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## Post-Development

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, p. 1). If development was dead, what would come after? Some started to talk about a 'post-development era' (Escobar, 1992) 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 and 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 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 conceptualisation of development in the social sciences has seen three main moments, corresponding to three contrasting theoretical orientations: modernisation 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. Modernisation 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 (for example, Apffel-Marglin and Marglin, 1990; Ferguson, 1990; 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.

The deconstruction of development led post-structuralists in particular 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 organising principle of social life (Escobar, 1995) – one in which, to paraphrase a well-known paper of the period, development would not take place solely 'under Western eyes' (Mohanty, 1991). Others added to this characterisation a re-valorisation 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 mobilisations as the basis for moving towards the new era (Shiva, 1993; Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997; Rist, 1997; Esteva and Prakash, 1999). 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 a '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: (1) with their focus on discourse, the post-development proponents overlooked poverty and capitalism, which are the real problems of development; (2) they presented an overgeneralised and essentialised view of development, while in reality there are vast differences among development strategies and institutions; they also failed to notice the ongoing contestation of development on the ground; and (3) they romanticised 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 1990. 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 (for example, dependency theory and the cultural critiques of thinkers such as Ivan Illich, Paulo Freire, Julius Nyrere, Orlando Fals Borda, Denis Goulet and Johan 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 the post-structuralist project was a different one – that of analysing the overall discursive fact, not how it might have been contested and hybridised on the ground. In a similar way that political economy endowed capitalism with a high degree of systematicity and unicity, it made sense at this moment in the conceptualisation of the post-structuralist critique to ascribe a certain relational coherence to development, even in terms of showing development's connection to capitalism and modernity (see, for example, Kamat, 2002). Besides, the post-structuralists argued, 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.

Finally, to the charge of romanticising 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 patronise 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 who 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).

This debate has contributed to the creation of a lively climate for more eclectic and pragmatic approaches. If anything has come out clearly from 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 (for example, Gardner and Lewis, 1996; Peet and Hartwick, 1999; Arce and Long, 2000; Schech and Haggis, 2000). This is particularly the case regarding a series of questions, including the contestation of development on the ground; the re-conceptualisation 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; 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 pluralising 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. 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. 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) 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, thus weaving together Marxist and post-structuralist proposals; Diawara (2000) implicitly makes a similar point by advocating for a consideration of the varieties of local knowledge that are present in the development encounter. The relation between post-development, feminism and post-colonial theory has been another focus of fruitful discussion. Sylvester (1999) warns about the effect on our accounts of the world of our distance from those we write about; she advocates for 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 characterised earlier developmentalist representations of women (for example, 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).

As we entered the present decade, the panorama of development theory is 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 globalisation 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 neoliberalism 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, also be possible. The knowledge produced by these movements has become an essential ingredient for rethinking globalisation 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.

ARTURO ESCOBAR

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## Poverty and Growth

The link between aggregate economic growth and poverty has been of long-standing interest in development studies. This entry revisits the issue in the light of recent