

Abstract:

What is the post-war development project? How does this project yield power asymmetries? In this paper, I will explore the development project as a hegemonic discourse and practice that is violent, oppressive, and degrading. We will analyze the development project as a culturally and economically dominant and disruptive force that is animated by violence, and is reinforced through depoliticized and technocratic discourse and practice.

Instead of abandoning development all together, I propose that countries in the global south reappropriate it. Instead of viewing development as an apolitical force through neoliberal development policy, I propose a politicization of development policy that evokes pan African, indigenous, and feminist lenses. These traditions will restore power to the subjects of development and will disrupt and deconstruct development practice.

As a result, development will no longer be a hegemonic, reductionist and Eurocentric discourse and practice – and will instead be derived from indigenous, pan African and feminist sources. Development discourse and policy are often birthed out of colonial logics, so it must be reshaped, reappropriated, and tailored to local contexts. This will restore power to the subject. Finally, I argue for a third space, which I will designate as communal spaces distinct from the home and neoliberal workplaces. This will challenge state power and hegemonic development discourses.

A critique of the Development Project

The development project emerged in the late 1940s to the early 1970s.¹ The development project can be defined as an internationally organized strategy for stimulating

¹ McMichael, Philip. "Development and social change: A global perspective." (1996).

nationally managed economic growth. This development project is animated by a universal, depoliticized and technocratic language that strips the subject of development from the project itself.²

As colonialism collapsed; political elites of newly independent states embraced development to pursue growth, revenue generation, and legitimacy. This reductionist, hegemonic and Eurocentric discourse and practice made universal claims that shunned indigenous ways of life. The development project is animated by a Eurocentric, coercive and dominant discourse and process that dominates subjects and shapes futures according to a western way of conceiving and perceiving the world.³ The development project is animated by a Eurocentric and hegemonic discourse that distinguishes between the modern and the primordial and the civilized and the uncivilized.

The development project is part and parcel of a discourse and process that appropriates and turns other people into objects. Development policy and discourse stripes the subject of individuality and identity – making them cogs in the machine of global development. The subject of development becomes part of a larger system of power that is technocratic and supposedly full of all knowing rationality. The subject of development in the development project is supposedly primitive, backward, barbaric and must be civilized through western modernity, economic advancement and industrialization.

The development project was promoted as a tool that enabled rising living standards, rationality, and scientific progress. This one size fits all development project was animated by an international framework of aid (military and economic) that made the developing world

² Crush, Jonathan. "Introduction: imagining development." In *Power of development*, pp. 17-38. Routledge, 2005.

³ Tucker, Vincent. "The Myth of Development: A Critique of a Eurocentric Discourse in Critical Development Theory: Contributions to a New Paradigm. Ronaldo and O' Hearn, Denis, ed." (1999).

dependent on the developed world. Political elites in the developing world entered this asymmetrical relationship on an unequal footing. The development project they implemented bequeathed new inequalities that were embedded in states and markets along regional, class, gender, racial and ethnic lines.

These power asymmetries came in the form of material supports including foreign aid, technology transfers, stable currency exchanges, and international trade. Aid and trade relationships followed well-worn paths between ex-colonial states and their postcolonial regions. Complementing these historic relationships were the Bretton Woods institutions and the political, military, and economic relationships of the new superpower, the United States.

A neoliberal bible emerged in the post war development period. This one size fits all approach to development was at the heart of the development project. W.W Rostow authored a reductionist view of economic development that summarizes a way of generalizing the sweep of modern economic history in his "The stages of economic growth".⁴ Rostow proposed a set of stages of growth, which can be designated as follows: the traditional society; the preconditions for take-off, the take-off; the drive to maturity and the age of high mass consumption.

Rostow's believes that traditional society is unproductive – and he uses depoliticized and technocratic language to prove his point. Rostow's model of development postulates that all societies evolved from a state of traditional society to the modern one and wangled into economic maturity.

This Eurocentric view does not consider that developed countries in the western world we're not traditional from their inception – and he fails to adequately explore how western countries benefited from colonial hegemony. Reading between the lines of Rostow's work, it

⁴ Rostow, Walt W. "The stages of economic growth." *The economic history review* 12, no. 1 (1959): 1-16.

sounds like he is on a civilizing mission – which usually conjures up the idea of European colonialism and imperialism.⁵ Civilizing missions are animated by ever-shifting set of ideas and practices that were used to justify and legitimize the establishment and continuation of overseas colonies.

His critique of traditional society, his emphasis on technological maturity and his insinuation that traditional society need take-off, maturity, and high mass consumption reinforces the idea that the development project is both Eurocentric and reductionist. He turns development into a political discourse that shuns and disrupts indigenous ways of life, Pan African visions, and feminist discourses and practice.

It is crucial to note the context in which the work of Rostow and his counterparts was bequeathed. The structural, political, and intellectual cold war context bequeathed a specific discourse of development that attempted to redirect the process of development.⁶ Rostow was part of the modernization theory intellectual scene that promised to be cost-effective in promoting the development of “underdeveloped” areas according to the perceived interests of the United States.

Rostow and his counterparts actively sought to coordinate the production of knowledge which they believed was necessary for U.S interests and the perpetuation of global capitalism. This reproduces colonial logics. The civilization mission in the British Raj in India has echoes of Rostow’s vision. For the British Raj in India the civilizing mission meant many things, including bringing the benefits of British culture to the subcontinent in the form of free trade and capitalism as well as law, order, and good governance.

⁵ Watt, Carey Anthony, and Michael Mann, eds. *Civilizing missions in colonial and postcolonial South Asia: From improvement to development*. Anthem Press, 2011.

⁶ Baber, Zaheer. "Modernization theory and the Cold War." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 31, no. 1 (2001): 71-85.

These components are crucial to the neoliberal development project and Rostow's hegemonic visions. British rule was supposed to bring an end to a supposed condition of chronic warfare, violence, disorder, and despotic rule – just as Rostow's stages of development hoped to bring an end to traditional societies.

At its core, the civilizing mission in the Indian context was about morally and materially 'uplifting', 'improving' and later 'developing' the supposedly 'backward' or 'rude' people of India to make them more civilized and most importantly, more modern. This is at the heart of the development project, or the "civilization project".

Rostow and fellow modernization theorists seem to be conducting a similar project. Rostow's project reproduces colonial stereotypes of the African subject as underdeveloped, primitive, and barbaric. Rostow wants to spread a hegemonic modernity in which the subjects will civilize, develop, and become modern capitalist subjects.

Development as violence

Colonialism and modern development discourse and are inherently linked discourses and practices that bequeath violence. In Jamaica, the violence of colonial conquest had fully degraded, displaced, and brutalized native societies with a plantation economy.⁷ These violent colonial logics and orders are reproduced and reverberated in the economic and political conditions of postcolonial Jamaica.

As Franz Fanon says, colonial rule is maintained through violence and repression – and it bequeaths violence into the home and mind.⁸ Indeed, violence is a natural state of colonial rule –

⁷ Getachew, Adom. *Worldmaking after empire*. Princeton University Press, 2019.

⁸ "Fanon on Violence and the Person." *Critical Legal Thinking*, July 8, 2021.
<https://criticallegalthinking.com/2016/01/20/fanon-on-violence-and-the-person/>.

and it is derived from the racialized views that the colonizer has about the colonized subject. The colonizer often inscribes the colonized subject with ideas of backwardness, a lack of empathy and rationality. These violent and degrading colonial logics are reproduced through development discourse and practice.

Violence is endemic and constitutive of development.⁹ Development is animated by violent, disruptive, and nauseating displacements. This displacement is normalized and celebrated in development discourse and practice. Colonialism, Rostow's vision of modernity and modern development discourse is essentially about displacement – conquering territories, uprooting peoples from place, restructuring places and spaces, such as creating plantations and urban sprawl or ghettos. Post war Columbia is the perfect case of this.

Concepts related to development discourse and practice, such as: poverty reduction, production, and increasing standards of living bequeathed violence.¹⁰ These discourses emphasized the market, the rational, the modern – and these terms and practices are synonyms with displacement. In the postwar development era, neoliberal globalization yielded a decreasing economic, political, and cultural importance of nation states, and new violent and hegemonic mechanisms assumed form as a result. Privatization displaced populations and austerity kept the people hungry – and this reinforced development as violence.

International political organizations interfered politically and militarily in particular states – and they relegated to the past the written and unwritten rules about sovereignty of nation (states) and their monopoly on the use of institutionalized violence within the borders (which has always been the central element in the definition of the states).

⁹ Escobar, Arturo. "Development, violence and the new imperial order." *Development* 47, no. 1 (2004): 15-21.

¹⁰ Schuurman, Frans J. "Paradigms lost, paradigms regained? Development studies in the twenty-first century." *Third world quarterly* 21, no. 1 (2000): 7-20.

The role of the state diminished, hollowing out from below by the growing phenomenon of local government, which seems to have become the example of what good governance should be about – when they were often vehicles that enforced violence and neoliberal development schemes. Economically, the state in the post war development era was disappearing as an economic actor – and privatization supported by deregulation assumed form – yielding violent displacement in the name of development, civilization, and modernity.

Imperialism and the pattern of globalization yields unequal development that is a vehicle of displacement. In the postwar development period, the pattern of globalization was animated by hegemony – and the global south had little autonomy over its own destiny.¹¹ This reinforces the idea of the development project as a degrading and violent civilizing mission – were the colonial subject is treated like a child with an abusive father. The neoliberal development yielded poverty, which itself a form of violence and degradation.

Conclusion: Rethinking Development

The development project prioritized technocratic growth and modernity over indigenous ways of knowing, pan African outlooks and feminist visions. This yields a violent and hegemonic discourses that displace and disrupts citizens in the global south in the name of development, modernity, and civilization. The western capitalist system has generated underdevelopment in the global south – and we must adequately address this underdevelopment by adequately addressing satellite realities and liberating political needs.¹² Instead of abandoning development all together, I propose we reclaim it and allow for indigenous alternatives.

¹¹ Amin, Samir. "The world without Bandung, or for a polycentric system with no hegemony." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 17, no. 1 (2016): 7-11.

¹² Frank, Andre Gunder. "The development of underdevelopment." New York (1966).

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