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Working Paper

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ZEF Working Paper Series, No. 103

Provided in Cooperation with:

Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung / Center for Development Research (ZEF), University of Bonn

Suggested Citation: Ziai, Aram (2012) : Postcolonial perspectives on 'development', ZEF Working Paper Series, No. 103, University of Bonn, Center for Development Research (ZEF), Bonn

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/88339>

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Center for Development Research
University of Bonn

Working Paper 103

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Postcolonial perspectives on 'development'

ZEF Working Paper Series, ISSN 1864-6638
Department of Political and Cultural Change
Center for Development Research, University of Bonn
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Postcolonial perspectives on 'development'

By Aram Ziai (Senior Researcher ZEFa)

Abstract:

The article deals with postcolonial works in the field of development theory and policy beyond the widely discussed post-development approaches. After identifying four analytical strategies typical for postcolonial studies, it examines the works in question. Particular attention is given to the criticism that postcolonial works would neglect material practices. The article concludes that for many works this criticism is not justified, but that the empirical engagement of postcolonial approaches with institutions and processes in development policy is often inaccurate, superficial and incomplete.

“Development studies does not tend to listen to subalterns and postcolonial studies does not tend to concern itself with whether the subaltern is eating” (Sylvester 1999: 703)

Christine Sylvester’s well-known characterisation of the relationship between development studies and postcolonial studies may be somewhat exaggerated, it is, however, based on a sharp observation. This relationship also constitutes the topic of this article. The article’s objective is twofold: on the one hand it aims to provide a – far from exhaustive – survey of works from the area of postcolonial studies that deal with ‘development’. Usually this type of work is associated with the post-development school, which has been widely discussed by now, but here the focus is on other authors beyond post-development. On the other hand, the article will deal with one of the central points of criticism which has been raised against postcolonial studies: that they neglect material practices. This criticism shall be examined on the grounds of the postcolonial works in the field of ‘development’.

For a start, it needs to be clarified what is meant by postcolonial studies and by ‘development’ – and why the concept is placed in quotation marks. Therefore the first section of the article deals (very briefly) with the concept of development and the second one (equally superficially) with the field of postcolonial studies. In the latter, specifically postcolonial questions and strategies of analysis will be examined, in order to achieve some orientation faced with the multitude of works and approaches in this field. Subsequently the focus will be on the relationship between development studies and postcolonial studies. Regarding the accusation of neglecting material practices and the strategies identified beforehand, a number of postcolonial works in the area of ‘development’ theory and policy will be scrutinized.

Keywords: postcolonial studies, development policy.

1 'Development'

A thorough historic and analytical treatise on the concept of development cannot be provided here (see instead Nisbet 1969, Alcalde 1987, Cowen/Shenton 1996, Rist 1997, Martinussen 1997, Nederveen Pieterse 2001, Kößler/Wimmer 2006). Nevertheless, a clear definition of the concept is indispensable in the context of this article, and it is here where the trouble already starts, for there is a host of heterogeneous definitions to be found in the literature. As can be seen in the works cited above, the discipline of development studies could not agree on a precise definition of its topic: in part, the term 'development' referred to evolutionary processes of social change (e.g. Rostow 1960); in part it dealt with targeted political interventions into these processes (Chenery et al. 1972); usually the change was associated with an improvement in living standards, but not always (Illich 1973); in most cases the topic was to be found in the countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and Oceania (hereafter referred to as the global South), but here we encounter some exceptions as well (Sachs 1999). In the beginning of the discipline, the goal was economic growth and industrialisation, later it extended to basic needs, poverty reduction or sustainability. 'Development' was measured primarily through the gross national product (GNP), like in the World Bank's *World Development Reports*, later indicators like formal education and life expectancy became relevant as well, like in the UNDP's *Human Development Index*.

Yet there was no complete conceptual disorder in development studies. For a long time definitions were influential or even predominant which conceived of the idea of 'development' as 'following in the footsteps of the West' (Bernstein cited by Thomas/Potter 1992: 119). Menzel understood 'development' explicitly as processes of 'economic growth, industrialisation, social differentiation and mobilisation, mental change, democratisation and redistribution' which took place in Western Europe, North America and later East Asia, but not (or at least not fully) in the rest of the world and for him, the task of development theory is to explain this lagging behind (Menzel 1993: 132).

On an abstract level, 'development' can thus be described as a bundle of interconnected and normatively positive processes which took place in some parts of the earth but not in others. On the one hand, this can be used pragmatically as a working definition, but on the other hand provides sufficient material for a (postcolonial – but we will come to that later) critique which leads to using the concept in inverted commas only. Because here processes which took place in Europe and the European settler colonies in North America (and later also in some Asian countries) are constituted as a historical norm the deviance of which is defined as in need of explanation and becomes the foundation of a discipline. Particular historical processes are then presented as human progress (neglecting their downsides), and one's own society as the ideal whereas other societies are attributed the status of deficient versions of it ('under-developed').

However, the concept is questionable not only on the grounds of its Eurocentrism, but also because it provides an all-too-simple pattern of perception and explanation for various social phenomena. According to the anthropologist James Ferguson "'development'" is the name not only for a value, but also for a dominant problematic or interpretative grid through which the impoverished regions of the world are known to us. Within this interpretative grid, a host of everyday observations are rendered intelligible and meaningful. The images of the ragged poor of Asia thus become legible as markers of a stage of development ... Within this problematic, it appears self-evident that debtor Third-World-nation states and starving peasants share a common "problem", that both lack a single "thing": "development"' (1994: xiii).

But behind the so-called 'development problems' there are often social phenomena whose origins and contexts – often related to power, privilege and exclusion – are blurred by this characterisation. The terminology implies that these problems can be solved by 'development' institutions and projects. This is a structural problem: because of the normative connotation of the concept processes

intended to bring about 'development' form a common ground for donor institutions, planning ministries, concerned social groups and NGOs. Who could be against 'development'? It is much more difficult to find support for political initiatives which point to conflicts on the national or international level and side with marginalised, exploited or oppressed groups.

Thus, to rid the concept of 'development' of its naturalness and to highlight its questionable aspects, the concept is used in inverted commas in this article. Now let us turn to the second central concept of our topic.

2 Postcolonial studies and their strategies of analysis

Contrary to widespread misconceptions, postcolonial studies are not postcolonial simply because they deal with previously colonised societies. As a rule, postcolonial studies are defined through a certain theoretical perspective. Regarding a definition of the field of postcolonial studies it has to be concluded that beyond the general concern with the phenomenon of colonialism and its effects there is no consensus on the precise delineation of the field of research – merely on its often quoted heterogeneity (Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin 1995: xv). Ashcroft, Griffiths und Tiffin primarily refer to 'discursive practices' and 'cultural strategies', but define the field as 'the totality of practices... which characterise the societies of the post-colonial¹ world from the moment of colonisation to the present day' (1995: xv). Williams and Chrisman have a narrower understanding of postcolonial theory and see it as the 'critique... of the process of production of knowledge about the other' (1994: 8). A similar focus can be found in the work of Young: 'Postcolonial cultural analysis has been concerned with the elaboration of theoretical structures that contest the previous dominant western way of seeing things. ... 'postcolonial theory' involves a conceptual reorientation towards the perspectives of knowledges, as well as needs, developed outside the west' (2003: 4, 6). Loomba, on the other hand, wants to broaden the field beyond the analysis of structures of knowledge and regards the central quality of postcolonial approaches in their 'contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism' (1998: 12). At a closer glance some of these definitions seem to be quite far-reaching and would also apply to the works summarized under the headings of Dependency, Imperialism and Neo-colonialism, which are examining relations of dominance and exploitation between metropolis and satellite, centre and periphery, i.e. as a rule former colonial powers and former colonies. But regarding their epistemological foundations and theoretical focus these works are tremendously different from the works of Said (1978), Bhabha (1994) and Spivak (1988), which are usually seen as the classic examples of postcolonial theory and which primarily deal with colonial discourse and only in the second place with their effects on material practices. Therefore Williams and Chrisman are justified in characterising postcolonial studies as 'critiques of the production of knowledge about the Other' (1994: 8). This focus on discourse analysis gives rise to the central criticism raised against postcolonial studies especially from a Marxist perspective: they would neglect 'material practices' in favour of 'mere representations' (Dirlik 1994 has probably been the most vocal proponent of this criticism). This reproach deserves closer examination and will be dealt with in the next section. What the different definitions have in common is the topic of the effects of colonialism, or colonial continuities, while the focus on the level of representation does not form a consensus. Looking more closely at the works designated as postcolonial it can be observed that the majority in fact is concerned with the effects of colonialism on the level of presentation, with the discursive construction of identities, concepts and practices which make possible and legitimise certain material practices. Postcolonial strategies of analysis can be identified and specified using the example of the most well-known representatives of postcolonial theory: Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty.

¹ Usually the term 'post-colonial' (with hyphen) refers to a historical stage, whereas 'postcolonial' (without hyphen) refers to a school of thought.

Orientalism and Othering

In his study *Orientalism* (1978) Edward Said has examined the construction of the orient in Western culture through various practices of knowledge production (travel diaries, academic treatises, novels and other literary works). According to Said this construction is based on an ontological distinction between the 'orient' and (mostly) the 'occident' (1978: 2), which made possible a homogenisation and stereotyping of this region and its inhabitants. This distinction allows 'to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image' (1f) – as progressive in contrast to a backward, as rational in contrast to an irrational, as liberal in contrast to a despotic Orient – and thus to achieve a 'positional superiority' (7). Against this background and because of countless distorted representations, Said comes to the conclusion that 'Orientalism responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object' (22), i.e. the knowledge produced matched rather the needs and desires of the West than the realities of the East. These needs and desires, however, were not only referring to identities, but also to politics. The political relevance of Orientalism was constituted above all by the fact that it legitimized colonial rule over the regions of the Orient, which is why Said characterises it also as a 'style for dominating' and 'having authority over' the Orient (3).

If we now abstract from Said's concrete example, we can define the concept of Orientalism as the production of knowledge about culturally defined others (the ontological distinction manifests itself after the demise of racist thinking predominantly through culture) which serves to constitute the identity of the Self and – this is particularly relevant for political science – allows for political claims and exclusions. In cultural studies, this practice is often referred to as 'Othering': the construction of an alien other which serves as a projection for the (re-) production of one's own (positive) identity.

This kind of knowledge production has been almost omnipresent during colonialism and can be observed even nowadays. Building on the work of Said and Todorov, Stuart Hall established that also in the colonial expansion of Europe beyond the Orient the classification of the non-West into a dichotomous, hierarchical system of representation has served to construct the identity of the West as civilised, rational, disciplined, superior, etc. (Hall 1992, see also Melber 1992 and Nandy 1983). Feminists have correctly pointed out that these dichotomous ascriptions are closely related with the binary oppositions between masculine and feminine respectively culture and nature (e.g. Peterson 2003: 36).

As the concept of Orientalism and the more abstract and more general concept of Othering imply the authority to 'know' and portray the other and their possible self-representation is negated, both are closely linked to the questions of Subalternity and representation.

Subalternity and representation/articulation

In the probably most famous text of postcolonial studies Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak confronts the question 'Can the Subaltern speak?' (Spivak 1988) and thus investigates the ability respectively possibility of the marginalised to speak for themselves. Contrary to a view not uncommon in German social science (Drekonja-Kornat 2004), she does not assert the right and the ability of the oppressed to articulate themselves, but problematizes and even negates this possibility. Having borrowed the term from Gramsci, Spivak sees the subaltern as classes not integrated into the hegemonic order but places them in the international context of a (neo-) colonial division of labour. According to Spivak postulating this possibility (as do Foucault and other intellectuals who, having recognised the power relations inherent in speaking for others have turned away from this practice) amounts to neglecting the 'problem of ideology': the subaltern, Spivak argues, are not naturally able to articulate their interests as authentic subjects, and here lies the responsibility of critical intellectuals.

The category of subalternity is employed in the sense of several dimensions of oppression based on race, class and gender: 'If ... in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.' (82f)

Spivak illustrates this claim with the example of the controversy surrounding the abolishment of the Indian ritual of widow burning by British colonial rule: The women themselves were hardly permitted a voice in this controversy, and if they were, their articulation was either appropriated by the imperialist side as evidence of the backwardness of Indian culture and the liberating role of colonial rule (if they were opposed to the practice) or (if they were not) by the patriarchal side as a commitment to the traditional role of women: 'Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears ... into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization' (102). Spivak concludes: 'The subaltern cannot speak' (104), not only because she is not given the possibility, but because she lacks the ability to articulate her interests.

The text inquires into the effects of colonial discourses on the construction of identities and practices and its answer leads to a theoretical and political positioning. Spivak's analysis is predominantly a theoretical engagement, but does integrate material practices and economic conflicts (through linking regional differences in inheritance law with the practices of widow-burning). She examines not only the multiple dimensions of oppression, but connects subalternity also to the inadequate ability to articulate one's interests in a politically effective way and thus analyses the conditions and obstacles of subaltern representation.

Hybridity

Bhabha's concept of Hybridity does not simply (as sometimes assumed) refer to a state of mixture between two cultures, but to a more complex specific result of the process of colonisation. His classic example (Bhabha 1994: 145-174) refers to the report of an India catechist of the early 19th century who was confronted with rather unexpected results of the British strategy to undermine Indian culture through distributing bibles: a large number of people had converted to Christianity, but to a quite peculiar version of it, which decidedly rejected the English claim to have brought the holy script to India and to whom the consumption of meat amounted to un-Christian, godless behaviour. The distorted imitation of the European faith undermined British rule as the denied and oppressed culture (here in the shape of vegetarianism) inscribed itself into the colonial presence (here in the shape of the bible) and transformed it. Hybridity thus denotes the productivity of colonial discourses, which can – through a subversive appropriation by the dominated – lead to a reversal of the dominant strategy of non-recognition of the Other and destabilise the colonial authority's identity.

Bhabha's analysis thus inquires into the limits and instabilities of colonial rule, into the possibilities of appropriating its discourses and into its unintended effects. Its strategy of analysis can be formulated as follows: Hybridity examines the ambivalences and incoherences of discourses and the corresponding formations of identity as well as the shifts in meaning related to different contexts and processes of appropriation of these discourses. So even when Bhabha focuses on the level of representations, he is also interested in the relation between discourses and the material practices made possible by them.

Provincialising Europe

Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000, 2002) coined the term 'provincialising Europe'. His starting point is the realisation that in history, but also in the other humanities "Europe' remains the sovereign, theoretical subject' (2000: 27), which markedly influences the perspective of these disciplines.

Beyond the critique of 'asymmetrical ignorance' (non-Western historians in academia have to be aware of the works of Western historians, but not vice versa) Chakrabarty argues: 'For generations now, philosophers and thinkers who shape the nature of social science have produced theories that embrace the entirety of humanity. As we well know, these statements have been produced in relative, and sometimes absolute, ignorance of the majority of humankind – that is, those living in non-Western cultures' (29). In spite of this perspectivity he does not wholly condemn these theories: 'The everyday paradox of Third World social science is that we find these theories, in spite of their inherent ignorance of 'us', eminently useful in understanding our societies' (ibid., emphasis in the original). Yet these supposedly universalist concepts produced exclusionary and limiting effects. Chakrabarty prime example is the uncritical adoption of the concept of the nation-state as the most desirable form of political community by anti-colonial movements. His aim is to point to the historicity and contingency of supposedly universal European concepts and to alternatives – not in the shape of entirely rejecting modernity, but in recognising its heterogeneous and often non-Western manifestations.

So Chakrabarty primarily remains in the dimension of discourse as well, but also with the strategic orientation to render possible alternative practices, which is of particular relevance in the area of the construction of states and citizenship, public and private sphere. The strategy of analysis visible here articulates an objective present in many postcolonial works: to show the Eurocentric imprint of dominant concepts on the one and the possibility of other forms of knowledge on the other hand.

All four postcolonial writers provide interesting hypotheses which are convincingly laid out with the help of concrete examples – whose empirical basis is, however, rather narrow. The systematic application of their strategies of analysis and the testing of their hypotheses seems to be a worthwhile task. In how far this task is being accomplished by postcolonial works in the field of 'development' theory and policy, will be examined in the next section.

3 Postcolonial perspectives on 'development'

'One field begins where the other refuses to look' (Sylvester 1999: 704)

It becomes obvious that there is a certain tension between development studies and postcolonial studies. Although at first glance both have a common object (the global South and North-South relations), following Mc Ewan (2009: 2) a closer look reveals significant differences in the following points:

Applicability: Knowledge in development studies as a rule has to abide by the principle of leading to/being translated into practical applications and solutions. Knowledge in postcolonial studies is often confined to the critique of representations. Both is related to different disciplinary origins (economics vs. literature).

Theoretical objective: In development studies the traditional aim is the transformation of society according to expert plans and universal concepts, while postcolonial studies question these concepts because of their (alleged) Eurocentrism (- the concept of 'development' being the classical example).

Methodological focus: Development studies are primarily concerned with measurable socio-economic change, mostly on the macro-level (economic growth, purchasing power, income distribution). Postcolonial studies are to a much higher degree concerned with questions of culture, representations and identities and with processes and experiences on the micro-level.

This (admittedly somewhat schematic) portrayal certainly does no justice to all writers from the respective fields, but is quite plausible for those who have been mentioned earlier in the text (and countless others). For Menzel the aim of a transformation of the societies of the South in terms of economic growth, industrialisation, democratisation etc. is out of question and controversy confined to how it is going to be achieved. Cultural difference or identities or the simple question what those who are to 'be developed' think about all this do not play a role here (or at best an instrumental one: intercultural trainings for 'development' experts and participatory methods could be useful). On the other hand Said is focused on the construction of the oriental Other, Spivak on the (im-) possibility of subaltern articulation, Bhabha on the productivity of colonial discourses – and not on statistical material on social and economic inequality in and between societies. Sylvester's reproach that the one party would not listen to subalterns while the other would not be interested in the material reproduction of the subaltern, does not seem entirely unjustified.

Therefore those works seem to be very interesting and promising which (explicitly or implicitly) heed Sylvester's call and take up questions of development studies from the perspective of postcolonial studies. Some of them will be examined below.² The most well known of these works are certainly those of the post-development school (see e.g. Sachs 1992, Rahnema 1997a), which have voiced fundamental criticism of the theory and practice of 'development' from (I would argue) a postcolonial perspective, but which have been widely discussed in the literature (Kiely 1998, Corbridge 1999, Nanda 1999, Nederveen Pieterse 2000, Ziai 2004, Ziai 2007a).

Shalini Randeria: Transnationalisation of law, resistance and the 'cunning state'

Shalini Randeria examines civil resistance against displacement and the loss of access to natural resources under the conditions of a 'new architecture of unaccountable global governance' (2003:

² The landmark study by Li (2007) will not be discussed here because although she points to interesting continuities between the colonial and the development era (referring to the 'will to improve' the lives of others), her central theoretical reference are the concepts of Michel Foucault and not those of postcolonial studies.

29) characterised by 'legal pluralism' (40) and 'scattered sovereignties' (29). Within the group of post-colonial states she differentiates between weak states (like Benin or Bangladesh), which are incapable of fulfilling their obligations towards their peoples because they lack the capacity to discipline non-state actors on the sub-national and supra-national level, and 'cunning states' (like India) 'which capitalize on their perceived weakness in order to render themselves unaccountable both to their citizens and to international institutions' (28). In the case of economic policy reform allegedly 'dictated by the World Bank', she argues that 'cunning states like India certainly have the capacity to decide which of the remedies prescribed in Washington for the ills of the national economy should be administered selectively to different sections of the population' (30). She also discusses the room for maneuver the Indian state undoubtedly had in putting into practice patent laws demanded by the WTO's agreement on intellectual property rights (TRIPs) and warns not to 'misrecognize cunning states as weak ones' (34).

At first glance Randeria's argument has little to do with colonial discourses and representations, but this is a misleading impression. On the one hand, she points out that in disputes surrounding displacement the Indian state resorts to a 'land acquisition policy of colonial provenance' (30) by invoking the British principle of 'eminent domain' (40) against traditional norms of community access to land and natural resources. So we are faced with colonial continuities (instrumentalised by a post-colonial state) in the area of law and related practices. On the other hand, her examples implicitly illustrate Bhabha's theses on the instabilities of colonial rule and the possibilities of subversive appropriation of the discourses in question. This is the case not only because the strategies of cunning states reveal the idea of a neo-colonial world order dominated by the North as oversimplified, but in particular because the World Bank's Inspection Panel (set up as a consequence of the protest against the Narmada dam projects) and its social and ecological standards became a positive point of reference for struggles by social movements in India. At the same time, the state is seen not only as an adversary, but also as a potential ally against neo-liberal globalisation. Further, that the doctrine of 'public trust' – originating in US law and 'regarding the state as a trustee rather than as the owner of natural resources that are seen to belong to local communities' (43) – was invoked by Indian movements and NGOs also illustrates the potential of a emancipatory appropriation of norms in the context of a transnationalisation of law. Dichotomies of 'good civil society and bad state' or 'oppressing North and oppressed South' are being overcome in this argument. So even without citing him Randeria demonstrates the productivity of Bhabha's strategy of analysis as well as the potential of a profound examination of material practices from a postcolonial perspective.

Maria Eriksson Baaz: Identities and partnership in development cooperation

Based on post-structuralist discourse theory and a number of interviews with European development aid workers in Tanzania Maria Eriksson Baaz (2005) analyses how identities are constructed in development discourse, in particular relating to the new prominent principle of partnership. Following Laclau and Mouffe, she defines 'discourse' as a structure of representations through which meaning and social practices are organized and as 'a partial, temporary closure of meaning, a reduction and exclusion of other possible meanings' (11). Identity, the second crucial concept, is seen as 'a double process in which the subject is not only 'hailed' into certain subject positions, but also 'invests in' a particular position ... Depending on the context and the discursive fields in which we position ourselves, different identities are 'activated'.' (15) The author situates her work within postcolonial theory and draws on Hall, Said and Bhabha, but takes care to distinguish it from the post-development approaches because of their all-too-simple view of the 'development industry' as a homogenous actor of Westernisation (which is a somewhat justified but in itself oversimplified criticism, see Ziai 2004).

The author's main conclusion is that 'there exists a contradiction between the message of partnership and the images of Self and partner maintained and propagated by donors and development workers. Donor and development worker identification involves a positioning of the Self as developed and superior in contrast to a backward and inferior Other' (166) The interviews provide ample evidence that 'the Africans' are not only consistently portrayed as unreliable, passive and even irrational, but (although assumptions of intellectual inferiority are superficially rejected) as 'situated at a different stage of development and enlightenment' (167). Thus Eriksson Baaz provides empirical evidence for the actuality of postcolonial hypotheses on the construction of an enlightened Western self in opposition to a backward non-Western Other. Yet she goes beyond Said's strategy of analysis and follows Bhabha in pointing to the ambivalences and contradictions of these constructions – for example by interpreting the hesitations and reversals in the interviews as efforts to avoid terminology which could be seen as Eurocentric or racist (154) and thus as indicators of conflicting discourses and subject positions. In this context the author remarks that 'some post-development writers, by placing the critics of development outside the development industry, tend to neglect the workings and influence of their own critique ... any influential and successful critique will destabilize the opposing identity... The neglect of influence and simplistic representations of development practitioners can thus be seen, partly, as reflecting a destabilized, threatened identity, which feeds a need to distance the alternative, critical Self from the mainstream Other' (169f).

In this work, little attention is paid to material practices, and it remains confined primarily to the construction of identities (and implicitly to the legitimation of such practices). Nevertheless it provides a convincing empirical application of postcolonial theory.

Ilan Kapoor: Dependency theory, postcolonial critique and development discourses

Ilan Kapoor illustrates the tension between development theory and postcolonial critique with a comparison between the dependency authors Frank and Cardoso/Faletto on the one and Said, Spivak and Bhabha on the other hand. Although he does identify differences between the respective writers, he concludes that from the perspective of postcolonialism dependency theory can be criticised for subordinating culture to political economy, perpetuating binary oppositions (metropolis-satellite, centre-periphery) and consolidating the West as the sovereign subject in contrast to a subjected and passive South. 'In equating its analysis of history with the analysis of the unequal development of global capitalism, dependency forgets that it is using (as did Marx and Lenin before it) Europe as a universal model. In this sense, it is not just capitalism, but the way capitalism develops in Europe that is 'made to stand for history' (Prakash)' (Kapoor 2008: 10). Related to this theoretical claim he accuses it of a tendency to flatten differences and ignoring non-economic relations like gender and racism (11) and of linking political agency to the frame of the nation-state (12). On the other hand he also articulates a dependency critique of postcolonial approaches, which (unsurprisingly) focuses on ignoring respectively inadequately engaging capitalism (Spivak is partly exempted from this critique), but which also points to a problem in method: 'the emphasis on local discourses and action tends to result in the neglect of broader influences and impacts' (17). Kapoor does touch a central issue here. The question is: is the rejection of 'totalising' theoretical bodies the price for the emphasis on difference – and vice versa: is the homogenisation of differences the price to be paid for 'global social theory'? Regarding his strategy of analysis it can be observed that in his critique of dependency theory he employs an argument that has been described with the term of 'provincialising Europe'.

Kapoor also deals with various discourses of 'development' from a postcolonial perspective and traces their alleged neglect of culture. He criticises the 'basic needs' approach for artificially separating physical necessities from needs and rights in the fields of the cultural, the social and the political, which are implicitly constructed as less important (23). Contrary to the entire anthropological research, the approach would regard the latter as a luxury which the poor could not afford. Quoting Paul Streeten, a well-known proponent of basic needs, Kapoor shows the paternalist and technocratic bias of the approach as well as the 'ideological' legitimisation of inequality by concentrating on absolute poverty and neglecting the relational element and the macro-structures (24). Yet if Kapoor goes on to criticise the discourse of structural adjustment (almost exclusively based on secondary literature) because of its teleology and its focus on growth (which are both not specific to it, but elements of a general discourse of 'development', one should add) as Eurocentric (26), then the previous reproach of ideology seems somewhat incoherent. Because if the universalisation of economic categories appears problematic – especially the post-development approaches have attacked the assumption of universal and infinite material needs (originating in economics) as the silent foundation of the 'development project, see Esteva 1993, 1995, Latouche 1993 – then we have to ask whether material inequality does not equally appear problematic merely on the basis of the assumption of universal material needs regardless of cultural difference. The challenge is how to transcend this basis without resorting to a culturalist legitimisation of inequality. A workable solution seems a constructivist conception of culture (which sees culture not as static, but as the dynamic result of values, norms and practices) pointing to the fact that in every alleged culture there is at best a limited consensus on basic and other needs. The dilemma's solution would then be the rather vague objective of increased self-determination on the basis of a clarifying deliberation on priorities within the group concerned.

Regarding the discourse of good governance, Kapoor remarks, the adjective conveyed 'a moralistic tone, implying not simply that developing countries have 'bad' governance, but also that the West is the model for 'good' governance and Western donors are the arbitrators of what is 'good' and 'bad'' (30). He highlights the aspect of domination of the concept by pointing out that in Europe and North

American corruption scandals are not explained by reference to a certain culture. His strategy of analysis shows the construction of a backward (corrupt, patrimonial and pre-democratic) Other.

In the debate on human rights in development discourse Kapoor distances himself equally from a universalism of natural rights and from a cultural relativism. Drawing on Spivak, he also criticises the non-essentialist position of Nussbaum as reproducing elements of modernisation theory by associating non-Western cultures again with patriarchy and fundamentalism. Here, too, he employs a strategy of analysis similar to that of Said. Unfortunately there is not enough space to cover Kapoor's further essays (on Bhabha's postcolonial politics or on the relevance of the Habermas-Mouffe-debate for the Third World). But his method of primarily engaging texts and concepts and at best indirectly material practices is a constant.

Timothy Mitchell: Egypt as the object of development discourse

Mitchell's study on the construction of Egypt within development discourse (1995, 2002) contrasts at first representations of the country by the World Bank with empirical facts and statistics, concluding that they are dominated by a technocratic and depoliticising perspective excluding conflicts and relations of powers – the parallels to Ferguson's *Anti-Politics-Machine* (1994) are obvious. Mitchell shows that the common representation of Egypt's central 'development problem' – the fertile Nile valley in the midst of the desert cannot feed the rapidly growing population – is incompatible with the facts: population density is far below that of Belgium or South Korea (not to mention resource use), agricultural productivity has continuously been growing faster than the population, and the deteriorating food situation (more and more food imports, increasing undernutrition) is explained by Mitchell through a shift of demand towards grain: rising social inequality and tourism have shifted 'effective demand' towards the consumption of meat, supported by a policy of state subsidies: 'the growing disparity in income between rich and poor enabled the better off to divert the country's resources from the production of staples to the production of luxury items' (2002: 217). On a closer look, the alleged scarcity of land also turns out to be a problem of soil distribution and concentration, and the technocratic and management-oriented attempts to solve the problem of the 'natural' limits of geography and demography' (222) do not touch the real problem of social inequality. Mitchell calculates that the World Bank suggestions to copy South Korea's model of export-oriented growth imply a forty-fold increase in non-oil exports, but there is 'no evidence that Europe's demand for airlifted shipments of Egyptian cut flowers and winter tomatoes might grow by even a fraction of this amount' (232). However, this suggestion indicates that the World Bank is still constructing nation-states as discrete functional units, allowing for the transfer of economic strategies 'without regard of their different position in larger economic and historical networks' (231).

On top of that, Mitchell argues, development discourse constructs its object as a reality separated from development organisations. Even if USAID 'operated, more or less successfully, as a form of state support to the American corporate sector, while working in Egypt to dismantle state supports' (240), the organisation presented itself as an actor guided by reason external to the country's configuration of power. This was a structural characteristic of development discourse, in which the West provides the expert knowledge lacking in the non-West but apart from that entirely overlooks its own role regarding questions of power and inequality on local, national or global scale.

In how far can we speak of a postcolonial analysis here? On the one hand Mitchell argues that the construction of the non-Western Other is heavily influenced by the needs and interests of Western actors (and less by Egypt's reality) – which provides empirical evidence for Said's argument. On the other hand he emphasises the analytical constraints resulting from the generalisation of the Westphalian model of state – which matches Chakrabarty's hypothesis. So again it could be argued that even without any explicit reference to the said authors we find an empirical application of postcolonial strategies of analysis and hypotheses.

Cheryl McEwan: Postcolonialism and development

Appearing more than a decade after the important post-development publications, Cheryl McEwan's course book on postcolonialism and development (2009) is a milestone in the establishment and promotion of postcolonial perspectives on the topic. For her, the general aim of postcolonial theory is to show the situatedness of Eurocentric universal knowledge (34). She identifies the following central strategies of postcolonial critique: destabilising discourses of imperial Europe, questioning the concepts related to them, especially the metaphors of space and time, and the attempt of an alternative knowledge production based on the voices of the oppressed (25f). The analytical tasks of 'provincialising Europe' and 'subaltern articulation' are quite obvious. Her critique of development discourse is the usual one – Eurocentric and power-stricken representation of the South from the perspective of the North – and corresponds to the analytical strategy of 'othering'. At the same time she sees as an element of a postcolonial approach that 'development' is 'not simply a European and American invention because it is also shaped by agency and resistance in the South' (30) – an argument already employed by Cooper (1997) and others to relativise the post-development critique. What is visible in her argument is the attempt to overcome dichotomies and the recognition of ambivalences and potentials for appropriation, reminding us of Bhabha's strategy of Hybridity. So all four analytical strategies can be found in her work. For McEwan, the main difference between a postcolonial critique of 'development' and post-development is the insight of the former 'that it is impossible to stand outside of dominant discourses such as development and instead there is a need to change the discourses from within' (106).

On numerous occasions McEwan deals with material practices and institutions of development policy. However, the manner in which she does so is not always entirely precise and convincing. In part, there are some inaccuracies in her engagement: the WTO is not (as claimed) part of the Bretton-Woods-Institutions (129), the MDGs have not been invented by the World Bank (168) the 'battle of Seattle' did not take place in 2000 but one year earlier (196), the World Social Forum does not always come together in Porto Alegre (ibid.) and the Human Development Index measures purchasing power (not income), school education and life expectancy, but not human liberty (91). On the other hand her argument gives rise to questions: If the 'anti-globalisation protests' are identified with the postcolonial critique of 'development' (196), both are treated rather superficially, especially in the (incorrect, see Ziai 2006) equation of neo-liberalism and 'development'. If World Bank, IMF and WTO are described as the 'trustees of the modern age' which control the distribution of resources in the South (81), the central role of national elites who after decolonisation took over the mandate of trusteeship and often have been much more involved in the use of force in the name of 'development' (to which McEwan alerts us as well, 193), is neglected. If it is suggested that development institutions do not care about how the poor themselves see poverty (92), it is not quite sincere not to mention the interviews that World Bank researchers conducted with 60.000 'poor' on just this topic.³ And even if – as is not uncommon in postcolonial critiques of 'development' – locating people in the South as being on a lower 'level of development' is criticised as cultural racism (141), would it not (in the face of widespread similar views among those concerned) be more adequate to differentiate as Ferguson does (2006: 176-193) between economic and cultural location and to demand which of the two is being referred to? The appropriation of the discourse of 'development' in the south was not always based on a conception of cultural inferiority in the pursuit of economic and technological catching-up. (In how far the focus does nevertheless imply such a conception, as no doubt some post-development proponents would argue, is another question.)

³ See

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0,,contentMDK:20613045~isCURL:Y~menuPK:336998~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:336992,00.html>

Teivo Teivainen: The IMF as producer of knowledge and neo-colonial instrument

In his analysis of the IMF Teivo Teivainen proposes three hypotheses: One, he shows that the contradiction between the undemocratic decision-making procedure of the IMF (voting rights are distributed according to capital shares) and the democratic identity of the countries (or rather, the states and governments) controlling the procedure is legitimated by two elements. The first is the 'doctrine of economic neutrality', presenting the IMF as a non-political adviser in economic questions, the second the 'assumption of the nation-state as the largest legitimate political society, according to which the realm of international relations does not constitute any political or public sphere in which democratic claims can be made' (ebd.). This is a lucid observation, although it hardly goes beyond what has been shown by Ferguson (1995), Doty (1996) or Walker (1993) (who is even quoted here). Two, the author describes the IMF in his context as a 'modern priest' and 'teacher of metaphysics', which denotes '(Re-) Produzenten von Wahrheitsansprüchen, die auf Strategien der Universalisierung und Neutralisierung aufbauen' (108).⁴ Three, in a comparison between the situation of Latin American debtor states in the 1920s and 30s and the 1980s and 90s he claims that the governments had had no room for maneuver in the latter case and through the conditionalities of the structural adjustment programs had been in a relation of 'political servitude' (132) to the IMF, in the context of a global governance system with authoritarian elements exceeding democratic control within the nation-state (129). In other words: the IMF is presented as a neo-colonial instrument of disciplining the South.

This hypothesis is certainly not completely absurd, but would be more convincing on the basis of a more profound engagement with the actual attempts to circumvent or reject the conditionalities of structural adjustment. Such an engagement can be found in George (1988) on the one hand, who portrays the draconic measures used by the North to threaten unwilling debtor states, but on the other hand in Mosley et al. (1991), who have thoroughly examined the implementation of structural adjustment programs and surprisingly concluded that many governments got away with ignoring the conditionalities by the World Bank without dire consequences.⁵ Material practices are thus included only partially in Teivainen's analysis: the reform of structural adjustment and its formal (!) subordination to the principles of poverty reduction, 'ownership' and participation is not mentioned, just like the changed role of the IMF in the international debt regime. Its influence has significantly decreased after many debtor states particularly in Latin America have paid back their loans, and in the debate about state insolvency procedures the IMF was definitely not the obstacle for moderately progressive change in the international political economy. However, the IMF-model of a Sovereign Debt Restructuring Mechanism (SDRM) in important aspects did not match the NGO demands for a fair and transparent arbitration procedure (FTAP), but a rule-based system of insolvency would be a marked improvement compared to the status quo in which the creditors in the London and Paris Clubs decide completely arbitrarily. The SDRM-proposal of the IMF finally was defeated through a veto of the USA, but also of the Latin American newly industrialising countries, because they were fearing the reaction of the financial markets in the shape of higher interest rates (spread) as a result of such a procedure – which actually would have been in their interest.⁶ This illustrates that the international political economy is definitely characterised by asymmetric relations of power, but these cannot be simply reduced to the 'servitude' of debtor states towards the IMF.

⁴ George/Sabelli (1994) manage to deliver a more convincing argument concerning the religious component of neo-liberalism.

⁵ This is explained through the 'pressure to lend' in the World Bank.

⁶ Sources for this piece of information are interviews conducted in the course of my habilitation (professoral thesis) (Ziai 2007b).

Teivainens criticism of the IMF is based on the evidence of relations of domination between North and South reminiscent of colonialism, and the deconstruction⁷ of the attempts to legitimate them. It could be linked to postcolonial theory and the aforementioned analytical strategies by emphasising the identification of the constraining consequences of a westphalian conception of political community which converges with Chakrabarty's argument.

⁷ The term is used here not in the sense of Derrida, but merely to denote an examination of theoretical and political foundations and assumptions of a concept.

Joel Wainwright: Colonial patterns, development policy and 'counter-mapping' in Belize

Starting from the postcolonial insight, that colonial rule is dependent on the production of certain kinds of knowledge, Wainwright initially examines the discourse which allowed for the displacement and attempts to settle the Maya in Central America, in Belize. He manages to show that the central element of this discourse - namely that the agricultural system of the Maya (slash and burn cultivation) is primitive, inefficient and destructive and therefore needs to be fundamentally changed in order to achieve sustainable development despite population growth - can still be found nearly untransformed in the later discourse of 'development' as the legitimation for trusteeship-type interventions to settle the indigenous people and introduce new agricultural practices. In an analogy to Orientalism he identifies the assumptions of 'Mayanism' which provides knowledge about this group, their essence and how to treat them. But he does not stop at the analytical strategy of 'othering', Wainwright also delves into the ambivalences of colonial discourse, which manifest primarily in the metamorphosis of the most influential and well-known development expert of colonial rule towards a proponent of indigenous rights after decolonisation - yet who still remains true to Mayanism. The (not very participatory) development projects targeting the Maya in the Toledo district since 1978 were, according to Wainwright, aiming for the privatisation of communal land, a more capital-intensive agriculture and a closer identification of the Maya with the nation-state - and leading to over-indebtedness of many farmers, which gave rise to a large protest movement. This movement achieved debt relief and even a redistribution of land, but the latter was concerned with privatised allotments given to the male 'heads of family'.

Wainwright's study manages to integrate political economic and discourse analytical methods in its analysis of domination in the dimensions of race, class and gender, but its engagement with the practices of counter-mapping originating in anti-colonial geography is even more gripping. The term refers to a 'cartography from below', and in the case of Belize the Maya communities have, in the wake of their protest, produced an atlas in which they portray their land, their way of life and their world view - in order to oppose the hegemonic perspective which disavows their culture and their territorial claims. However, Wainwright (who was complicit in the project) does not read this atlas as an authentic statement on Maya culture, but as an attempt to construct it, and, borrowing from Spivak, asks the question: 'Can the subaltern map?' (260) He shows how by no means 'authentic indigenous' discursive elements can be found in it, like nationalism, sustainable development, international law and feminized nature, and how the conceptions of the 'cultural ecology' geographers assisting the project have influenced it, and how the self-representation of the Maya blanks out ambivalences in favour of a romanticised picture stamped by Mayanism, where e.g. rice, wage labour, chain saws and Christianity and other external influences simply do not appear (253). 'The meaning of what constitutes "Maya" space in the Atlas is produced through a set of exclusions' (257), and the most visible of these concerns gender relations, especially the focus on male activities, the reproduction of traditional roles and the neglect of widespread marital violence. And in the end also the maps in the Maya atlas are based on the templates of colonial cartographers on the nation-state territory of Belize, formerly British Honduras.

Wainwright concludes that there are no simple solutions and no 'outside' beyond discourses of domination and demands a 'decolonisation' of 'development', to release it from the themes 'inherited from Western colonialism ... capitalism, settling, and trusteeship' (286) This positive reference to 'real development' (284) in the sense of an improvement of living standards appears as an essentialist spot on an otherwise flawless empirically grounded postcolonial analysis of material practices and discourses linked to them.

4 Conclusion:

In this – I repeat: far from exhaustive – overview the heterogeneity of postcolonial approaches becomes obvious. Some authors like Eriksson Baaz remain on the level of discourse, others like Mitchell include material practices in their analysis, some draw explicitly on postcolonial theory (Wainwright, Kapoor), others have merely implicit references (Randeria, Teivainen). Regarding the two questions posed in the introduction to this article we can conclude the following: 1. The four analytical strategies identified – orientalism and othering; subalternity and representation/articulation; hybridity; provincialising Europe – seem to be able to capture this heterogeneity and provide orientation within it. 2. The criticism that postcolonial studies would neglect material practices cannot be sustained if we look at postcolonial perspectives on ‘development’. It can be observed that material practices of development policy are in many cases part or focus of the research topic. Yet it has also become obvious that the engagement with these practices is often inaccurate, superficial or incomplete. This holds true especially for the macro-level and its institutions – Randeria has to be mentioned as a positive exception. All in all, the postcolonial strategies of analysis prove to be promising and productive, but their systematic application in the area of development has only just started.

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Published by:
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