Aktionsgruppen (federal congress of development action groups) was renamed Bundeskoordination Internationalismus (federal coordination internationalism) (Thielking 1996; BUKO 2006).

The critique of development discourse within the BUKO had two faces: explicit and implicit. The explicit face consisted in vivid discussions on interna-
tionalism, development, subsistence and ‘undeveloping the North’. The implicit face becomes visible in examining the ‘new openness’ of the BUKO towards other issues than Third World solidarity: during the last years, an increasing number of anti-racist, feminist, queer and other groups have been active and visible on the congresses. Their political strategies and demands reveal not only that the rejection of development discourse and its tenets was rhetorical but that the political and utopian points of reference have clearly changed.

**Internationalism, politicising subsistence and undeveloping the North**

During the second half of the 1990s, the critique of development was a major topic in discussions that were taking place in the journal of the BUKO, the *Forum entwicklungs-politischer Aktionsgruppen*, which was later renamed *alaska*, especially as a reaction to the concepts of superficially ecological modernisation under the heading ‘Sustainable development’. In a central and controversial piece, five authors from a BUKO working group presented ‘building blocks for perspectives’ of an internationalist movement. In this, they not only intended to reject the aspects of domination in modernity’s promise of development, but also investigated the extent to which people in the North were complicit in it (Peters *et al.* 1996: 33). The subsistence approach by three German feminist sociologists was seen as a promising starting point for developing a radical alternative to the current way of life in the capitalist industrialist countries. This approach (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1997; Werlhof 1998) is very similar to neopopulist post-development theory (see Chapter 8), except for the attention given to questions of gender and the importance of unpaid reproductive work for the capitalist world system, and has internationally become known under the heading ‘Ecofeminism’ (Mies and Shiva 1993). The chapter then formulated questions in relation to the subsistence approach in the following areas: Is the higher cultural evaluation of women the way to an antipatriarchal society or should the categories of sex and gender be relativised, especially regarding the concept of two sexes/genders? Do we struggle against imperialism, and the like, by simply refusing to take part in this social system or do we stick to traditional forms of social movement resistance? Is agrarian subsistence our main focus or are we searching for urban livelihoods and alternative forms of technology? Do we assume that living in subsistence economies is already a form of doing politics or are we looking for forms of living that are oriented towards the whole global society? Are utopian forms of living valuable by themselves or do they also have to be not only politically correct but also attractive? Do we take the position that the needs structured by capitalism block the way for a free society or do we value the individual possibilities provided by ‘modern’ society? Do we try to avoid traditional forms of politics (congresses, articles, panel discussions) or do we try to preserve them alongside new and alternative ones? (Peters *et al.* 1996: 34). In the latter part of the questions, an alternative to the subsistence approach is indicated, which is being developed in the concept of ‘undeveloping the North’ (‘Abwicklung des Nordens/Den Norden abwickeln’).
Undeveloping the North refers strictly speaking not to a geographical area, but to a social order and a system of domination which is based on the unequal access to and exploitation of labour and nature. The various aspects of this system have been described as capitalist, imperialist, patriarchal, anthropocentric and so on. Undeveloping means disempowering the North, pushing back asymmetrical access and domination in all its dimensions, especially the neocolonial access of the North to resources and labour in the South, in order to provide space for autonomous ways of living. Undeveloping includes five principles: (i) prevention of intervention, (ii) curbing the global sector, (iii) de-privileging formal work, (iv) direct appropriation of spaces and (v) measures to secure survival. To prevent military intervention through which the North can violently implement or consolidate its access to resources and labour in the South is the first principle. If the North is unable to do so, it will have to pay much higher prices for the desired resources. A disarmament of the military-industrial complex will also lead to less repression internally. The second principle of undeveloping is pushing back the global sector producing for the world market to weaken the pressure of global competition that forces every enterprise to follow the imperative of maximise profit or perish. The third, de-privileging formal work is probably the most controversial element of the strategy; nevertheless, it is necessary because its privileges (paid holiday, pensions, etc.) are only granted to a minority – neither the illegal migrant nor the mother taking care of the household is allowed to enjoy them. A basic income provided to everyone would be a demand adequate to counter this discrimination of informal work. The fourth, appropriation of spaces, is the equivalent of the call for ‘land and freedom’ and implies creating independent structures to satisfy material and cultural needs – from squatted houses to community-supported agriculture, local exchange trading systems and autonomous learning centres. The last principle, measures to secure survival, comprises reappropriating land in the South used for the import requirements of the North and taking food crops off the world market. As a consequence, the North has to start producing foodstuffs again. The protagonists are not claiming to have invented a totally new concept, but they emphasise that within some social movement strategies, elements of undeveloping the North are already existent, though maybe in an unclear and diluted form. They are also eager to stress the point that the concept of undeveloping does not in itself create a free and just society – this, and the debates what exactly this society should look like, is the task of social movements, not of scholars. But it provides points of reference, a framework for the shaping of the future, which has learnt its lessons of the history of emancipatory social movements (Spehr 1996: 209–226; see also Hüttner 1997).

These lessons become apparent in the debates about a ‘new internationalism’ that have been led within and around the BUKO during the second half of the 1990s. The ‘old’ internationalism was severely criticised because of anti-semitic tendencies, an almost mythical conception of ‘the people’ in the Third World as a revolutionary subject, a blind eye regarding the cruelties of ‘liberation movements’ come to power and a patriarchal concept of heroism (Foitzik and
Often as a reaction to these shortcomings, a ‘new’, revised internationalism developed, which rejected the traditional concepts of revolutionary subjects, vanguard groups, main contradictions, objective interests, seizing state power, technocratic social planning and productivity, modernisation and development. Different relations of domination were seen as equally important, resistance was seen as having to start in one’s own country and the industrial model of the North was no longer perceived as a model to be repeated by other regions. On top of that, a ‘post-modern’ critique insisted that we have to abandon a modern conception of emancipation which implies a complete rupture between the present and a future system (as if there was nothing liberating in modern achievements), a process which will come to an end in a future society free of domination (as if this were possible), and a liberation of something which already exists but frees itself from its situation (as if it was not shaped by its situation) (Nederveen 1992; Redaktion alaska 1998; Spehr 1998).

**Elements of a post-development discourse**

The renaming of BUKO – replacing development with internationalism – expressed both the turning away from the concept of development politics that had already occurred long before 2001 and its opening up as an internationalist umbrella association towards groups coming from different backgrounds such as anti-racist, feminist or queer.

This opening up began in 2002: 45 organisations were asked to work together on the preparation of the 25th BUKO in Frankfurt am Main. These included groups dealing with the issue of labour, such as ‘European marches against unemployment and exclusion’ or ‘LabourNet Germany’. Previously there had been a rather tense relationship between working-class-oriented groups and internationalist organisations. The congress in 2003 in Bremen was conducted as a common project together with the Berlin ‘Antipatriarchal Network’ and Crossover – a coalition explicitly opposed to all kinds of domination. This was the time of the Iraq War, and the congress focused on the relation between war and the male–female dichotomy. This also implied an obvious rupture with the view of women being closer to nature, which had been latent within the BUKO in the 1990s. The topic of the congress in 2004 was ‘appropriation’. It yielded discussions on appropriation of spaces in the whole left-wing movement. The following congresses already became rallying points for the radical left. The issues then widened to reflect this: colonialism, biopolitics and labour in 2005, migration, control, energy and the G8 in 2006.

New political strategies can be discerned in the entire internationalist movement in Germany. The following reference points mark the beginning of a kind of post-development discourse:

1. ‘Open borders’: this has been a demand of anti-racist groups since the 1990s. The objections of unions and other labour-centred groups, that this
would lead to even more brutal competition on the labour market, were first considered as a mere expression of self-interest and national protectionism. In recent years, these objections have been taken more seriously – though without dropping the demand. Instead it is considered as an unsolvable contradiction of capitalism and the nation state (Zentralamerikakomitee Tübingen 1997). At the same time, it is attempting to steer the unions away from purely protectionist demands, so that the struggle can be undertaken neither just alongside each other nor against each other, but rather with one another.

2 ‘Appropriating global social rights’: this concept does not imply either appealing to nation states or allowing one group to set the standards for rights. Every day and worldwide, people are struggling for global social rights. For example, in this light, migration is understood as a movement of appropriation against global hierarchies. The daily struggles of thousands of refugees to break the fences of Fortress Europe, as in Ceuta and Melilla, are considered as not purely for survival, but also for the right to free movement and world citizenship. Whether people fight against water privatisation in Bolivia or against the dismantling of the welfare state in Germany, they are also opposing growing deprivation and the denial of a secure, self-determined life. In short, global social rights stand for a life of dignity for everyone everywhere. These rights are not predetermined but develop within the struggles (attac AG globale soziale Rechte 2006).

3 ‘No integration’: In 1999, the candidate of the Christian-Democratic Union party in the federal state Hesse carried out a campaign called ‘Yes to integration – No to dual citizenship!’. This won him the election. Kanak Attak, an association of people aiming to break with the categorisation of ethnic identities, turned it on its heels to the provocative slogan ‘No integration!’ With this, they want to draw attention to the incessant pressure on migrants, as they undergo a permanent litmus test as to how well integrated they are. ‘No integration!’ means to reject any standard notion of identity.

Kanak Attak actually consists mainly of people from a migrant background, but it tries to overcome this pigeonholing with its racist social, legal and political consequences. This expresses a new understanding of solidarity: not the solidarity with those concerned, but the insight that only by abolishing identity categories can discrimination be abolished. This reflects a change that also occurred within the debate on undeveloping the North, which had always been shaped by feminists. The exponents of ecofeminism, including the debate within the BUKO on undeveloping the North in the 1990s, had for the most part an essentialist understanding of sexes. Not only this was due to the general time lag in the reception of poststructuralist literature within the German feminist movement, but it expressed an explicit rejection. The modern equation of men with culture (and technology) and women with nature was simply reversed in its estimation, so that women turn out to be the better human beings (critically, Stolz 1997).
So this first strand of developments within the movements can be summarised like this: The split into many different struggles fought by many different identity groups who insisted on their differences transformed into a more diversified movement. This consists of different struggles with people not only increasingly working together but also striving to overcome this pigeonholing as a constituent element of the oppression itself.

The second strand concerns the concept of politicising subsistence and underdeveloping the North, although it may not be so much a theoretical development as a first conversion into practice. The discussions in the 1990s had been very abstract and removed from practical alternatives. There had been some, indeed very few, experiments like intentional communities, but the community members usually steered clear of actual political discussions, becoming very insular, while the theorists stuck to theory. Nowadays, as the dismantling of the social welfare state proceeds, the search for alternatives is becoming an issue for more than just a core of political activists. Here are some examples:

1. A congress called ‘Wie wollen wir wirtschaften? Solidarian Economy in Globalised Capitalism’ was held in Berlin in November 2006. In addition, several workshops on this issue were conducted, and more and more is being published around this topic – this shows that it is not the idea of a small group but the expression of a broader change. Solidarian economy in the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s was a matter for the post-1968 generation, which soon became disillusioned due to the constraints of capitalism. In the late 1980s and 1990s, solidarian economy was thought of as efforts of poor people, mainly women, in ‘third-world countries’. These days, people are becoming interested in getting involved themselves in their everyday lives.

2. Not only are there about 200 Local Exchange and Trading Systems (LETS) in Germany, where people exchange without money, there are also ‘free shops’ in more than 20 cities. These are shops with everyday goods, but without prices. Everything is for free. This works because people bring what they no longer need and take whatever they want. It has no exchange logic; giving and taking are unconnected. It is not intended only for poor people either: most free shops are based on a political desire to overcome the exchange concept. Others are more motivated by the ecological aspect, to avoid throwing away what can be used by others.

3. Free shops are part of a small but growing movement – mainly very young people are involved – of ‘gratis economy’. Partly incited by financial misery, but mainly out of political/ecological motivation, people are trying to live and get by without money, purely from society’s leftovers. This is organised on the basis of sharing, not exchanging. One way to survive without money is ‘dumpstering’: getting discarded groceries from supermarkets, asking for unsellable fruits and vegetables at the end of the market, making agreements with bakeries to collect unsold bread or getting from a farmer what cannot be sold directly – there is always a bunch of crop that
cannot be sold because of European Union (EU) standards of what a potato or a carrot has to look like. To some of the people surviving this way, it matters to live exclusively on organic food – and they manage to. At the same time, people are trying drastically to reduce their consumption of electricity and other resources. The project ‘Kesselberg’ – about 60 people near Berlin – is an example. People dumpster, have windmills to secure their electricity decentrally and ecologically, take wood out of their forest for heating, in order to avoid fossil fuels, have a free shop and have workshops for metal, wood or sewing. All this they organise with only recycled tools. On top, they participate in the LETS. Again, everything is open for everybody, without membership or membership fee, and without exchange logic.

The Cologne foundation ‘women’s initiative’ is setting up a network of people thinking/living/working along the lines of non-patriarchal and non-capitalist economy – whether it be in institutions like universities or in practical projects. While in the 1990s it seemed almost a taboo even to use the word ‘capitalism’, nowadays more and more people are looking for alternatives. Although this network covers only the German-speaking area, the foundation is trying to learn from starting points in the global South.

Out of this intention originated the book Aus der Not eine andere Welt (To make another world out of necessity) (Habermann 2004), an inquiry into the alternative economies in Argentina after the financial crisis of 2001. In this research, one thing became clear: those movements that best fit the criteria of such an economy either stemmed from the feminist movement or had some connections to the Zapatistas in Mexico. From different backgrounds they came to similar conclusions and alternatives.

**International activism, the Zapatistas and PGA**

‘I am sending you 600 dollars in solidarity with your strike’, wrote Subcommander Marcos 1995 in a letter to the Fiat workers in the Italian city of Turin, subverting the traditional constellation of the North providing solidarity and aid for the South. This symbolic act of the Zapatista spokesman marks a turning point in the internationalist understanding of the solidarity movement. Up to this point, the activists had seen themselves in solidarity with the struggles in the ‘Third World’ and tried to support them from a distance. Depending on their political convictions, they collected money either for ‘bread for the world’ or for ‘weapons for El Salvador’.  

However, on some occasions the activists did more than sending bread or weapons. In the radical left, people felt the need to bring the struggle onto the streets. The events in Seattle in 1999 pale in comparison with the 1988 West Berlin riots against IMF and World Bank, when 80,000 people protested. Yet the Berlin protests are not considered as the beginning of the globalisation movement. So why not?

The street fights in Berlin 1988 occurred as solidarity with people in the
global South who were suffering under structural adjustment programmes. In a
two-hour-long video about the riots made one year later by activists themselves,
they conclude that the coincidence and similarity of the Berlin street-fight
images with those of the revolts in Caracas and Buenos Aires should not lead us
to forget that there was no connection between these events. Activists in the
video also reflect on how all the discussions occurring at that time about differ-
ent forms of domination like patriarchy or environment and capitalism were per-
ceived as too much to cope with. Rejecting the traditional position that
capitalism is the main contradiction, they did not feel capable of bringing all
these analyses together. ‘An international structure is lacking, and so is a consis-
tent theory linking the struggles and conditions of women, peasants, workers
and other marginalized groups with an ecological perspective. A vision is
lacking . . . which could halt the loss of utopia’ (autofocus videowerkstatt 1989).

The protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle in 1999
are usually considered as the beginning of the globalisation movement, although
those involved for a longer time in the struggle often consider the Zapatista
insurrection as the starting point of the ‘movement of movements’ (Naomi
Klein). The uprising occurred on 1 January 1994, the day when the North Amer-
ican Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into force. In 1996, the Zapatistas
called for the ‘First Intercontinental Gathering against Neoliberalism and for
Humanity’. Three thousand people followed the call and went for ten days to the
forest of Chiapas. There, Subcommander Marcos described figuratively how
every person has to suffer under and resist against different forms of oppression:

There are different fences. In ours, one must get past the police, customs
officials, tanks, cannons, trenches, planes, helicopters, rain, mud, insects.
Each one of the rebels from the five continents has his own, her own, fence,
own struggle, and a broken fence to add to the memory of other rebels.

This gathering led to the second declaration of La Realidad:

that we will make a collective network of all our particular struggles and
resistances. An intercontinental network of resistance against neoliberalism,
an intercontinental network of resistance for humanity. This intercontinental
network of resistance, recognizing differences and acknowledging similar-
nities, will search to find itself with other resistances around the world.
This intercontinental network of resistance will be the medium in which dis-
tinct resistances may support one another. This intercontinental network of
resistance is not an organizing structure; it doesn’t have a central head or
decision maker; it has no central command or hierarchies. We are the
network, all of us who resist.

This was the missing link that the activists of 1988 had looked for in vain: the
awareness of the fact that they do not have to help from a privileged position but
to fight their own struggles as part of a network of struggles. The words of an
Australian Aborigine above the manifesto of PGA – which arose from the international Zapatista network – express precisely this aspect: ‘If you come only to help me, you can go back home. But if you consider my struggle as part of your struggle for survival, then maybe we can work together.’

With their call to create an ‘intercontinental network of resistance, recognising differences and acknowledging similarities’ and to ‘re-create the world’, the Zapatistas struck a chord worldwide. They call on all those marginalised – women, elderly, homosexual, etc. – to resist. They do not allege that all these struggles would be one and the same, a fight against capitalism. In this way, they underline patterns of dominance also within the movement, among those who struggle, and point to the hegemonic thinking in one’s own mind.

After having been prepared during the second Zapatista Intercontinental Gathering in Spain in 1997, PGA, a worldwide network for exchanging information and co-ordinating actions, was founded in Geneva in February 1998. Common hallmarks include non-hierarchical organisation and rejection of all forms of discrimination. Geneva had been chosen on purpose: three months later prime ministers met here for the second WTO ministerial conference. In fact, Geneva was to witness riots, which led the president of the police to speak of them as the beginning of a movement like 1968. In addition, in all continents, people protested against the WTO, among them 40,000 in Brazil and 100,000 in India, while at the same time a Global Street Party was celebrated in 37 cities. The ‘intercontinental network of resistance’ had become a reality. One year later, during the third WTO conference in Seattle, it was noticed in the whole world.

But maybe the most important part of the work done within PGA is hidden: learning from each other, exchanging ideas, developing alternatives together; talking and debating, bringing together one’s similarities and differences – and changing our own sexist or racist mentalities too. For example, at a workshop called ‘Not man, not woman, but just the opposite’ in Chiapas, Mexico, in May 2000, representatives of grass-roots movements from four continents had joined together to exchange their experiences on the theme of ‘Gender and Neoliberalism’. The very composition of the participants brought the issue of ethnicity into play. This brought tension, but it was fruitful in the end. After this intense week of encounter, nobody left the same.

This is just one example that struggling together is changing our identities too. ‘Here are subsistence farmers, unorganized peasant labor, the tribals and the communities of zero workers on the street or in the countryside. To confront them is not to represent (vertreten) them but to learn to represent (darstellen) ourselves,’ Gayatri C. Spivak writes in her famous essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988: 84). For the two meanings of ‘representation’, she uses the German words *Vertretung* and *Darstellung*: to represent (vertreten) people’s interests always implies representing (darstellen) in the sense of constructing identity for them and oneself.

Subcommander Marcos describes how he went in the middle of the 1980s with a group of white academic people from Mexico City to the forest of
Chiapas to mobilise indigenous people against capitalism and imperialism. This dual representation is exactly what happened: the indigenous did not just listen, but questioned what they were told. It was ‘a clash’, Marcos says. He changed his identity, away from a white middle-class position; though he still has his old identity, he did not become indigenous even when he speaks of ‘we’ in his declarations. But it is precisely this ambiguous identity that gives his voice special importance. Furthermore, it was fundamental in sparking off the global resistance movement: the Zapatistas did not discover this kind of ‘post-development’ policy, but they were heard and thereby able to bring together all the different approaches to such a new policy. That is why they became some kind of umbrella for all these struggles.

Classical internationalist movements saw themselves as speakers of the oppressed in the Third World. But not least because of their pretension to represent adequately the marginalised, they could not understand their own entanglement with hegemonic ways of thinking. The internationalist left of today has abandoned the concept of development as modern and universal progress. Its points of reference are those of international solidarity beyond the dichotomy of developed and underdeveloped, of ‘those concerned’ and ‘us in solidarity’, towards a world where many worlds fit.

Global perspectives for post-development

We see that the struggle against and the abandoning of the tenets of development discourse have not been restricted to social movements in the South but have in fact taken place in the North as well and constitutes an important element in the global network of resistance against neo-liberal capitalism, which is associated with the names of Seattle and Genoa. A new form of internationalism is on the rise, which manifests itself in the strategies of ‘undeveloping the North’ as well as in the declarations of the Zapatistas. It is not without ambiguities and incoherences – for example, one might ask how the notion of global social rights is compatible with the idea of radically decentralised structures of power – but it certainly has learnt the lessons of history; the lesson that not only the project of the developmental state, but the very idea of some nations or cultures being ‘developed’ and others less so, has highly authoritarian implications that serve not to liberate, but to dominate human beings. That the very claim to have found a blueprint of an ideal society subordinates a myriad of other aspirations and utopias and ultimately serves to stifle debate about relations of power and social transformation. That the assumption to represent or articulate the needs of the subaltern from a privileged position amounts to ‘cognitive imperialism’ and serves to disempower those who are supposed to benefit. That on the other hand, the minds of activists or the subaltern or ‘revolutionary subjects’ are not mysteriously free from power relations such as racism and sexism and that the idea of an authentic ‘voice of the poor’ cannot serve as a universal guiding light either.

It should give us hope that these and other elements of post-development discourse have not only been invented by some clever theorist or authentic
indigenous community and then spread via the internet, but have been the outcome of debates of activists and social movements all over the world. It should also give us hope if these elements are not accepted as ultimate wisdom, but instead are sceptically discussed and criticised. ‘Preguntando caminamos’, the Zapatistas say, questioning we proceed.

Notes

1 It has to be noted that these three and the overwhelming majority of the post-development authors are also male.

2 Stephen Marglin pointed out that ‘whatever one’s reservations may be about the necessity or utility of radios, televisions, motorcycles, and the like, the division between the necessary, the merely useful, and the wastefully luxurious is not ours to make; it is not our place to argue the virtues of simplicity and abstinence to those for whom material abundance is a distant dream’ (Marglin 1990: 27). Similar reflections on one’s position as a scholar from the North are to be found in Rist (1997: 241f) and Sachs (1999: 8).

3 The former is an aid campaign by Christian non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the latter support armed resistance by radical groups.

References


15 Concluding the exploration
Post-development reconsidered

Aram Ziai

At the end of this exploration, it is time to review the path of the debate. Numerous questions concerning development and post-development have been addressed – and even more are left for further research. We have encountered post-development theory building on Heidegger, Cowen and Shenton, Castoriadis, and especially on the actor-oriented approach by Norman Long and the sociology of absences by Boaventura de Sousa Santos. We have learned about post-development practice in Mexico and the Philippines, about alternative NGOs in Senegal and resistance movements in India. In this final chapter, four points shall be dealt with that deserve further exploration: two of them concerning points of criticism which have been taken up by some of the contributions, two of them concerning points not sufficiently treated so far. First of all, the charge of representing development as a monolithic enterprise and neglecting the appropriation of development projects by local actors shall be treated. After that, the question of indigenous practices aimed at improvements in the standard of living needs to be discussed from the post-development perspective. Then, the theoretical foundation of post-structuralism and its methodological consequences are reflected – a slightly more detailed discussion seems appropriate here. And finally, gender relations should be noted as a blind spot in most post-development contributions.

Development – a monolithic enterprise?

Critics of post-development argue that development is wrongly presented as a monolithic enterprise and that its radical repudiation misses the positive changes in the concept and practice of development which have been achieved since the 1960s. Also, post-development would underestimate the extent to which development projects were appropriated and transformed by local actors.

Several of the chapters, particularly those by Nustad and Lie, demonstrate that it is possible to combine a post-development perspective which criticizes Eurocentrism and trusteeship with an actor-oriented perspective on development projects focusing on these processes of adaptation and transformation on the local level. In order to refine post-development theory, we have to differentiate between the critique of development as a concept and as a practice. It is possible
to unconditionally reject development as a Eurocentric concept without claiming that each and every development project is part of an enterprise of material or cultural imperialism (as some of the neo-populist post-development texts seem to suggest).

Still, even recognizing the vast differences between huge infrastructure projects resulting in the loss of livelihood for thousands of people and small-scale projects based on participatory action research which forbid grouping them together under the same label, one has to ask whether the form of development agencies and projects has certain implications shaping all efforts for social improvement undertaken within this form. Does not the conception that there are problems in the South which can be solved by development projects in the South already preclude other possibilities? Can the traditional relation between trustees from the North and beneficiaries in the South really be broken up by participatory methods if the outside expert is still necessary to solve the problem? Does all the rhetoric about ‘partnership’ and ‘ownership’ in development policy make a real difference if the structural positions of aid donor (who sets the conditions) and aid recipient (who tries to at least give the impression of abiding by these conditions in order to get the money) have not changed? Can ‘development policy’ tackle the relevant causes of poverty and be more than a palliative if it avoids attacking class rule and capitalist relations of exploitation – which hardly any ‘development agency’ is interested in or can afford to? A serious engagement with these questions raises doubts about the extent to which the development apparatus can be reformed, even if progressive reforms are attempted. Post-development theory shows that parts of development practice still remain the same despite repeated conceptual innovations and provides explanations why this might be so.

The subjects of ‘development’: neither acceptance nor resistance

Another serious criticism concerns the claim that post-development has a reductionist view on the subjects in the Third World: they are characterized as either passively accepting the assumptions of development discourse and the demands of development projects or as actively resisting these attempts of cultural domination and capitalist exploitation. In the first case, they were denied agency and were portrayed as helpless victims of development discourse, in the second their activities were romanticized as resistance against the ‘Western project’ of development.

However, as some contributions indicate, the most frequent response to projects and processes of development might be neither of these, but a creative engagement with them. Especially the chapters by Maiava, Gibson-Graham and Matthews appear of great interest here. They suggest that the goal of these engagements might not be exclusively the pursuit of material interests or the maintenance of cultural identity, but often a curious mixture of the two: an attempt to improve the standard of living not only of oneself but usually of the
family or even the community while not surrendering certain traditional cultural practices and values, or at best adapting them to the new circumstances. Indigenous ‘home-grown’ practices aimed at improvements are often hard to categorize: they are based on the promises of development or on an explicit resistance to the Western model, but mostly consist of creative strategies of survival under the conditions of globalized capitalism and a development industry, just like the migration movements and the entailing transfer of remittances in the Pacific or the use of development organizations to set up clientelistic relationships of patronage in Senegal.

Post-structuralism: methodological problems, theoretical questions

Another important point of criticism has not been adequately addressed by post-development scholars so far. It concerns the theoretical foundation, which in this book is clearly identified by Escobar (and also by Nustad) as post-structuralist, and the omnipresent tendency within post-development to state what development actually means and consequently to reject it. Taking Sachs as a representative of post-development, Crush correctly points out that ‘in the very call for banishment, Sachs implicitly suggests that it is possible to arrive at an unequivocal definition’ (Crush 1995: 3). Nederveen Pieterse expands on this point: ‘Apparently this kind of essentializing of “development” is necessary in order to arrive at the radical repudiation of development, and without this anti-development pathos, the post-development perspective loses its foundation’ (Nederveen Pieterse 2001: 106).

While – as we have seen – it is possible to maintain a fundamental critique of development even though accepting a more nuanced view of the whole range of practices conducted under the name of development, the previous point is absolutely valid: rejecting development in its entirety presupposes unambiguously defining what development is. This, however, is a highly questionable method if one claims to have a post-structuralist foundation.¹ Whereas both structuralism and post-structuralism agree that linguistic signs are composed of a signifier (e.g. the word ‘cat’) and a signified (e.g. the concept of a furry animal hunting mice and purring occasionally), that the relationship between the two is arbitrary and that meaning is a result of the differential relation between signifiers (e.g. ‘cat’ in contrast to ‘hat’ and ‘bat’, etc.), structuralism assumes languages to be stable systems where each signifier corresponds to a certain signified. Post-structuralism, in contrast, claims that the relationship between signifier and signified is by no means stable, but has to be reproduced continuously, and that there are endless contextual variations in meaning.

Now the post-development theorists have pointed out, in line with post-structuralist thinking, that the signifier ‘development’ has been used to denote very different things throughout its conceptual history: infrastructure projects damaging the environment and ecological policies trying to repair the damage, structural adjustment policies sharpening inequalities and social policies lessen-
ing them, and so on. There has been economic, social, rural, integrated, sustainable, participatory, endogenous and human development. Esteva identifies a ‘conceptual inflation’ (Esteva 1992: 12), and Sachs remarks: ‘The meaning of development exploded, increasingly covering a host of contradictory practices ... the semantic chaos was complete ... development has become a shapeless amoeba-like word. It cannot express anything because its outlines are so blurred’ (Sachs 1999: 7).

The problem is obvious: if development can be arbitrarily redefined, how can the post-development writers be sure that the content is always to be rejected? The answer they give is twofold. First of all, they argue that the concept is being instrumentalized for a ‘political campaign’ (Esteva 1992: 6): ‘They who pronounce the word denote nothing but claim the best of intentions. Development thus has no content but does possess a function: it allows any intervention to be sanctified in the name of a higher evolutionary goal’ (Sachs 1999: 7). Second, they argue that those who now use the word cannot free themselves from a web of meanings that impart a specific blindness to their language, thought, and action. No matter the context in which it is used, or the precise connotation that the person using the word wants to give it, the expression becomes qualified and coloured by meanings perhaps unwanted. The word always implies a favourable change, a step from the simple to the complex, from the inferior to the superior, from worse to better. The word indicates that one is doing well because one is advancing in the sense of a necessary, ineluctable, universal law and towards a desirable goal. ... The metaphor of development gave global hegemony to a purely Western genealogy of history, robbing peoples of different cultures of the opportunity to define the forms of their social life ... the emphasis on economic growth of the first post-Truman developers was ... the expression of its [Truman’s original development program’s] very essence.

(Esteva 1992: 10, 9, 17)

However applied, the development idea always implies that there are lead runners who show the way to latecomers; it suggests that advancement is the result of planned action. Even without having economic growth in mind, whoever talks of development invokes notions of universality, progress and feasibility. ... Development entails looking at other worlds in terms of what they lack.

(Sachs 1999: 7)

There is a certain tension on the theoretical level between the notion that a discourse has to be continuously reproduced and can take on different shapes and the idea of certain unchanging characteristics of a discourse, between the malleability of development and its essence. In order to clarify this issue, one needs to entangle the different claims. We have to differentiate not only between
development as a concept and development as practice, but also within the latter between development as a natural process and development as intentional development policy and within the former between the concrete, historical and the abstract level.

Starting with development as a concept, we see that its roots lie in nineteenth-century evolutionism (which was based on the premise of a ‘natural’ development of capitalism during history) on the one hand and in the attempts to intentionally develop certain areas on the other hand. The concrete concept of development, which evolved as a successor to colonial discourse in conceptualizing the relations between North and South, was assuming the societies of North America and Western Europe as ideals of development and was stressing the necessity of economic growth, modernization and industrialization. On an abstract level, it was based on the assumptions that there is a general process of development which all societies experience sooner or later and that there is a general idea of a good, developed condition irrespective of cultural differences. The practice or rather the project of development was historically linked to its political function in the Cold War and to the interventions by development experts. On an abstract level, different kinds of interventions independent of the colonial and post-colonial North–South relations can be imagined.

Taking a radical post-structuralist position, it is conceivable that through a continuously changing discursive practice and rising ecological consciousness, the Western European and North American societies will one day no longer be seen as developed societies and other societies will serve as models. But on the abstract level even then there will be a universal standard for what counts as developed and underdeveloped, again ignoring cultural differences and heterogeneous conceptions of a good society.

However, such a position seems to underestimate the ‘staying power’ of discursive features and the relations between signifier and signified. Even by radically redefining development as, for example, a humble and harmonious relationship with nature or social cooperation without unequal access to resources, one cannot simply change the terms of discourse. The web of meanings previously established is still present in the thought, speech and writing of all the other people. It seems plausible that regarding development there are certain premises on the abstract level linked to the concept which are nearly impossible to change within this discourse (the general idea of comparability of societies – some being more developed than others), while there are premises on the concrete level which seem not impossible, but quite hard to change (the industrialized countries being developed, economic growth being a central element of development, development as the result of planned intervention by experts).

In this context, it has to be noted that during the 1980s and 1990s, a transformation of development discourse has begun which has the potential to shake the foundations of development discourse. Elements of this transformation are the integration of originally critical concepts in a supposedly harmless form (participation, sustainability) as well as the neo-liberal counter-revolution in development theory.
In the light of these reflections, any post-development position should be very careful to delineate what exactly is meant by development: development as the concrete Eurocentric concept (leaving space for an alternative universalism) or the abstract concept in general (the position of cultural relativism), development as process or as policy, the concrete interventions by Western experts or the abstract necessity of planned intervention as such, etc. To mix up these different notions is not helpful for serious further debate about development and post-development. From a post-structuralist position, one should, however, be aware that definitions of development, relations between signifier and signified, can never claim to be universally valid or natural, but are contingent and thus political relations, which have to be justified. Given these preconditions, the theoretical debate on these issues seems very promising.

Gender: the blind spot

Despite the numerous comments on and critiques of post-development, its blind spot in the realm of gender relations has hardly been realized or found noteworthy. Here, we are confronted with a specific case of the general problem pointed out by Sauviat: the neglect of relations of domination within cultures as a result of a focus on the relations of domination between cultures. The uncritical stance adopted by many post-development authors towards cultural traditions implicitly or explicitly includes not only gendered divisions of labour, but potentially patriarchal values.

This is already indicated in Esteva’s comments on the ‘nature of women’ (Esteva 1995: 175) as well as in Esteva and Prakash’s views on the segregation of the sexes and on cooking and child-rearing and expressing kindness as being female tasks (Esteva and Prakash 1998: 60f). Nevertheless, ecofeminist positions also hold essentialized views on the nature of women and their proximity to nature and nurturing (Mies and Shiva 1993).

It is, however, telling that the often vast inequalities in working hours, possession and status between men and women in the traditional communities that Esteva and others refer to remain undisputed and even unmentioned. From a feminist perspective, this can be interpreted as ‘strategic silence’ which implies silent approval of these inequalities. Furthermore, the appeal to respect the integrity and intimacy of the family just as those of the person and of the society (Esteva 1995: 136) can easily be read as a demand to confer some sort of sovereignty to the structure of the family in order to prevent interventions into oppressive patriarchal relations within a depoliticized ‘private’ sphere.

To construct the gendered access to resources, spaces and certain occupations and activities as an inherently valuable cultural tradition is to naturalize highly political structures and relations of domination. Parpart correctly observes: ‘sensitivity to existing social arrangements has often led to the uncritical acceptance of traditional inequities, especially those based on gender, which is regarded as private, and thus outside the realm of economic development and challenges to the status quo’ (Parpart 2002: 53).
However, not all of the post-development authors seem to have a blind spot in this area. Not only does Arturo Escobar deal in detail with the process of the discovery of women in development theory (Escobar 1995: 171–192), he also subscribes to the view that the acceptance of a sexual division of labour as a fact in many development projects contributes to the subordination of women (Escobar 1995: 183). Still, the confrontation of post-development with feminist theory remains an important and interesting field for further research. To give just one example: post-development thinkers have correctly pointed out that within colonial and at least early development discourse, the oppression of the natives was legitimized by metaphors of childhood. Just like children, they were closer to some pristine state of nature, but also immature, irrational and in need of protection, guidance and education by the civilized or developed men of the West (Nandy 1992: 56–76). But they failed to realize that exactly the same discursive strategies have long since been applied to defend male privilege and deny equal rights for women.

Concluding remarks

Although not all the questions raised in the Introduction have been authoritatively answered in this book, maybe the important point is merely to ask the right questions and to carry on the debate about ‘development’ as it has been so far – and about the alternatives. This book should not be seen as the definitive statement on post-development, but rather as a part of an ongoing debate between scholars and activists interested in the field of North–South relations and ‘development’ policy, but also in critical theory and emancipatory practice. In contrast to most previous publications on post-development, its aim was neither to celebrate nor to bury it, but to further pursue its lucid arguments on the one hand and to engage in discussion with its controversial claims and point to its weaknesses on the other hand. Its goal was less grand than proclaiming the ‘era of post-development’. If it contributes to denaturalizing the conceptualizations of development discourse and if it manages to advance the debate on alternative thinking and practice on the subjects and objects of this discourse, then at least the editor will already regard it as a success.

At the end of the twentieth century, one of the sceptical post-development authors wrote:

It seems to us today almost nonsensical to deny that there is such a thing as ‘development’, or to dismiss it as a meaningless concept, just as it must have been virtually impossible to reject the concept ‘civilization’ in the nineteenth century, or the concept, ‘God’ in the twelfth.

(Ferguson 1994: xiii)

It remains to be seen whether this will hold true for the twenty-first century.
Notes

1 The relatively recent reform of the infamous structural adjustment programmes of the IMF and the World Bank illustrates this case. Although the policies to be adapted in exchange for debt cancellation or fresh money are in theory to be decided by the government and the civil society of the country itself drafting Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) by using participatory methods, the final decision is taken by the Bretton Woods institutions. This has the effect that the governments anticipate what the IMF and the World Bank want to read in the PRSPs in order to get the money.

2 Ferguson (1994) convincingly argues that the institutional constraints of development agencies are responsible for their main effect: the depoliticization of poverty as a ‘development problem’.

3 Richard Ashley, who works in the field of International Relations using post-structuralist perspectives, has called this ‘the heroic practice’ (Ashley 1988). It entails eradicating ambiguities in order to arrive at a clear statement on the relevant object and constitutes a specifically modern way of producing knowledge.

4 This transformation of development discourse is examined in detail in Ziai 2004 and 2007.

5 Although the contributions in Marchand and Parpart (1995) and Saunders (2002) mostly engage the post-development text only marginally, they are promising steps in the right direction.

6 In this context, Spike Peterson claims that diverse types of domination operate with the same pattern – the privileging of masculine values:

   Understanding gender analytically generates what I consider the singularly most transformative feminist insight: that the (symbolic, discursive, cultural) privileging of masculinity – not necessarily men – is key to naturalizing the (corporeal, material, economic) power relations that constitute structural hierarchies. The point here is that diverse hierarchies are linked and ideologically ‘naturalized’ by denigration of the feminine. In other words, casting the subordinate as feminine – lacking agency, control, reason, skills, or culture – devalorizes not only women but also racially, culturally, or economically marginalized men.

   (Peterson (2003): 14, emphasis in the original)

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