

CRITICAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY: RESULTS AND PROSPECTS



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ABSTRACT: In the current conjuncture there is much talk about «the collapse of globalism» and a move «beyond the Washington Consensus» as the dominant global neo-liberal order enters a crisis of legitimacy. It is thus a good moment to (re)engage with the genealogy and current prospects for a critical development theory or, rather, theories. In the 1990s, capitalist triumphalism saw the neoliberal approach to development in unchecked full flow and it seemed that «there was no alternative» as the gurus of neoliberalism preached. Now we are presented with an opportunity to offer development alternatives that would have real popular purchase. Critical theory's embrace of a «post-development» which read the whole development enterprise as illusion left no viable challengers to orthodox development theory in the field. While state-led development in the traditional mode, including its radical variant, had little purchase in an increasingly internationalised world order, the issue of development as theory and practice to overcome poverty and inequality has not gone away as a vital global concern. The question today is whether a revitalised critical development theory can meet these challenges.

KEYWORDS: development, critical theory, dependency theory, post-development, neo-liberalism.

RESUMEN: En la actual coyuntura se ha hablado mucho sobre «el colapso del globalismo» y de ir «más allá del Consenso de Washington» a medida que el nuevo orden neoliberal dominante entra en una crisis de legitimidad. Por ende es un buen momento para (re)pensar la genealogía y la perspectiva actual de una teoría crítica del desarrollo, o más bien, de las teorías. En los años noventa, el triunfalismo capitalista consideraba al enfoque neoliberal del desarrollo como una corriente desbordada y que «no tenía ninguna alternativa» según predicaban los gurús del neoliberalismo. Ahora se presenta una oportunidad para proponer alternativas de desarrollo que pudieran tener una credibilidad popular real. La teoría crítica, de la mano del «posdesarrollo», que considera la empresa del desarrollo como una ilusión, no dejaba rivales viables en el campo frente a la teoría ortodoxa del desarrollo. Mientras que el desarrollo encabezado por el Estado en el modo tradicional, incluida su variante radical, tuvo escasa credibilidad en un orden mundial cada vez más internacionalizado, el tema del desarrollo como teoría y como práctica para superar la pobreza y la desigualdad no se ha agotado como preocupación global vital. La pregunta en la actualidad consiste en saber si una revitalizada teoría crítica del desarrollo puede enfrentar estos desafíos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: desarrollo, teoría crítica, teoría de la dependencia, post-desarrollo, neoliberalismo.

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*This is how we picture the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past.
Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe
which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.
The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what was smashed.
But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has got caught in his wings
with such violence that the angel can no longer close them.
This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned,
while the pile of debris grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.*

(Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, IX)

INTRODUCTION

With many writers now openly talking about «the collapse of globalism» (Saul, 2005), and a move «beyond the Washington Consensus» (Broad, 2004) it might be opportune to (re)engage with the genealogy and current prospects for a critical development theory or, rather, theories. In the 1990s, capitalist triumphalism saw the neoliberal approach to development in unchecked full flow and it did seem that there was no alternative as the gurus of neoliberalism preached. Critical theory's embracement of a «post-development» which read the whole development enterprise as an illusion left no viable challengers to orthodox development theory in the field. While state-led development in the traditional mode, including its radical variant, has little purchase in an increasingly internationalised world order, the issue of development a theory and practice to overcome poverty and inequality has not gone away as a vital global concern. The question today is whether a revitalised critical development theory can meet these challenges.

CRITICAL THEORY

Critical theory, in its broadest or ecumenical sense, could be said to start with Marx, continuing via the Frankfurt School to reach the present, via Foucault, in the shape of feminism, ecology and post-colonialism amongst other liberatory pulses. Critical theory is, in essence, concerned with the critique of modernity. In its Frankfurt School variant critical theory can be distinguished from traditional theory according to its specific and practical purpose. A social theory is critical insofar as it seeks human emancipation, that is «to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them» (Horkheimer, 1982: 244). Such theories seek to explain the circumstances that enslave human beings and provide the normative bases for social enquiry that will decrease domination and increase freedom in all its aspects. Following on from Horkheimer I will take «critical development theory» to refer to those approaches which explain what is wrong with the current social order, identifies the agents for social change and provides practical goals for social transformation.



Forty years ago the «great refusal» of 1968 saw a considerable flourishing of critical theory. Today thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse are being (re)discovered in terms of what they might have to say in an era of paradigmatic transition such as the one we are living in. Steven Vogel refers to how «Marcuse, of course, was the great philosopher of everything being possible. He thought that things really could be radically different than they are, and that we could think of other ways of living» (Vogel 2004: 240). Disarmingly simple this political philosophy holds that the world around us is neither natural nor eternal and that it can (indeed should) be transformed. The weakness of «classical» critical theory as expressed by Horkheimer was its radical separation between critical theory and any conception that it might be addressed to a social grouping that might put into action such as Marx's proletariat. Theory was (re)separated from a political practice aimed at the seizure of political power to effect social transformation. With the revival of social contestation since the loss of confidence in full blown neoliberalism we could argue that a revived critical theory(ies) today might seek an addressee for its message. This time round it is unlikely to be the classical proletariat and might include a whole host of contestatory social groups from peasants to disaffected middle layers.

Insofar as development is associated with the development of capitalism and of modernity, critical theory is inextricably bound up with modernity even while it offers a critique of its discontents. Social theory can act as an apologist for modernity (while helping to smooth its rough edges), it can act as a conservative cry for a nostalgic lost order or it can act in a critical/radical manner and strive for human freedom (Beilharz, 2000: 46). For some social theorists the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* referred to by Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) in their foundational text revealed the «dark side» of modernity to an extent that leaves them with no option but to move onto a «postmodern» terrain of theory, enquiry and politics. The new social movements of the 1960s around peace, gender and ecological issues also operated precisely such a shift even if without license from social theory.

The modern/postmodern transition will serve in this genealogy of critical development studies (CDS) as a crucial disjuncture or hinge between the various critical development theories we shall examine, from socialist development and dependency theories, through engendered and sustainable development, to the «culture turn» and the «language turn» to end up with «post-development». I assume, as does Boa Santos that «ours is, therefore, a time of paradigmatic transition» (Santos, 1995: ix). What I do not take for granted, though that might indeed be the conclusion of my survey is «the idea that the paradigm of modernity has exhausted all its possibilities of renovation, and that its continuing prevalence is due to historical inertia ...» (*ibid*). Be that as it may, it is undoubtedly the task of CDS to offer a radical critique of the dominant paradigm and to use all its imaginative powers to develop a new paradigm offering renewed emancipatory horizons.



Critical Modernism

Marxism was clearly shaped by and part of modernism as well as being a prime mover of critical theory (see Berman, 1983). Karl Marx famously declared that «The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future» (Marx, 1976: 91). In time, however, Marx began to question the unilinear simplicity of this evolutionist and teleological schema. So by the time he came to correct the French proof of *Capital* in 1875 he had specifically restricted the English model's relevance to Western Europe. He then began a remarkable correspondence with his Russian followers on the nature of the peasant commune and whether capitalism was in fact an inevitable stage in its evolution. Marx was driven to conclude that England's industrial revolution did not necessarily show Russia «the image of its own future» as he had previously argued so categorically. Embryonically thus we find in the late Marx a recognition of the unique structures of backward capitalism and an intuitive understanding of uneven or dependent development.

It was in Russia, in relation to which Marx rethought his development theory in the 1880s, that the Marxists, under Lenin, were able to actually practise development, albeit in the most inauspicious circumstances. The transition to socialism was to begin in what today would be called, at best, a developing country. As the hopes of revolution in the advanced capitalist West failed, so Lenin turned to the East for the source of revolutionary upheaval. Within Russia, the civil war against the counter-revolutionary forces was followed by an internecine struggle within the revolution that led to the triumph of Stalin. Against the various development strategies advanced by Preobrazhenski, Bukharin, Trotsky and others, Stalin's «socialism in one country» won out. This entailed large-scale, capital intensive, import-substitution industrialization led by the state based on rural-urban terms of trade desperately unfavourable to the peasantry.

While the post-Soviet collapse dominant mood is that communism simply failed, this should not blind us to the rich Soviet debates around development in the 1920s. An exceptionally wide range of development issues were tackled in these debates that would have a momentous impact on the future of socialist development. In an unprecedented era of daring, creativity and experimentation, basic development choices were debated. What was the current balance between agriculture and industry, and within the latter between heavy industry and consumption goods? Was autarkic development possible (or desirable) or should the new state import its technology from the West? Alec Nove goes as far as to say that the economists of the period «could be said to have been the pioneers of modern development economics» (Nove, 1986: 73) in their sophisticated analysis of growth and development models.

The balance sheet of actually existing socialist development is not particularly enlightening. Health and education indicators have often improved, and



some degree of industrialization has occurred. Yet even that was not the case for the varied expressions of «African socialism» for example. We must go further to question whether socialism was ever a development project and whether the provenance of the Third World socialist development model in the Soviet revolution made it «socialist» in any meaningful sense. As Leftwich puts it, in regards to this anti-Western development policy, «It offered speed, it offered force, it offered power and could be called socialist. [But] in the course of this process of borrowing, emulation and adaptation of the Leninist-Stalinist model, a tragic elision of the ideas of socialism and of development seems to have occurred» (Leftwich 1992: 36). Socialist development paths rarely led to the development of socialism.

Soviet orthodoxy in the 1930s and beyond imposed a rigid and schematic understanding of the «stages» of development. This impoverished Marxist development theory was first contested by Latin American Marxists in the mid to late 1940s (see Frondizi, 1947; Bagú, 1949) and then taken up with great vigour by the dependency theorists in the early 1960s (for an overview see Kay, 1989). The dependency approach responded very concretely to the perceived failure of the modernization theory driven Alliance for Progress in the post-war period. Import-substitution industrialization was not leading to national development but, rather, a dependent development driven and for the benefit of the mainly US-based multi-national corporations. Dependency theorists were also, if perhaps less explicitly, responding to the perceived Eurocentric bias of the Marxist and Leninist theories of capitalist development and imperialism with their neglect of the «view from the South».

While the critical dependency theory became somewhat codified and simplified in the North through the prolific polemics of André Gunder Frank, in Latin American social science it produced undoubted advances in our understanding of the original path capitalist development took in the periphery. The influence of external vulnerability on development, the foreign debt burden, financial and technological dependence and the rise of marginality and the informal sector are all debates springing from dependency debates. In the Cardoso and Faletto version (Cardoso and Faletto, 1979) there was even a sustained engagement with the interaction between capital accumulation, the development of social classes and the political process. Of course, from afar dependency will probably be remembered more for the less nuanced but more *engagé* titles of Samir Amin's books such as *Delinking* (1990) and *Maldevelopment* (1990) which more or less reduce social theory to political slogans.

From a present day critical development theory perspective, the dependency approach seems severely flawed (for a contemporaneous review see O'Brien, 1975; Palma, 1981). Most visions or perspectives (although not all) were economic and neglected the role of social classes and political struggle. The precise mechanisms of dependent development were rather underspecified to say the least. For most of these writers the choice was stark –underdevelopment or revo-



lution– and thus the great leap forward by the NICS (Newly Industrializing Countries) in the 1970s set them back severely. The intuition that backward capitalism would not follow the progressive path charted for it by Marx seemed simply disproven. Above all from a meta-theoretical perspective dependency was flawed because:

a) it more or less mirrored the mainstream modernization theory, simply reversing its postulates on, for example, the role of the multi-national corporations which one saw as positive and the other as negative without actually contesting the terms of the discourse;

b) it was premised on the existence of something we could call «non-dependent development» that was never really specified and when it was it sounded like a quite unattractive and non-viable delinking from the world system;

c) it was shaped by methodological nationalism insofar as it took the nation-state as unproblematic envelope of development which was thus reduced, more or less, to economic nationalism;

d) its essentially teleological construction tended to deny the role of social classes, the cultural dimension and any real sense of agency other than the ultimate revolutionism that characterised many of its variants.

In an era when the dependency theory of the 1960s seems as remote to present day development debates as the Soviet industrialization debates of the 1920s what might remain relevant to the contemporary (re)construction of a critical development theory? First of all, since around 2000 the theories of imperialism are making a comeback, albeit under conservative (Ferguson, 2003) and post-modern (Hardt and Negri, 2000) guises. To understand the precise dynamics and mechanisms of the globalization processes we urgently need a robust, renewed and relevant theory of imperialism if critical development theory is to find new life and applications in practice. As to the dependency approach it has been revived under the guise of the neo-structuralism now actively contesting the until recently hegemonic neo-liberal paradigm (see Sunkel, 1990). Whatever its limitations it does effectively counter neoliberal articles of faith from a modernized or quasi dependency perspective. If we turn to mainstream development we find for example that in the UN Millennium Project and its widely disseminated goals, the underlying dominant modernization paradigm is tempered by an explicit recognition of the «structural constraints» to development, the exogenous roots of development problems and the growing gap between rich and poor countries, all once dependency theory staples.

GREENING AND ENGENDERING MODERNITY

During the first UN *Decade of Development* (1961-1970) the international development institutions took shape under the aegis of the liberal capitalist model which



emerged triumphant from the Second World War. Women were only visible in the development discourse in relation to debates on population control. The ecological constraints on the development mission were simply not seen or recognised in the post-war period. The relationship between international trade and the environment was simply not on the agenda. On both fronts –gender and environment– what was once the preserve of new social movements in the 1970s had become part and parcel of mainstream discourse and practice by the 1990s. The World Bank in particular –but also the IMF and the WTO– proved permeable to first environmental and then gender issues to the extent that these are viewed as paradigmatic cases of how civil society can impact on global governance (see O’Brien et al, 2000).

Critical feminist development theory challenged the dominant «women in development» main/malestream approach in various ways (for an overview see Rai, 2005). The issue was seen not as one of «bringing women in» to the development process but the unequal social relations between women and men. It was not integration that was needed but the empowerment of women with a view to transforming unequal power relations. Nor could one just «add women and stir» into the development process, what was required was a total re-conceptualization of the development process from a gender and equality perspective. The main conceptual breakthrough was a move from «women» (as lack or as problem) to the gender division of labour in the household and in waged work as the main determinant of inequality. The Gender and Development (GAD) approach eventually displaced Women in Development but for its critics «we have only to see the way in which the major national and international development agencies have embraced the terminology of GAD to be aware of the dangers of co-option and the limits of its challenge» (Rai, 2005: 234). Constantly we need to bear in mind that when CDS makes an advance the mainstream may seek to co-opt it.

One strand of the gender and development approach focused most clearly on the domain of patriarchy, capital accumulation and work. There was an intense focus on the sexual division of labour and on the household as locus of unequal gender relations. The early studies all rejected the notion that if only women had equal access to the market –in terms of jobs, equal pay, childcare provisions, etc.– women’s subordinate position in capitalist society would end. In the dialectic between class and gender oppression the latter was, at the end of the day, seen as more determinant. There was later (see Bakker 1994; Sparr, 1994) a concentrated focus on the gendered nature of macro-economic policy and in the impact of the 1980s structural adjustment programmes. The main element in the feminist engagement with development discourse and practice in the 1990s was a much greater emphasis on the practical policies that the likes of the World Bank needed to adopt for gender planning in development (expressed cogently in Moser, 1993). Here an advance in terms of engendered policies was a certain domestication of once radical policies.



The postmodern feminist critique of the 1990s took a very different tack. On the one hand there was a shift within critical feminism from the period when a linked (if debated) future for Marxism and feminism was on the agenda (see Barrett, 1980) through a «paradigm shift» to the post-materialist, post-structuralism of 1990s feminism (see Barrett, 1991). An arguably distinct element in destabilizing dominant theory was what Chandra Mohanty referred to as the 1990s «challenges posed by Black and Third World feminists [that] can point the way towards a more precise, transformational feminist politics» (Mohanty, 1992: 75). The feminist critique of mainstream development theory took various forms including the Third World Marxist Feminism challenge to orthodoxy (see Sen and Grown, 1988), the post-structuralist feminist critique of global capitalism's totalizing project (Gibson-Graham, 1996) and the imaginative (re)integration of the productive, reproductive and virtual elements of global political economy (Spike Peterson, 2003).

The greening of development theory took a sometimes parallel path to its engendering (see Castro, 2004 for an overview) although its acceptance by the mainstream was much more marked. The critique of mainstream environmentalism centred around its innate conservatism that would leave social structures untouched. During the 1970s the desirability of growth from an ecological point of view was consistently questioned (e.g. Meadows et al, 1974) albeit in very different ways. While radical strands on the ground stressed grassroots development and empowerment, the mainstream «development machine» took up a bland «sustainable development» as its leitmotif. A foundational statement of intent was *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987) which followed in the steps of the global Keynesianism of the *Brandt Report* (Report of the International Commission 1981). Sustainable development would address both the environmental and poverty-related causes of the perceived environmental crisis through a strategy designed to meet «basic needs» and by recognizing the «environmental limits» set by technology and social organization.

There are many strands of critical ecology theories within CDS. Many theorists in the radical tradition tried to bridge the gap between ecology and modernist socialism. Thus Michael Redclift (1984) argued that the growing concern with the environmental crisis of the South in the 1970s was not matched by an understanding of global economic relations and the uneven share of resources obtained by different social groups across the world. Another green/red synthesis has been developed by Bill Adams (1990, 1995) for whom the greening of development theory and planning needs to go beyond a concern with the environment to take up the politics of development and the need for empowerment of the poor to determine the future of their own environment. Beyond this scenario lie the «deep ecologists» with their eco-centrism and bio-centrism development models posing a fundamental, not to say fundamentalist, critique of utilitarian, reformist and managerial conceptions of the environment.



There has also been a clearly post-modern or post-development critique of environmental politics. The currently fashionable notion of «sustainable development» is seen as a discursive operation to elide the 1970s and 1980s opposition between Northern ecologists and Southern concerns with development. According to Sachs «it promises nothing less than to square the circle: to identify a type of development that promotes both ecological sustainability and international justice» (Sachs 1999: 76). But this mission is not achievable from a post-development perspective from which «development» is a way of thinking that is now on its way out insofar as it has been unable to spread over space and be sustainable over time. Sustainable development could be seen as simply an oxymoron, as a pure rhetoric, while the only alternative could be a self-admittedly utopian call for civilizational changes from the global consumer classes.

The dominant development discourse today –as set against that of the 1950s for example– poses an explicitly «engendered» and «sustainable» development as core objectives. It would be easy to argue that the «mainstreaming» of gender and ecological concerns has led to their effective co-option by traditional development theory and institutions. There is however a plausible reformist argument against this view that development institutions are now, indeed, more responsive to the needs of Third World women and ecologies than they once were. Furthermore, in its synthesis of the two strands considered in this section, «ecofeminism» provides a radical anti-patriarchal and sustainable alternative model of development (see Salleh 1997). Finally, as Michele Barrett puts it there are good grounds for refusing to situate feminism as either a modernist or post-modernist enterprise and we can argue that «feminism straddles and thus destabilises the modern-post-modern binary divide» (Barrett, 1992: 216).

THE CULTURAL TURN

«One of the most striking features of social science at the end of the twentieth century has been a growth of interest in culture and a turn away from the economy. The cultural turn has been especially strong in radical social science...» (Ray and Sayer, 1999: 1). Post-structuralism and post-modernism rest on the cultural turn and/or the language turn (of which more later). In radical politics it leads to/coincides with a turn away from equality as a focus to the «politics of difference». It definitively buried the lingering economism –even determination by the economy «in the last instance»– of radical social scientists including those involved with development studies. The cultural turn was –apart from its disciplinary origins and genesis in «cultural studies»– inextricably linked also with the critique of meta-narratives which refer usually to socialism and feminism but must include also development, a meta-narrative *par excellence*.



Already in the 1980s Peter Worsley had indicated that culture was the «missing concept» in development studies (Worsley, 1984). By 1988 the United Nations had proclaimed the World Decade for Cultural Development putting «culture and development» (CAD) firmly on the conceptual and policy-making terrain. Basically it was argued that economic development cannot be dissociated from the cultural context in which it is embedded. This mainstream perspective is described thus by critical anthropologists Marcus and Fischer:

«What we cannot understand is respectfully assigned to the mysterious residual category of culture ... Cultural for these thinkers constitutes primarily a category of resistance, which must be taken into account in planning for change» (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 39).

Culture thus became a key element in the management of development while it could also be seen as part of the contestation of mainstream development notions.

Peter Worsley's challenge to develop the «missing concept» of culture was taken up by many theorists and practitioners (see Tucker, ed, 1997). Vincent Tucker pursued this task on the basis of his argument that «development thinking must be underpinned by a conceptualization of culture as a dynamic and conflictual process» (Tucker, 1999: 17). It is perhaps best to see this shift in terms of bringing cultural politics into critical development theory, in other words to advance a cultural critique of development. It is at this juncture that the cultural critique of development joins the terrain of social movement theory and its rich understanding of the «culture of politics and the politics of culture» (Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar, 1998). Here we move also towards the terrain of the post-colonial critique (of which more later).

There is, of course, no one «culture and development» (CAD) school or approach but its overall purpose is to renegotiate development from the perspective of interculturalism. Much of its work is firmly within the mainstream modernization problematic with dualistic and functional understandings of tradition/modernity, particularism / universalism and so on. As to its critical theory variant, Nederveen Pieterse argues that «A manifestation of the cul-de-sac of Culture and Development theory is the current of anti-development thinking. Obviously the rejectionist position is not the best platform for redefining development; it may, in effect, give free rein to business as usual» (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 69). Adding culture into the development equation does not necessarily redefine it in practice and the neo-liberal hegemonic discourse is well able to absorb what are ultimately the insights of anthropology, itself marked by its colonial origins.

A possibly more fundamental critique of mainstream development came through the Foucault-inspired «turn to language» and the radical deconstruction of the very concept of development. The linguistic turn in cultural studies directed our attention to the crucial importance of language through an emphasis on discursivity and textuality. Following Escobar we could argue that «Critical



thought should help recognize the pervasive character and functioning of development as a paradigm of self-definition» (Escobar, 1995: 215). From this perspective flowed the critique of development as discourse with very different results from the critique of development as political economy. The discourse of development from the nineteenth century onwards and particularly following the Second World War is seen to create the object of development and its others in the shape of «underdevelopment», the «poor», the «landless», «Third World women» and all those shaped and marked by the totalizing gaze of development.

Foucault's notion of discourse was deployed to deconstruct the power/knowledge elements of what has become known as «development». Development –and its other «underdevelopment»– is far from being natural, self-evident or pre-ordained categories. Development is not simply an instrument for economic and political control of the Third World but, rather, a strategy to define the Third World and its supposed problems. In Escobar's words: «Development has been the primary mechanism through which the Third World has been imagined and imagined itself, thus marginalizing or precluding other ways of seeing and doing» (Escobar, 1995: 212). It is in seeking other ways of «seeing and doing» that (an)other or alternative or counter-development can be constructed. It is the new social movements that are seen to have the imagination to think of a world outside that created by the development machine.

The disciplinary aspects of the development discourse were seen most clearly in the 1990s when under the «good governance agenda», democracy (in its Western version) became a pre-condition for development aid. We return in the next section to the question of whether «post-development» is a viable political alternative. For now we should note that the discourse approach to development in the 1990s is what dependency was in the 1960s. Dependency failed in theory and practice to offer an alternative to modernisation theory now reborn as neo-liberal globalization. Escobar and his Foucault-inspired critique reflect a new era of radicalism in the North (the US in particular) where the environment and the destruction of indigenous cultures are key issues. For David Lehman, «post-modernism may turn out to be as much of a landmark as dependency was, and may go deeper intellectually than neo-liberalism. The question is whether it will leave a mark on history, or merely in the nostalgia of its...protagonists» (Lehman, 1997: 569-70).

The critique of the cultural / discourse critique of mainstream development theory is, to those familiar with broader social theory debates, quite predictable. «Add culture and stir» is seen as a means to bolstering the authority of mainstream development theory and practice through the co-option of the authority of anthropology. For Nederveen Pieterse, «C & D [Culture and Development] policy discourse tends to be a depoliticizing vision because by inserting culture it takes the politics out of development, while taking the politics out of culture by assuming established cultural boundaries» (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 68). In



other words, development is not re-problematized and its essentials in terms of modernism and modernization are left untouched. As to the Foucaultian approach to discourse analysis as applied to development theory it is deemed «long on history and short on future, strong on critique and weak on construction» (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 69). Be that as it may, we take this deconstruction of mainstream development theory as a theoretical hinge, opening the way to our consideration of alternative development or post-development radical counterblasts to modernist development theory.

BEYOND MODERNITY?

If the «culture turn» opened up development as discourse to options beyond modernity, the explicit adoption of a «post-development» perspective in the 1990s took this shift one stage further. Gustavo Esteva puts this hypercritical perspective most clearly when he states that:

If you live in Mexico City today, you are either rich or numb if you fail to notice that development stinks ... the three «development decades» were a huge, irresponsible experiment that, in the experience of a world-majority, failed miserably» (Esteva, 1987: 138).

We could argue that people living in China and India today would testify, on the contrary, to the dynamism and «creative destruction» that is still capitalism's *modus operandi* with all the contradictory effects that implies. Even in Latin America after the «lost decade» of the 1980s development in terms of capitalist accumulation has proceeded apace. Certainly this development process has been uneven and has, in its unfolding, created great levels of social exclusion from that process. Development may stink but it is far from dead or just kept alive by the clever discourse of the World Bank.

So where do the critical social theorists of post-development take us with their critique of mainstream development? There are very distinct strands in the post-development literature from the critical persuasive tone of Gilbert Rist (2002) to the rather fundamentalist rejectionist tones of *The Post-Development Reader* (Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997). The latter is a heady mix of Ivan Illich, Eduardo Galeano, Mahatma Ghandi, Vandana Shiva and Majid Rahnema himself. For the latter, the balance sheet of development's trajectory and record is clear: it «was indeed a poisonous gift to the populations it set out to help» (Rahnema, 1997: 381). It is not that all development projects are bad, but that «The development ideology shattered [the] familiar universe where human relations predominated and where the strong desire to tackle common needs together formed part of the language of mutual help and hope» (Rahnema, 1997: 384).



This version or modality of post-development is in many respects a reprise of classic anti-modernist or romantic critiques of modernity. It is entirely understandable that after half a century of «development» as we know it today not delivering on its original optimistic promises, critics may well wish to turn for inspiration to a pre-development era. In Gilbert Rist's (2002) rendering, post-development takes on less apocalyptic tones. Rist deploys a vague language of empowerment and self-worth: «the main task is to restore the political, economic and social autonomy of the marginalized societies» (Rist, 2002: 244). According to this perspective we must reject the whole discourse of economics and the concept of utility and turn to what amounts to basically a version of «the good life». Apart from producing a warm glow there is very little that this perspective might add to current debates on globalisation and how oppositional social networks might in practice counter its negative effects. It certainly does not offer a plausible alternative post- or any other development strategy.

If we take post-development theories in their broad generality we can point to various flaws in terms of constituting a critical development theory for our era. Stuart Corbridge outlines some of these fault-lines:

- a) post-development essentialises the «West vs the rest» story with binary distinctions which reduce to a simplistic bad vs good;
- b) it equates reason with technology and refuses any progressive role to science;
- c) it conversely romanticises the «soil cultures» of the global majorities;
- d) it does not see any downside to delinking as an alternative to the global project of development. (Corbridge, 1998: 142-5).

Basically it is the simple equation of modernism with ethnocentrism that is the main problem with this world view. It is a classic example of «logocentrism» in the Derridean sense where the first term belongs to the realm of logos and needs no explanation, whereas the second term is defined solely in relation to the first. What distinguishes logocentrism, following Kate Manzo, who applies it to the Black consciousness movement in South Africa, «is a nostalgia for origins; for a foundational source of truth and meaning that is beyond doubt and criticism; and for a standpoint and a standard supposedly independent of interpretation and political practice» (Manzo, 1995: 238).

We need to go further to question the relevance of post-development theories in terms of their own objectives. Michael Edwards some time ago posited the question of development theory «relevance» in terms of the contrast between increasing poverty and exploitation in the Third World and an ever-increasing amount of development research with little demonstrable effect on the problems it seeks to address (Edwards, 1989, 1994). The role of the outside expert and the denigration of indigenous knowledge is seen to be the root of this disjuncture. The point is whether «bottom up» and «participatory» approaches or the



reclaiming of indigenous knowledge leads in itself to greater relevance or is doomed to being co-opted or deemed irrelevant. Having successfully undermined the discourse of development in its 1950s Walt Rostow modernisation school perspective, can post-development help us understand globalisation and its discontents in the 21st Century and then go on to articulate intelligent ways for «working the spaces of neo-liberalism»? (Laurie and Bondi, 2005)

If post-development theories do not at present point us in a post-capitalist direction what might be the relevance of post-colonialism in that sense? Post-colonialism could be seen as a suitable alternative critical discourse. In practice it has been marginalised within cultural studies, its central tenets and epistemology ignored by much of the social sciences. Its own fractiousness might be one reason for this marginalisation but there is also a widespread conceit that all to do with post-modernism concerns only the rich, affluent North moving into post-industrial mode. Yet we need only explore the notion of «hybridity» (crucial to the post-colonial enterprise) to see the political value of a post-colonial thinking that refuses the imperial hierarchies between colonizer and colonized or the potentially dangerous counterposing of essentialist or nativist conceptions of identity and a return to a mythical pre-colonial origin.

In terms of the politics of development, I think Edward Said was correct when he castigated «all the energies poured into critical theory ... [that] ... have avoided the major, I would say determining, political horizon of modern Western culture, namely imperialism» (Said, 1995: 37). While Said's own earlier work deconstructing *Orientalism* (Said, 1978) provided the impetus to the post-development theorists such as Arturo Escobar's more overtly political readings are possible. Thus Robert Young in an influential review of post-colonialism argues that: «it combines the epistemological cultural innovations of the postcolonial moment with a political critique of the conditions of postcoloniality» (Young, 2001: 57). A contemporary critical development theory needs, arguably, to have at its core an understanding of post-coloniality and its impact on the economic, social and cultural conditions of the global system we live under.

A postcolonial politics of development would have several features that would give it real purchase on the real and perceived impasses in development theory. Ilan Kapoor refers in this regard to «development's relative amnesia about (neo) colonialism ...» (Kapoor 2008: xv). Decolonizing the imagination is an integral and essential task in the making of a new critical development theory for the 21st century not least through an ongoing interrogation of power/knowledge constructions. Whatever the ambiguities of the very term «postcolonialism» (not least in a Latin American context) it directs us clearly towards the continuities of uneven development and persistent privilege of the west/north/dominant countries. It is precisely an epistemological challenge to imagine a genuinely postcolonial future taking us beyond the false promises of globalisation discourse that all that is behind us now. Decolonization also entails a new power/knowl-



edge paradigm fit for purpose in the era of globalization, at least for those who see the need to overcome its grip and seductive power. It is also a strategy for power because it recognises the continuities of north/south economic disparities and refuses the iron grip that imposes on the life prospects of the world's majority populations. Certainly postcolonialism in its western academic guise has tended towards a certain culturalism but there is nothing intrinsic in its makeup that prevents it considering the overwhelming reality of the economic factors that continuously make and reproduce underdevelopment. Nor do we necessarily need to romanticise the knowledge of the subaltern which ultimately is a refusal but not an alternative to falsely universal economic prescriptions and a blind faith in western science and progress as antidotes to underdevelopment.

Finally, critical development studies (CDS) today needs to recognise explicitly that the development project as blueprint for national economic development has been surpassed by the globalisation project. Following Mc Michael's periodization we could argue that: «Postdevelopmentalism refers to the demise of the project in which states pursued nationally managed economic growth» (McMichael, 1996: 148). The frame of reference for «development» is now today a global one and it is the market and not national governments that play the driving role. In this sense we are indeed living in a post-development era and the politics of post-colonialism could well be the way to articulate a powerful societal response. From this perspective counter-modernism can hardly offer a viable response to modernism's limitations: only a post-modern critical theory can take us onto a new terrain. As Sousa Santos puts it: «Critical thought must therefore assume a paradigmatic stance for a radical critique of the dominant paradigm from the standpoint of an imagination sound enough to bring forth a new paradigm with [a] new emancipatory horizon» (Santos, 1995: x).

BRINGING POLITICS BACK IN

If we are, indeed, now moving beyond the «easy» stage of globalization which in the 1990s foresaw economic homogenization and political democratization spreading smoothly across the world then, might there be room for a revival and reconsideration of critical development theories? We could argue that the only alternative to neo-liberal globalisation or «actually existing globalisation» is not some vague utopian era of post-development but, rather, a developmental approach to globalisation. At this point, as Nederveen Pieterse puts it: «development becomes world development, a horizon radically different from the original Gestalt of development» (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 168). This is the space where critical development theory morphs into critical globalisation studies in other words. It takes us beyond methodological nationalism and the whole emphasis on national development to the new challenges of development in the era of globalisation.



Development studies as an area of research/policy formation is in fact continuously reinventing itself to meet the challenges of the age, a point that applies to the mainstream as much as to critical approaches. Fifty years ago the goal of development was simply to achieve modernity within the boundaries of a given nation state. Now even the most conservative of mainstream approaches recognises the role of environmental constraints for example. The once easily assumed superiority of the western development model is being challenged by India and in particular the dramatic development drive in China that is bound to change the very core of what development studies believes in today. John Humphrey, in a broad review of postwar development studies, shows how its parameters have been continuously rethought to meet the challenges of a changing world. He argues persuasively that «such a reinvention must bring ideology- in the sense of contesting views of what development is and how it can be achieved- back into development» (Humphrey 2007: 19). Whether we call it ideology or politics it is clear that development studies needs to dispense with its studiously apolitical and technocratic self-image. John Saul (2006) has recently presented an initial rethinking of how development might be reconstructed for the era of globalization especially in what he calls the «embattled South». That is precisely the debate we now need to join, avoiding the temptations of the mainstream on the one hand and the self-imposed irrelevance of the anti-development theorists on the other hand. The stakes are high: as Amartya Sen has argued development is essentially about advancing freedom and removing the conditions of unfreedom (Sen 1999). Of course we need to engage creatively with all factions on what «freedom» actually means...

Twenty years ago there was a flurry of debate around what was then seen as the «impasse» in development theory (see Booth, 1985). The impasse was deemed to have arisen due to a commitment to theory that was both dogmatic and deterministic. While it was a specific Althusserian strand of Marxism that was blamed, it was very easy in the «collapse of communism» mood of the late 1980s to blame Marxism *tout court*. Today as an «impasse» in globalisation theory is widely recognised and the illusion that «there is no alternative» dissipates, what are the prospects for a revived critical development theory? Marxism has largely settled accounts with its economic, deterministic, teleological, Manichean and Eurocentric past (see Munck 2000). From that critical/ renewal/post-structural marxist perspective we can now examine the great dynamism as well as the growing inequalities of contemporary global development. Manuel Castells in his influential neo-Marxist treatise on the contemporary world system, writes that: «By development I mean ... the simultaneous process of improvement in living standards, structural change in the productive system, and growing competitiveness in the global economy» (Castells, 1996: 113). Contrary to all anti-development discourses «development» in the conventional and in the classical Marxist sense is now very actively reshaping the worlds of millions of people in



China, India and in most of Latin America. Despite the seeming exclusion of most of Africa from this process, Castells is quite right to stress that this «is a much more diversified and dynamic reality than the image presented by the dogmatic version of dependency theory» (Castells, 1996: 115).

The challenge of critical development theory cannot, arguably, be met by simply giving up on development as it were, rather, «the challenge is to imagine and practice development differently» (Gibson-Graham, 2005: 6). It is Eurocentrism that is probably what stands in our way most decisively and the need is thus to develop an epistemology of the South (to put it in spatial or geographical terms) so as to redress the balance and produce a global knowledge for transformation. Boa Santos points acutely to the powerful obstacle of Enlightenment thinking through what he calls its mono-culture of knowledge, of classification and of linear time, which produces the «non-existent» pre-modern or under-developed vis-à-vis the declared objective of modernity (Santos, 2004). A new critical social theory of absences would focus on the alternatives to hegemonic Eurocentric or more precisely «North Atlanticist» practices and articulate the concrete ways in which another world is indeed possible and not juts desirable. We clearly cannot go back to the socialist development theories and practice of the early 1900s but we must examine the various contemporary options for global development submerged by the dominant neo-liberal logic. There is in the world around a vast array of non-capitalist practices building Polanyian counter-movements to the dominant free market ideology (see Gibson-Graham 2006). This is a landscape characterised by diversity, complexity and potentialities. We need to go back to the original debates on the nature of capitalism on a world scale (Rosa Luxemburg on the need for non-capitalist sectors), capitalism's contradictory aspects (Joseph Schumpeter on «creative destruction» for example) and the classical debates on the different paths tom capitalism (from Alexander Gershenkron onwards) at the same time as we look to the future beyond neoliberalism. But then we also need to let the political imaginary flow without constraints and not be afraid to (re)think in utopian terms that may be the only practical way in which we may all move beyond the unsustainable present via critical development theory.

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