
Development, post-, anti-, and populist: a critical review

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Abstract. The notion and practice of development have been severely critiqued from both modernist and postmodernist perspectives, yet the global development industry flourishes. The latter have afforded important insights, but also suffer from unexamined ideological agendas, a disinclination to undertake detailed research into development processes and policy, a preoccupation with texts and representations by the development industry, and from perpetuating an indulgent and agenda-less academic cul-de-sac. Instead, the postmodern critique of development could lead to a more politically astute and practical reconstruction of certain aspects of 'development', particularly in the neopopulist mode of developmentalism. Three powerful development paradigms are identified, and the ways in which they are constructed, promoted, and adapted are discussed in the light of conflicting modernist and postmodern accounts.

Postmodern engagement with development

There has been a profound sense of disappointment and reappraisal in the global development project since the 1960s, yet the project continues. This has come about after a long history of modernist critiques, which have judged the results of development in their own terms (it failed to deliver what it promised), as well as the more recent postmodern turn which social science has taken, which has sought to portray development as a metanarrative ripe for deconstruction, and to interrogate its intellectual and epistemological foundations, but, I argue, has led development debate into some confusing and exposed terrains. One of the most difficult aspects of engaging with postmodern antidevelopment writing is the rules of discourse about discourse itself, which concern claims about the supremacy of reason (Feyerband, 1988) and, more subjectively, the degree of uncertainty, risk, and contingency that any one of us feels comfortable with. How legitimate is it to deploy rational arguments, and other modernist assumptions (for example, about the worth of human life and the possibility of progress) in a critique of postmodern writings about development? How far should rationalist arguments be shared and how do we engage in debate about this? Indeed, what are the 'rules of discourse' about development within postmodernism itself? While rules may smack of modernist exercise of power, one might expect implicit assumptions and expectations to be made explicit through the application of reasoned argument, even though they too may dissolve under deconstructive interrogation. Thus, Simon (1997, page 184) lays a general charge against postmodern antidevelopment writing that:

"The emphasis of much post-modern literature on playful, leisured, heterodoxical self-indulgence [also] has little to offer those who can still only aspire to safe drinking water, a roof which does not leak, and the like."

However, this view, with which I find much common ground in this essay, rests upon modernist values, which may not be shared at all by more sceptical postmodern writers.

The question of whether modernity has expired is far from settled. There are many who still defend it, either explicitly or implicitly in their critiques (Fukuyama, 1992; Habermas, 1987; Harvey, 1989 and, with reference to development, Lee, 1994)—and

some of this work which focuses on postmodern critiques of development will be discussed here. Postmodernists locate themselves across a range from the ‘hard sceptics’ (Rengger, 1992) or ‘sceptics’ (Rosenau, 1992) to the ‘soft sceptics’ or ‘affirmatives’ as Rosenau styles them. Many postmodern critics of development of the more sceptical inclination admit that there are dangerous “descents into discourse” (Palmer, 1990, quoted in Crush, 1995, page 6), and that pressing human problems are at issue. The question remains whether “we can appreciate the complexity of social processes and the elusiveness of our categories of analysing them without becoming incapable of doing something” (Cooper and Packard, 1997, page 4). The realisation of the limits of discourse, and the risk of losing sight of the materiality of life and agency of nature haunt the authors of the more hostile linguistic exegesis of development texts. As the dust settles from yet another deconstruction, “what now?” the battered modernist might be heard to mutter, and also “so what?” Of course, the hard sceptic will reply it is not their business to fill the void with yet another metanarrative—except with the metanarrative of relativity itself.

“Within the current critique of modernity and its explanations by the postmodernists, with everything turned relative except relativity itself, the idea of progress reaches its peculiar final stage of impact through negation” (Shanin, 1997, page 70).

This tension partly arises from the position of the author and the reason why he or she may think it worthwhile at all to communicate the latest critique of development to anyone at all. If it is in any way to ‘make a difference’ and perhaps to palliate the worst excesses of existing development practice, then the issue of audience and language must become part of the deconstructive project. There are different networks, styles, and audiences to reach particular ends. If sceptic postmodernists cannot declare these ends (implying a particular intentionality, which is in turn vulnerable to deconstruction), then why is the author telling us, the audience, in the first place? The position taken here is that a comprehensive critique of ‘development’ has been an ongoing process for a long time and much of the postmodern variety is not new, although in some respects it is insightful and desirable—not merely for an academic audience to witness some deft act of deconstruction, but also in order to pursue modernist ethical and ideological objectives. However, these objectives inevitably are based on some of the very foundationalist and universalist notions which are firmly in the sights of the more sceptical postmodern critics of development. These modernist notions involve an assertion that, in diverse and particular ways, peoples of all cultures know what drudgery, exploitation, grief, bereavement, respect, self-actualisation, in fact all of Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, are. People the world over experience these states of mind and body in different ways and, for sure, there are contested claims and representations about who experiences what, and who should (or should not) experience what. But, Simon’s leaking roof, I would argue, drips just as distressingly on a family abandoned on a labour reserve in the Transkei, South Africa, as it does upon anyone else. This, I admit, is as much an assertion as those of the ‘inventionists’ and some of the more committed social constructivists concerning ‘needs’ (for example, Escobar, 1995a; Yapa, 1996). However, attempts to identify and report on changes in these conditions (for example, the annual UNDP Human Development Reports) or to develop a rights-based development approach have been dismissed as a universalising and totalising set of Western values (Esteva and Prakash, 1998, page 137; Rist, 1997). Such a dismissal, though, does surely risk the charge of ethical refusalism [a charge also made by Corbridge (1997) in an extended review subtitled “The poverty of post-development”]. The claim made here is for the possibility that the critique of development can lead to better practice, and that postmodern critiques should be examined and evaluated in terms of the discursive resources they provide to this end. Similar sentiments

can be found elsewhere in relation to the possibilities of postmodern approaches to poverty, gender, and development (Jackson, 1997, page 145) and to development in more general terms (Porter, 1995, page 85):

“To me it is unclear whether this epistemological relativism which defends the heterogeneity of moral standards and criterion of truth, actually nihilistically abandons democracy, justice and more satisfying futures.”

Also, the possibility of critique leading to better practice need not rest on naive assumptions about the effects of talking ‘sense’ (that is, a shared and dominant world view) to policymakers and politicians in the face of controlling discourses and powerful interests, nor on an assumption of a straightforward and unproblematic impact of critique upon policy. The normative and rational approach to policymaking itself has lost credibility anyway in the face of all manner of critics (including postmodern) (see Long and van der Ploeg, 1989), but policy and, more broadly, strategies and plans for action still matter. As explained later, there are paradigmatic contests over different styles of development at the international level, which impact upon international agreements, and aid policy for multilateral and bilateral agencies. National policy affects people’s lives through fiscal and taxation policy, land reform, health, and education. Policy may benefit from postmodern interrogation, but also from rational rebuttals and detailed strategies for reconstructive work. Finally, local politics are also important, and should not be left in the glow of the often unexamined virtues of the local, which some of the more populist and postist critics are apt to do (Corbridge, 1997; Ortner, 1995). Thus, the possibility must remain open that critiques of development and of all the claims made in its name can be progressive, provided that (a) they encourage new agendas and suggest new ways of doing things, and (b) careful attention is given to identifying audiences and messages. The sceptical postmodern may reply that all these notions of development are little more than more toxic words anyway (for example, “planning normalises people”, “science is violence”, and so forth) and cannot be detoxified in modernist terms. In response, an appeal to values, which a modernist may invite others to share, may be the only point of dialogue across the divide. But then, any talk of the declaration and imposition of values has a normative and modernist ring, which could be why the divide remains. The rules of discourse which facilitate constructive engagement about development are particularly difficult here. Also, the radical pessimist (of both academic Marxist or sceptical postmodern origins) may also consign any professional activism or advocacy as irredeemably compromised. It is possible to imagine a postdevelopment world as Rahnema does so eloquently in *The Post-development Reader* (1997), but at the end of this volume there are, well ... two pages entitled “Towards a new paradigm and a new language”. This failing (long on critique, short on what to do) is shared by writers from a wide spectrum of persuasions, not just postmodern, for two reasons. First, development professionals and academics of all radical persuasions face what used to be called the “problem of the petit bourgeois intellectual”, or a separation from the authentic, the subaltern, the working class, or other imagined bearers of a new world. Second, we are all “flying blind” [as Fraser (1989) has it] as the socialist project, at least as practised, has lost credibility. In the contemporary confusion and doubt, however, an alternative imaginary of development can, and in my view should, lead to reflection about what the audience as well as the author can actually do about it.

‘Development’, with or without its inverted commas, has been critiqued since the 1960s, although of course its origins predate the Truman invocation of 1945. Cooper and Packard (1997), Cowen and Shenton (1996), Simon (1997), and Slater (1993) amongst many others have rehearsed the history and invention of development. I do not propose to review again this important field, but to focus on the practice of development itself,

and the ways in which ideas in development are promoted, politicised within the development industry and its clients, become powerful, and affect the lives of people in—if a modernist phrase may be permitted—very real ways. From a liberal perspective, Streeten as far back as 1981 said:

“It is not easy to convey, in the present atmosphere of gloom, boredom and indifference surrounding discussions of development problems, what an exciting time of fervour these early years [referring to the 1950s and 1960s] were” (1981, pages 61–62).

Edwards wrote an influential article entitled “The irrelevance of development studies” (1989), and more recent academic reviews of development theory and research from a predominantly applied perspective from the viewpoints of sociology and anthropology (Booth, 1994; Gardner and Lewis, 1996; Hettne, 1995) identified impasses in development theory and practice and confronted the considerable empirical evidence of the failure of development in terms of their own stated objectives. There were other important modernist critiques of the ‘development industry’ and its major institutions such as foreign aid and the World Bank (Hancock, 1989; Payer, 1985; Rich, 1994). It was not until the early 1990s that the theoretical and epistemological tenor of the critique changed to a more self-consciously poststructuralist and postmodern one, for example, Dubois (1991, page 2): “... the apparent ‘crisis’ notwithstanding, development is doing just fine, even flourishing—not the process of development of Third World societies, of course, but the business of its promotion.” The 1990s witnessed a flood of postmodern critiques of development, which sought to provide a sociology and anthropology of development knowledge, and to read development theory and policy as text. Sachs starts his edited book with the words:

“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” (1992, page 1).

It was in this edited volume that Esteva coined what has become an aphorism, albeit one with a distinct modernist ring: “you must be very dumb or very rich if you fail to notice that development stinks” (Esteva, 1992, page 7). This set the scene for other influential works such as those by Bhaba (1994), Sachs (1993), Slater (1993), and Spivak (1988), but the target for most of these writers remained the authority and production of Western rationalities. Although these writers have been important in the critique of the culture of development in a general way, I wish to focus here on those who have claimed to critique development practice, its institutions, policies, and knowledge. In this genre, Escobar (1995b) mounts a sustained attack on ‘development’, although he chooses the specific (but, most will admit, fat and slow-moving) target of the development industry—rather than all manner of other formal and informal institutions which also claim to be doing development. It is in this last work that the deconstructive assaults upon the narratives and the institutions which shape and are shaped by them, rely most heavily on the linguistic weapons of postmodernism rather than on any heavy rational battering. Here, it is death by epithet, and one can hear the loud excoriative scratchings of the inverted comma as a derisory scoring point against the smooth and polished prose of World Bank and USAID documents. Other major contributions take a more ambivalent approach to development practice, and much of their critique is mostly modernist and applies rational argument, though much of their language style remains postist (Ferguson, 1990; Mitchell, 1995). Peet and Watts (1993; 1996) critically review a range of affirmative to sceptic postmodern approaches to the development theme, and in later work (Watts and McCarthy, 1997), as well as in substantial book reviews of postmodern writings on development, a countercritique starts to appear.

Elements of the postmodern deconstruction of development

It is risky to attempt a succinct summary of the assumptions made by a broad and heterogeneous poststructuralist and postmodern critique of development over the past ten years. Nonetheless, it is necessary as an intermediate step between the general discussion above and a more detailed examination of aspects of development theory and practice to be discussed below. I shall summarise these elements, adapting Rosenau's organising brief in her (1992) review of postmodernism and the social sciences. First, postmodernism calls for 'the death of the author' and an end to the polite and docile acceptance of development narratives in which objects for development (for example, target groups) are inserted into a totalising set of assumptions and values. These have been elaborated into a number of development metanarratives such as modernisation, dependency theory, and classical Marxism, and lesser, middle-level development narratives or 'war stories', such as soil erosion, overgrazing, neo-Malthusianism population pressure, and many others (Roe, 1995a; 1995b). The key question generically posed here is: Is it the right of the author (development experts, academics, and development institutions) to represent the object of development, rather than for the latter to represent themselves, tell their own authentic stories, and let them be heard above and over the master narrative of the author? For example, a rural family living at the margin of the humid tropical forest and agricultural land may find itself inserted into a metanarrative about biodiversity conservation, national parks, and legal instruments which exclude it from its livelihood. So, how is it that international environmental agendas are promoted while marginalised and subaltern voices cannot speak or are never heard? The invention of the Orient (Said, 1995), the "discovery – invention of poverty" (Escobar's phrase, 1995b; see also Yapa, 1996), and of the Third World by the development industry, particularly the World Bank (Bhaba, 1994; Escobar, 1995b) are other examples of an exposure and examination of unwarranted representations and exercise of power.

Second, postmodernism has challenged all-embracing worldviews which are highly teleological, and assume their underlying assumptions and the validity of their claims. The close nexus of knowledge, theory, and power is examined so that it may be unmasked, destabilised, its pretensions punctured, its silences prised open, and all manner of linguistic assaults successfully launched. Here, development is only one of a number of controlling discourses and practices, and one which is an elaboration of an historically embedded global project to extend a universalising European and American knowledge – power regime to all parts of the world. Since the origins of postmodernism are primarily linguistic, it is through this mode of attack that most postmodern writers feel comfortable. It also converges [as a reviewer (Lehmann, 1997) of *Encountering Development* (Escobar, 1995b) commented (unfairly, in my view)] with the agendas of academics on the conference and publication circuit, who can claim a dramatic and seemingly radical coup de theatre by literary flourish, rather than by rational argument and painstaking research (Lehmann, 1997). Nonetheless, this swipe does draw attention again to the need to ask the (postmodern) question about the context of research for all academics of whatever persuasion, and what constitutes the knowledge – power regime of the author, who they are talking to and why. I will return to this issue later.

Third, postmodern treatments of development focus upon the way in which different knowledge(s) is (are) constructed and promoted in which the privileged status of scientific and expert knowledge is questioned and instead the voices of other less powerful groups, particularly the local and indigenous, are talked up. In the environmental sphere, for example, there is a debate about whether there are ontological, epistemological, and methodological differences between indigenous, and exogenous and scientific knowledge (Agrawal, 1995; Anacleto, 1996). The

latter is treated as issuing from professional and cultural repertoires originating in positivist science, from white-coated and apolitical scientists and more specifically from Western (and usually American) political contexts. These are legitimated by the identification of problems (for example, environmental degradation, overstocking) which require expert intervention (see Alcorn, 1995; Bebbington, 1991). In the social sphere, (ab)original poverty, technical ignorance, organisational incompetence, and institutional barriers to freer markets are constructed or 'discovered', and all serve to legitimate a development industry to reproduce itself, earn its employees handsome livelihoods, and to render other endogenous views illegitimate. This is a profoundly challenging postmodern assault, but leaves some nagging doubts that there may not be all that much difference between local and global knowledge anyway (Agrawal, 1995), that negotiations to achieve closure around some provisional truth about the environment are still necessary. Western and consultancy-driven knowledge has been proved wrong so often (by rational and empirical means rather than by postmodern literary persuasion, perhaps), but this in no way necessarily confers virtue on the local (Alcorn, 1995; Greenough and Tsing, 1994; Haverkort, 1995; Scoones and Thompson, 1994).

Fourth, what might be called the poststructural aspect of postmodernism has turned modernist epistemology and methodology inside out. The familiar structural approach to reality as being empirically verifiable by observing phenomena as objective facts, is being challenged by another which holds that reality is socially constructed. Instead of an epistemology which builds models of society and environment with causal connections, another is constituted as a series of different subjective descriptive accounts according to various actors' perceptions. Instead of models, hypotheses of limited application, and explanations of human behaviour based on determining structural variables and a shifting and impermanent set of subjective accounts are pervasive. The implications of the more uncomprising forms of social constructivism are problematic, particularly decisionmaking of any sort involving action in one way rather than another, and in which different social constructions converge and contradict one another. Here, if a practical solution is desirable, a poststructural plurality of interpretations can be confusing and unsatisfactory for all actors involved, whether for a plant-breeding station, a forest user group, or an urban housing association which may be trying to solve practical problems. Negotiations on a set of provisional truths have to be able to achieve closure to get anything done at all. At the same time, a focused social constructivist critique on development practice can be useful for suggesting new ways to construct useful development knowledge democratically, by outsiders and insiders alike.

The hidden political steer

There is an enduring tension in most postist writings about development, which is sometimes alluded to and only occasionally examined. It is the self-confessed need somehow to reconstruct a new world after the deconstruction of the old, and "extricate ourselves from the development morass" (Cooper and Packard, 1995). Escobar (1995a) and other contributors to Crush's edited volume (1995) express similar sentiments at different points. Persuasive deconstruction of development often leaves only fragmented remains, and offers little more than a celebration of an underproblematised and underresearched 'resistance', diversity, and alternative voices. The more sceptical postmodernists are consistent enough not to fill the vacuum with their own metanarratives and impose them on local sites of resistance. For the more affirmative, there remain three related problems: (1) an unexamined and 'thin', even romanticised, notion of the local, as the site of resistance; (2) a naivety or deliberate myopia about some of the more questionable social agendas that appear at local sites of power; and (3) an

agenda-less programme, a full stop, a silence, after the act of deconstruction [or in Esteva and Prakash's (1998) language, simply saying 'no' to the global development project].

The responses to these difficulties is various. First, there is deliberate silence, by which postmodern writers on development signal that it is inconsistent or inconceivable that they should represent others in any new world (other than their own choice of ideologically acceptable, priorly identified, and self-evident enemies of course). The second employs the very strategy which postmodernists draw attention to in others, which is to frame some issues and avoid others. The choice for all academics and writers for mass audiences is strongly directed by current fashions of political correctness. Examples of silences and omissions are difficult to find, so I will create two instead, and provide other brief ones. For example, why was there such an expansion of local histories of the Xhosa and Zulu in the lead-up to majority rule in South Africa in international anthropological and sociological annual conferences in the West? Why not Afrikaaner history? After all, Afrikaaners had suffered extraordinary oppression under the British from the late 19th century through to the rise of Afrikaaner nationalism in the 1920s—the Afrikaaner language was suppressed in favour of high Dutch or English, Afrikaaner children were bullied and ostracised at school, and these were preceded by a ferocious war and the extermination of many women and children in concentration camps. To take another example, why has there been a dearth of deconstructive zeal focused on the antismoking and passive smoking campaigns, which have developed on both sides of the Atlantic over the past twenty years? Authoritative and positivist science backed by the medical establishment and a universalistic condemnation of smoking might have been expected to have attracted a talking up of the resistance of smokers and their diverse and subjective views about the therapeutic effects of the cigarette? The reason for such a yawning silence is that neither nicotine nor Afrikaanerdome have quite been flavours of the month. Rather, postmodern framings held up by the hands of political correctness appear as blurred finger images on a photograph when the photographer/author fails to get them out of the way of the lens! They perhaps invite too dangerous a deconstruction altogether. The World Bank, World Trade Organisation, and bilateral aid agencies invariably come in for ultra-critical treatment, sometimes one suspects merely by association, while other equally massive and perhaps even more damaging development stories (for example, socialisms as practised, or reversals of the emancipation of women under new fundamentalist regimes) somehow seem to be treated softly. As the senior men of a village said one day to Western officials of a project which included efforts to empower women in Iran “your project is spoiling our women”. So be it, then? However, a critical view of local expressions of ethnic hostility, religious persecution, or gendered abuse is somehow difficult to find in postmodern development writings. Thus postmodern writers face a choice—to remain vague and hopeful about what might command the sites of local resistance, to fill these new deconstructed spaces with their own narratives, or to resist both altogether and run the risk of being accused of consigning the future to whatever comes along.

Contending coalitions and paradigms of development

Most of the postmodern deconstructions of development have either engaged at a very high level of abstraction or have been highly selective in their targets. While much of the literature has often brought new insights, or reinforced modernist critiques (but in a different language and style), it has usually ignored the variety of development styles and practices, and the ways in which these are created and reproduced. Ever since 1945, there continue to be recursive processes of learning and adaptation between theory,

policy, and outcome. The development industry reproduces itself not only by its circularity and interlocking networks of clients, but also by adjusting its messages (theories, narratives, procedures, institutional forms, and so forth). There have been broad changes of development theory and epistemology since the establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions after World War 2, and these have led to changes in practice. These changes are explored in terms of the development paradigm.

A paradigm is used here to mean an ideal type and a model to be emulated. Each of these development paradigms is a domain of thought and, in the development context, is internally consistent with a particular view of human decisionmaking, a set of development goals, and theoretical and normative assumptions about social change. Their expansion and elaboration are brought about through the formation of networks or communities in an uneven and often contradictory manner (for there are contradictions in all 'communities'), but the power of the paradigm is that it lays claim to consistency and confers intellectual authority on its adherents. However, it bears repeating that, in development texts such as strategy and policy statements and in project documents, all manner of statements of fact and intention in the style of these paradigms are borrowed and conflated. Sometimes this is done intentionally, in cases where there is a limited and temporary discursive alliance, and sometimes unintentionally where the result is contradictory and confused. Theory and practice in development are no exception, are always contextual, contingent, and always changing—a postmodern notion indeed, but one that opens up new spaces and possibilities for 'doing development' in different ways.

A new paradigm assembles its claims on the carcasses of the old and differentiates itself from them as a part of achieving a distinctive profile to promote itself further and the members of that community in their professional careers. A periodicity of these paradigms is clear and the phenomenon of the 'paradigm shift' (Kuhn, 1962; 1970) can be dated to within a few years in some of the major institutions and publications in the academic and policy spheres. The notion of a paradigm shift is grounded in Kuhn's evergreen work (a precursor perhaps to postmodern treatments of knowledge and power), but is also a device which has been used to good effect by those promoting a new paradigm, whose promptors hope to inflict a judo throw as it were, on the old paradigm and effect a decisive and rapid shift in ideas. However, these shifts occur in more complex and long-drawn-out ways in which truncated and hijacked narratives are used from the old to fortify the new, and cognitive shifts tend to be faltering and gradual. There are strategic policy alliances, sometimes limited in time and across institutions which make it difficult to demarcate these shifts decisively. A number of writers have pointed out, for example, the ways in which neopopulist sentiments such as the poverty agenda, grassroots participation, and decentralisation have been used by the World Bank in its Development Reports since about 1989, while at the same time consistently promoting its own neoliberal approach to the environment and development (Biot et al, 1995, pages 6–21; Blaikie, 1997, page 80; Peet and Watts, 1993, page 237). The World Bank simply appropriates soundbites from the neopopulist agenda where it also reflected its own antistate and anti-centralised-bureaucracy sentiments, and grafted them into its narrative.

A useful notion for understanding how different paradigms of development (and also less abstract and encompassing development theories) become established is the "epistemic community" (Haas, 1992). This is a group of professionals held together by a shared set of normative principles, shared causal and epistemological beliefs, and a common policy enterprise. They may form themselves around different paradigms of development or around specific professional areas of interest in the development field (for example, the new range ecology and range management in Africa, participatory

approaches in research and local development, or the economic approach to the environment). While they seek to define, harmonise, and promote their shared project, their successful growth cannot be assumed to be, in some simple way, the precursor of a successful paradigm shift—for example, from a top-down, statist, and coercive style of development to a bottom-up, transparent, and participatory one. Rather, the proposers of a new paradigm are agents of a slower process of ‘cognitive evolution’ in an international learning process. This sketch helps us to identify the ways in which different development paradigms are promoted, and how they crosscut or coincide with others to some degree and appeal to different actors in development. For example, neopopulist styles of development have been promoted by a network of academic scholars from the social sciences (particularly anthropology, sociology, and geography), a small and marginalised scattering of scientists from the CGIAR (Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research) network, and local activist nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). Once these initially diverse set of professionals established their network, made strategic alliances, and attained a degree of convergence, an epistemic community had been formed. We shall see how its constituent members adapted a shared (and, when occasion demanded, conveniently blurred) episteme to conform to their own diverse professional circumstances, and sought to engage (and, if possible co-opt) other groups of professionals and other crosscutting epistemic communities.

Another aspect in the reproduction of the development industry is its need for narratives which can be understood and implemented (see Gare, 1995, page 139f; Roe, 1995). These have to be fairly simple, elegant, and appealingly told, and they have to resonate with the professional and cultural repertoires of their constituencies. For most, this means narratives with claims for universal validity and generalisation with clear outlines and contours. They must reduce the bureaucratic anxiousness for decisionmakers that goes with uncertainty and ambiguity. They must also stabilise policy recommendations, and in this sense are “discursive closures” (Hajer, 1995). As long as a development narrative does these things, it has a chance of enduring—whether as an active combatant in a ‘war story’ or on the shelf to await its moment in the future. The important point is that some development paradigms fulfil the criteria of elegance, brevity, and literary appeal better, and conform to existing and inbuilt bureaucratic and administrative templates better, than others. Nonetheless, there is also evidence of ways in which paradigm and institutional form have a reflexive effect on each other, and that paradigms do profoundly affect strategy and policy at international, national, and local levels [for an excellent collection of writings on how to analyse development policy, see Apthorpe and Gasper (1996)]. Three paradigms can be identified.

The classic development paradigm

From about 1950 to 1975 a ‘classic’ development paradigm predominated and drew its sources from the strategic objectives of the USA as the hegemonic power in the Cold War period (So, 1990, pages 11–16), and from other lower order notions from a European colonial past, chiefly concerning rural development, population policy and control, and environmental management. Big theories, inclusive narratives of awesome teleology such as modernisation, were then in fashion. This approach to rural development and to environmental management is modernising, top-down, focused on technology transfer, state instigated, and usually informed by state-sponsored scientific institutions. It is this paradigm which has attracted most criticism from all quarters—liberal, neo-Marxist, as well as postmodern. A number of commentators have also noted the similarity of their critiques, and asked “what is new?” (Cooper and Packard, 1995; Lehmann, 1997). In the area of environmental policy, examples in colonial

Africa, particularly in the British and Belgian colonies, are legion (Anderson and Grove, 1987; Blaikie, 1985; Leach and Mearns, 1996). Policies are expert led with the state and its science, which are promoted via extension agents to target populations, and with the necessary legislative and policing instruments. Particular ways of understanding the world (usually employing a logical positivist framework) and of defining 'environmental problems' are deployed—the terms themselves, such as overgrazing and environmental degradation, carry with them a particular cultural and professional charge, which has only recently been interrogated and deconstructed. These critiques have come from a number of different sources, but the vast majority have come from scientific studies. For example, new understandings of the ecology of semiarid areas (Behnke and Scoones, 1993; Scoones, 1995) have, through scientific means, led experts, range ecologists, and commercial farmers in sub-Saharan Africa full circle, back to the long-expressed views of local herders and pastoralists themselves who had maintained all along that most ranges were not overgrazed, that maximisation of herd size was a logical survival strategy in a risky environment (and not a bizarre 'cattle complex'), and that the maintenance of spatial mobility to 'flee drought' was essential. So, prior notions of carrying capacity and climax vegetation are now seen as superseded and irrelevant. Other much more postmodern routes to the destabilisation of scientific certainties include an institutional approach to the production of scientific 'facts' in the Himalaya by Thompson and Warburton (1985). However, the classic paradigm for research and interventions in terms of policy and projects still persists, in spite of all the criticism it has attracted from the neopopulist and neoliberal counterrevolutions over the past fifteen years. It appeals to standards of professional excellence, technology transfer, and universalised and administratively simple solutions. It appeals to governments of developing countries, because the style of development tends to be distinctly statist, giving opportunities to politicians to lay claims upon 'bringing development' to their clients and to bureaucrats both national and international, to undertake development tasks [a point well made by Escobar (1995a)].

The neoliberal development paradigm

At different times during the 20th century, the neoliberal paradigm has been rediscovered in response to particular global crises, with a view to ensuring outcomes which are claimed by its adherents to be beneficial to all people, or alternatively beneficial to certain fractions of capital according to Marxist critics. The most recent disinterment of Adam Smith and neoclassical economics was articulated by such authors as Bauer (1976) and Beckerman (1974), but views such as theirs became mainstream over the next five years or so, and particularly after the international debt crisis. Economists discovered that neoliberal laws had been proven valid after all, and that the invisible hand of the market does indeed allocate resources optimally (in fact, and in an empirically verifiable manner). Any efforts by states to improve the operation of the market by intervention only distort it. Reviews of the major discussions can be found in Broad (1988), Cole et al (1993), and Watts (1993). The paradigm is closely associated with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and the environmental policies which flow from this paradigm can be read in a series of World Development Reports from 1991 onwards and from their series of technical papers and special publications. In some ways, this is the most ultramodern project of all, and shares with postmodern antidevelopment writers some of the high levels of abstraction of the institutions and structures in which economic action takes place (Cooper and Packard, 1997, page 3). The neoliberal paradigm, with its kernel of subjective preference theory, is highly totalising and universalising. Its view on the role of local people in applying their knowledge and skills in action is therefore myopic. Local knowledge is sidelined

and reduced both theoretically and practically to market information on the technical choices available, and the local appropriateness of these choices to their environment and individual or household endowments. The paradigm is indifferent to the 'localness' of appropriate institutions which should be induced to meet market demand [following an interpretation of the models of institutional and technical innovation after Hayami and Ruttan (1985)]. The neoliberal development paradigm is globally dominant today. The most powerful reasons why, in my view, are provided by political economy and derive from the need of capital to restructure itself from time to time. Theories, narratives, policies, and institutions—the global power–knowledge nexus—drive, and are driven by, global capital. In this context, Marx and his subtle understandings of the economic base and superstructure cast longer shadows and more powerful spells than any postmodern excoriation (a view echoed by Peet, 1997). In the simplest terms, global capital, and its various fractions at different junctures, appropriate, frame, and promote particular aspects of classical and (later) neoliberal economics for particular strategic ends. This paradigm has true economic power—it dominates. The next paradigm hasn't—it doesn't.

The neopopulist development paradigm

A reappraisal of the classic approach led to the development of the neopopulist development paradigm. It originated from a number of different sources which increasingly converged during the late 1970s (see also Watts, 1997, although his treatment differs from mine). The first was a rejection of the classic, top-down, technocentric, and state-led model of technology transfer, and the literature of the time bears witness to the possibilities of reflection and reappraisal of previous development experience. The critiques were modernist in tone along the lines that previous models were simply not working and development should be promoted by alternative approaches. 'New agendas' and 'rethinking development' became the theme of conferences and overview publications at this time (Chambers, 1983; 1993). The second element in assembling the claim of the neopopulist paradigm was a reassertion of populist sentiments. These have a long and heterogenous set of roots (Ionesco and Gellner, 1969; Kitching, 1982). Kitching assembles a diverse set of historical contexts, which include: reactions of an agrarian and more-or-less self-sufficient society against capitalist penetration (for example, the Narodnik movement in Russia); small-scale capitalism fighting against finance capital and urban interests (for example, North American populism); a rural movement seeking to realise traditional values in a changing society; and any creed or movement based on the premise "that virtue resides in the simple people, who in their collective traditions are the overwhelming majority". There remain unresolved problems in defining the boundaries of populisms and who is included, and excluded from, 'ordinary folk'—something which postmodern writers also have to face.

A third and distinct source of neopopulist thinking came from a seemingly unlikely source, the international and national agricultural research stations. A more participatory research style began to be suggested by such writers as Collinson (1972) and Ruthenberg (1968). Mostly, this change in direction was prompted not so much by the populist sentiments listed above, but by the recognition of inadequate diagnosis of farmers' needs and capabilities of adopting new technologies. The analysis of the 'whole farm' context in which single technological innovations had to be set within the technical and social context of the farm household necessitated detailed farm surveys, and on understanding of farmers' resources, decisionmaking, and conceptual frameworks. Agendas can be charted over a period of the thirteen International Farming Systems Research Symposia held each year since 1981. The first few concerned the technical issues of understanding small farm issues, whereas after 1985 links with

communication methodologies and processes bringing together expert and farmer rose to prominence. It was not until the 1990s that intrahousehold analysis, gender issues, and farmer experimentation were introduced. The importance of indigenous technical knowledge was emphasised, and consequent on the need to consult farmers, other institutional changes in the ways in which farming systems research was conducted all slowly followed (Okali et al, 1994). To some degree the farm research element in neopopulist development remains distinct, although there are increasing linkages being made between these 'technical' aspects of technology development and the wider moral and political aspirations of neopopulism, for example, in the bringing together of a wider range of practices such as community-based research, decentralisation of government programmes, empowering farmers, primary environmental care, social and community forestry, and indigenous technical knowledge. By 1980 the neopopulist paradigm had become central to many development agencies, particularly big international NGOs (BINGOs), not only to environmental management but also to sustainable agriculture and in health, welfare, and education projects, and an upturn in the labelling of projects and programmes in neopopulist terms can be recognised in multilateral and national institutions by the mid-1980s (Blaikie et al, 1997). Participation, flexible 'process-oriented' planning in which local people use their own knowledge and skills to work out their own solutions to the problems that they set themselves, had become de rigeur. According to more recent writings (Burkey, 1994; Nelson and Wright, 1995; Posey and Dufield, 1996) the use of local knowledge can be linked with notions of empowerment and participation.

Neopopulist developmentalism: modernist paradigm in postmodern clothing

The vast literature promoting neopopulist developmentalism over the past fifteen years has a number of curious characteristics, of which a few of the most salient will be addressed here. The first is its audience—which is almost exclusively 'upstream' to the development industry itself rather than 'downstream' to the rural 'beneficiaries' or 'target groups' of rural development. Again and again, scientists and development professionals are berated for their procedures, structures, and behaviours which prevent them from facilitating the true participatory, bottom-up, process-led, appropriate, sustainable, and flexible outcome. Since much of the literature is written by and for development professionals, the salience of professional expertise in 'how to do development' is very marked. There is an assumption that, if only the methods were right, a more participatory, accountable, feasible, and sustainable development would occur. Of course, these methods are the least radical aspects of the paradigm. While they do require different behaviours on the part of professionals, they only imply (rather than state openly) that power relations will have to change both between and within development agencies and governments, and between them and civil society (Scoones and Thompson, 1994). If the neopopulist paradigm is embraced more fully, and pursued to its moral, political, and practical conclusions, then control over priorities for allocating resources, project design, choice of technologies, timetables, logistical planning—in short practically everything that the development professional and government personnel do—will start to drift away from them. Thus, it is no wonder that the largest constituencies for the paradigm may well have ambivalent attitudes towards it. I suggest that for very large numbers in the development industry:

(a) Neopopulist rhetoric can be useful for repackaging development styles by verbally addressing fundamental structural issues of inequality and power, but in practice by pursuing business as usual. Relabelling projects, putting old wine in new bottles, and using its appealing vocabulary allow new claims to be made upon funds and justify the exercise of control in old ways.

(b) The methods of neopopulism (for example, participatory rural appraisal, rapid rural appraisal, and other negotiating techniques more akin to personal skill development and counselling than planning) are treated with scepticism by many in the development industry. But there need be no commitment to change on their part, and agreeing to training courses in the new orthodoxy and including these catchphrases in project documents are hardly fundamental sacrifices to current fashion, as long as they do not imply a change in classic, bureaucratic styles of 'development'.

Neopopulist development (where its moral, ideological, and methodological aspects are integrated) therefore sends confusing and threatening messages to its main audiences. Here again, the central message of this paradigm challenges all the certainties, assumptions, and teleologies of 'development' in the previous forty years. It embraces diversity, shuns the truths of science, disputes their relevance in mainstream rural development in the South, and rejects patterns of thought, values, and behaviours of the development industry as a whole. In many ways, it is the most postmodern of development paradigms, and when addressed to those with established modernist notions of the possibility of progress on the Enlightenment model, it is no wonder that its patrons are hostile, perplexed, or simply do not know what to do within existing patterns of power, both ideational and material, which exist in their daily professional lives.

It remains to recapitulate the postmodern characteristics which appear in neopopulist development. These are:

- (a) neopopulist development rejects modernisation, as an inevitable and convergent direction of social change;
- (b) it respects local diversity and local agendas;
- (c) it accepts that truth is variable and negotiable;
- (d) it is aware, in principle at least, of power relations appearing in knowledge construction, development priorities, research agendas, and goal setting;
- (e) it encourages local and authentic action so that people can speak and act for themselves;
- (f) it recognises that development is a continually negotiated and subjectively defined process.

Neopopulist developmentalism therefore can be argued to resemble a new style of postmodern thinking, but also to dissemble in that, in many cases, the wolf of control and subjugation may still lurk beneath the new sheep's clothing.

Neopopulism and NGOs: local spaces, havens, or new sites of modernity?

There are therefore grounds for disputing the claim that neopopulist development really does provide the postmodern space and site of resistance to modernity. First, neopopulist development often involves intervention by outside organisations, even if only for funding to which are attached strings of various lengths and strengths. These organisations and actors include BINGOs, national networks of NGOs, agricultural extension officers, plant breeders, ground-level professionals as well as those making decentralised policies made at national level, and they will all have agendas of their own. Community-based organisations as well as social movements will also have a diverse set of agendas, driven by a dynamic local political economy. Watershed management projects, traditional midwife training programmes, women's projects, income-generation projects for the landless, all spell out by their labels exogenously defined agendas. The local people are dealt these agendas like a hand of cards; they pick some up, leave some, struggle amongst themselves over others, but all have to be negotiated at the development interface (Long and Long, 1992, pages 16–46; Long and Vilareal, 1994). Fundamental contradictions therefore arise in the practice of neopopulist development as a result of its

rhetoric of local autonomy, empowerment, and the necessity for outsiders to listen and learn from insiders on the one hand, and the structural position in which development agendas (local functionaries of the community based organisation or NGO) find themselves, on the other. These agents whether they may be government servants, members of NGOs, consultants, or academics, have to reconcile the fact that, when they intervene in the development process, they will have some sort of modernist agenda and they will have their own cultural and professional approaches to bring to bear. First, a number of techniques have been developed for insuring democratic participation between outsiders and insiders. Techniques of mutual data collection together with the adoption of local meanings, classifications, and problem identifications have now become part of development orthodoxy. Rapid rural appraisal and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) have been developed and refined over the past ten years. Also, there are techniques for egalitarian and transparent negotiation which derive more from counselling than from the social sciences, such as Delta, TeamUp, and Participatory Agricultural Research. However, experience has shown that it is not so much the technique for data collection and negotiation of rural development priorities that is the problem, but the ways in which these data are used, and the relations of power within the intervention organisation and between it and the local people (Burghart, 1994; Mosse, 1995). Indeed, Biggs and Smith (1997) have suggested that participatory development can seek ways forward by a shrewd reading of the local and institutional political economy so as to form 'contending coalitions' in a pragmatic manner, and that a reliance on participatory methods alone should be deemphasised. Thus, rural development becomes a new form of politics.

Second, the recognition that outside agencies, however democratic and participatory they wish to be, have agendas of their own gives the lie to the modernist development project in postmodern clothing. What happens, for example, if local 'big men' corner an income-generation project for poor families or for women? What happens if the village wants to cut down the forest for firewood or to substitute cheaper and more effective modern medical supplies for local herbal remedies? It is increasingly being recognised that awkward differences in objectives usually occur and, so far, the postmodern naivete about the unexamined virtue of the local has swept them under the carpet (especially so by Esteva and Prakash, 1998).

Third, the ways in which this style of development project are promoted aim to build a consensus between the various actors. It is common for project documents to use the notion of 'community' which provides an imaginary and convenient vehicle for the delivery of programme objectives. The techniques described above are all essentially negotiation techniques which seek to arrive at consensus. One of the criticisms of PRA amongst other things, is that consensus is reached by omission (the poor, sick, old, untouchable, unclean, absent, etc remain unheard in spite of exhortations to include them in what becomes a public ceremony of interchange between local people and the freshly arrived development agents). Also, neopopulist methodologies are well adapted to achieve consensus within the development agency itself but less so between them and local people. The facts that project processes (the allocation of resources, accountability procedures, who works and who benefits from project activities and outputs) are negotiated on a playing field that is far from level and that there are enduring structural inequalities which underpin the local exercise of power are only now beginning to be addressed. A negotiated settlement which must accommodate these gradients conveniently irons out these contradictions and plays to the more appealing methods of conflict resolution and negotiation. The avoidance of conflict has strong resonances with the ideology and systems of shared values of many NGOs, but also reminds us of postmodern myopia over the highly problematic notion of 'community', as the site of unpenetrated, local, and authentic alterity and cultural difference.

Conclusion

Postmodern challenges to these metanarratives as well as other stories in the development repertoire have reinforced the sense of cul-de-sac, but also shed light at both ends — behind the backs of the development industry indicating an overdue retreat, but ahead too, where it may be possible to reconstruct the modernist project of development in a more accountable, diverse, and just way. The neopopulist paradigm is one that moves forward in this direction, although it carries with it the contradiction that it still has to negotiate its own social and environmental agendas with local ‘ordinary’ people in the South. Postmodern writing on development must therefore be sifted for discursive resources for more modest modern objectives by many different audiences, who may be able to slip their moorings and steer towards their own agendas.

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