4 Post-Development and Alternatives to Development

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discusses the main concerns of the post-development school and highlights examples of practices and ideas of "alternatives to development." As in other scholarly debates, several concepts mark the post-development tradition. Leading among them are depoliticization, universalism, the conception of discourse and the consent, and knowledge–power. Proponents of orthodox development theories of both liberalism and Marxist-inspired theories of dependency that emerged in the post-1945 period tended to portray development in technocratic terms. Notably, liberalism that forms the mainstream view of development believed that countries in the Global South needed to institute depoliticized economic and industrial policies similar to those used in the Global North. At the same time, Europe's historical development towards capitalist modernity was seen to represent the universal trajectory for all countries regardless of their specific historical experiences such as colonialism and its attendant economic legacies. Finally, drawing on the work of Foucault, post-development thinkers contend that power dynamics underpin ideas such as those embodied in development theory. From their perspective, ideas are not neutral: those who have institutional or other forms of power determine what constitutes knowledge. Further, ideas play a crucial role in the reproduction of images and notions such as "the developed" and "the developing world."

VIDEO RESOURCES

Stuart Hall: Race, The Floating Signifier. Challenging Media, 1997.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMo2uiRAf30
Time 1:02:46

British Cultural Studies theorist Stuart Hall discusses the cultural production and reproduction of race relations.

Conversation Series: Arturo Escobar. XRoads conference, 2008.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2I1GRrQZKg
Time 9:54

This is a video of the keynote lecture given by distinguished Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina, Arturo Escobar, at the 2008 XRoads conference at the University of West-Indies, Kingston, Jamaica.

Carol Black. *Schooling the World: The White Man's Last Burden*. Lost People Films, 2010.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Ho3bT0eYZo
Time 1:04

Schooling the World takes a challenging, sometimes funny, ultimately deeply troubling look at the role played by modern education in the destruction of the world's last sustainable indigenous cultures. Beautifully shot on location in the Buddhist culture of Ladakh in the northern Indian Himalayas, the film weaves the voices of Ladakhi people through a conversation between four carefully chosen original thinkers: anthropologist and ethnobotanist Wade Davis, a National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence; Helena Norberg-Hodge and Vandana Shiva, both recipients of the Right Livelihood Award for their work with traditional peoples in India; and Manish Jain, a former architect of education programs with UNESCO, USAID, and the World Bank. The film examines the hidden assumption of cultural superiority behind education aid projects, which overtly aim to help children "escape" to a "better life."

Integration of the Peoples: Alternative in Construction in Latin America. Transnational Institute, 2008.
http://www.tni.org/tnibook/integration-peoples-video-documentary
Time 36:45

Regional integration alternatives are currently undergoing rapid development in Latin America. This documentary will expose, from the standpoint of social movements, the failure of the neoliberal model in Latin America and the processes of widespread protest that emerged in many countries. It will also show how the struggles of resistance were pursued in conjunction with the search for alternatives. The option has been set from an alternative regional integration. The movements have advanced concrete proposals in the social, political, economic, and cultural arenas and they have emerged as key protagonists in these processes. This documentary aims to present the state of the debate on alternatives for regional integration as this is unfolding among social movements and civil society organizations throughout the continent.

Muhammed Yunus: Microcredit and Social Business for a Poverty-Free World. IDRC Webcast.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j57X3idgICU
Time 1:32:28

Microcredit pioneer Muhammad Yunus founded the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh more than 25 years ago. Since then, millions of rural poor—mostly women—have received small loans for self-employment projects that have helped lift their families out of poverty. The bank's model has been

replicated in more than 100 countries, and microlending has become an important tool in the fight against global poverty. Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has worked with Yunus and the Grameen Bank on a number of initiatives linking the use of information and communication technologies to poverty reduction in rural Bangladesh.

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Conversations with History: David Harvey. **UC Television, 2004.**
http://www.uctv.tv/search-details.aspx?showID=8800
Time 54:00

Distinguished geographer David Harvey joins host Harry Kreisler for a discussion of how the analytic tools of geography and Marxism can contribute to our understanding of the new imperialism.

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Gustavo Esteva: Challenging the Institutional Production of Truth. **ISEC Economics of Happiness Conference, 2012.**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yN3iB5j8Gj4
Time 14:44

Gustavo Esteva is the co-founder of several Mexican, Latin American, and international NGOs, and the recipient of Mexico's National Prize of Political Economy. He is active in Zapatismo, a movement for protecting the rights of indigenous peoples.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Define and discuss the term *discourse.*

2. How is the concept of Eurocentrism related to post-development thought?

3. Discuss why there is serious critique against the GDP as the indicator of development.

4. What is the response of Escobar to the criticism that post-development had presented "development" as monolithic while in fact it was heterogeneous and contested?

5. Discuss at least two sets of criticism against post-development ideas.

6. Define one of the critiques against post-development theories.

7. What are the methodological challenges against post-development?

ANSWER KEY: REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. "A discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—i.e., a way of representing—a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. When statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic within a certain way. It also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed. . . . A discourse can be produced by many individuals in different institutional settings (like families, prisons, hospitals, and asylums). Its integrity or "coherence" does not depend on whether it issues from one place or from a single speaker or "subject." Nevertheless, every discourse constructs positions from which alone it makes sense. Anyone deploying a discourse must position themselves as if they were the subject of the discourse. For example, we may not ourselves believe in the natural superiority of the West. But if we use the discourse of "the West and the Rest" we will necessarily find ourselves speaking from a position that holds that the West is a superior civilization.

2. Post-development thought emerged as a reaction to Eurocentrism. Hegemonic development theory often assumes that the experience of Western Europe is the normal, or logical, trajectory for all development experiences. This Eurocentric approach completely ignores the specific histories and experiences of nations, and overlooks the role colonization played in Europe's development. Post-development scholars including Escobar argue that critiques of traditional development theory (including dependency theory and Marxism) are still grounded in European experience and thus fail to offer a sufficiently radical re-imagination of what development could or should look like elsewhere in the world.

3. Critics point out that production leading to environmental pollution (e.g., an oil spill) or other destructive results (e.g., guns and bombs) boost GDP twice: through the production of negative goods and services and through goods and services that try to negate the damage caused by this production. Abstaining from destructive production does not boost the GDP, thus, destruction of nature appears as wealth creation. Goods lasting for decades contribute to the GDP, but goods breaking down quickly, needing fixing or replacement, do so much more. Other criticisms include that the informal sector and unpaid labour (especially by women) are not being measured and that distribution is entirely ignored.

4. Escobar argues that the critics were right. But, he continues, they "fail to acknowledge . . . that their own project of analyzing the contestation of development on the ground was in great part made possible by the deconstruction of development discourse." Post-development's project had been to "slay the development monster," i.e., to break the consensus about "development" being necessary, self-evident, positive, and unquestionable and thus pave the way for more nuanced analyses. Romanticization, however, was an accusation used against any and all visions of societies that transcend the current model.

5. A frequent critique is that post-development romanticizes the grassroots movements and local communities in the South in two respects: On the one hand, it neglects relations of domination and exploitation within these movements and communities, in particular but not exclusively of women. On the other hand, it assumes that the people in these communities were not interested in accumulation and Westernization—projecting the romantic image of the "noble savage" onto them. Another critique claims that while post-development overlooks the negative features of traditional subsistence societies, it ignores the huge achievements of modernity and "development."

6. Post-development overlooks the negative features of traditional subsistence societies; it ignores the huge achievements of modernity and "development." It is also argued that that the progress

achieved in terms of significant improvement in life expectancy, for example, is based precisely on what post-development criticizes: the diffusion of Western models of society across the globe, including science and the growth of productivity. Therefore, to simply declare the "failure" of the "development project" was entirely inappropriate.

7. Instead of looking at differences and discontinuities, post-development authors constructed a monolithic development discourse impervious to more nuanced constellations. In addition, the high value attributed to tradition and cultural identity leads to cultural relativism, i.e., to the belief that cultures exist separately and no culture can be judged from the outside. This would allow elites in the South to glorify the defence of their traditional privileges against modern claims and practices as an act of anti-imperialism, sidelining political and economic conflicts within the country by pointing at alleged cultural conflicts and blaming the West.