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Uprooting Development

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Abstract:

Despite abounding evidence that international development as a model and concept is failing, it continues to dominate discourses of poverty alleviation and emancipation. This essay examines the theoretical origins and structural mechanisms of development and uncovers its epistemological roots in order to understand how development ideology persists and how it exacerbates the problems it claims to solve. What this examination reveals is that the entire 'developer' and modernizing mentality must be completely reformulated anew into a worldview that not only accepts, but embraces a destiny without the certainty of universal truths.

Most social thinkers and policy makers in the Euro-American world have come to accept the idea that civilizations are to be placed on a linear scale and that the 'developed' world is already living the future of the 'developing' world (Lal, 2002). In the aftermath of World War II, the United States and its Western allies modelled a plan, often reprised and recycled since, to alleviate global poverty and social injustice by 'developing' pre-industrial societies and incorporating them into a world-system of trading nation-states composed of core countries which dictate the terms imposed on peripheral ones (Wallerstein, 2004; Escobar, 2004; Parpart & Veltmeyer, 2004; Johnston, Gismondi & Goodman, 2006). The implementation of this development plan has sporadically achieved successes, but overall its effectiveness has been a failure. Development is failing; or at least, the conception of it originating from European Enlightenment and modernity is failing in its purpose. This is made obvious by the incapacity to fulfil the latest centrepiece of development policy: the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (Lewis, 2005). Indeed, according to the 2007 UN Human Development Report (25), eighty percent of the world population lives in countries where income disparity is increasing, and only twenty percent of the world's richest individuals account for three quarters of world income. The very notion of 'development' is a failed promise; unrealisable because it functions within a modernist epistemology (Escobar, 1992, 2004; Lal, 2002), and because of its inherent contradictions as a social apparatus for the normalization of capitalist economies that neither reduce nor eliminate poverty and oppression. Yet, despite the continual failure to engender a just and equitable world through development, this strategy continues to be perceived generally in its source societies as the only way forward. Development, seen as the purveyor of freedom and wealth, continues to act as a vector for capitalism and the episteme of modernity, and threatens to further exacerbate current social and ecological crises. To understand this, the theoretical origins and structural mechanisms of the development model must be examined and its epistemological roots uncovered. With a clear understanding of the inherent problems within the assumed truth and certainty in the development discourse, solutions that transcend it can begin to be glimpsed.

Modernizing and capitalising

The impetus for mainstream international development efforts can be found within modernization theory, a theoretical framework largely inspired by the works of modernist thinkers of Enlightenment lineage epitomized in the West by Parsons' *The Social System* (1991). Parsons' system categorizes the world into either pre-modern or modern societies; the former being said to have traditions that are circular and repetitive and where breakthroughs, progress and development are not possible (Parsons, 1991; Isbister, 2006). The pre-modern societies that constitute the 'Third World' are perceived as economically and morally stagnant because of their lack of commitment to science, technology, capitalism and liberal democracy (Isbister, 2006). Modernization theorists focus on deficiencies in these societies and speculate about ways to repair them through intervention and to allow modernization. Currently, neoliberal policies and the celebration of free enterprise are the most popular means of attaining such results.

While neoliberal market fundamentalism constitutes the most aggressive form of capitalism, no matter the form, capitalism will inherently cause poverty and oppression. Capitalism cannot function without an unequal accumulation of wealth and power, and therefore exploitation (Marx, 1967; 1995; 2002). Capitalism engenders an alienation of labour from the means of production (capital) – material, financial and human – through the enclosing of common resources as private property under managerial control of the owners. This leads to the distinction of two social classes: workers who do not own means of production and must enter into wage contracts with capitalists, and the capitalists who own means of production and hire workers for wages. Capitalists then, in competition with each other, vie to increase surplus expropriation (profits) through unpaid labour and outgrow one another through concentrated accumulation (ibid). Thus, in capitalism, an economic minority dominates and exploits the working class majority. While this system does constitute a powerful engine for economic growth and technical innovation, it also generates devastating human and natural exploitation

worldwide (ibid; Kovel, 2002; Johnston, Gismondi & Goodman, 2006).

Marx (2002; 1894) anticipated that the increasing exclusivity of wealth by a narrowing concentration of power and the decreased investment in human capital (workers) versus material capital (machinery) – thus leading to both increasing unemployment and declining rates of surplus – would lead to the collapse of capitalism. However, he did not foresee that the benefits of increased production and capital growth would be extended to the majority in populations of advanced capitalist societies (Isbister, 2006) and that the rates of surplus production would in fact continue to rise (Baran & Sweezy, 1968). Indeed in a context where competitive capitalism has been replaced by an advanced form of capitalism and where oligopolistic situations are prevalent, price competition becomes taboo thus increasing the impetus to lower production costs in relation to non-declining prices and therefore causing surplus production rates to rise and the need for investment to perpetually grow (ibid). Moreover, flagrant exploitation has been displaced, via a transnational economy, to other locations where it is distant (in terms of geography and affinity) from the majority of those benefiting from capitalism, and where it is also relatively tolerated due to desperation in face of immediate worse conditions threatening survival (Kovel, 2002).

At great cost to human life and well-being, capitalism has managed (thus far) to manoeuvre around the contradiction of class antagonism which Marx thought would lead to its downfall. Regardless, more recent analysts of capitalism observing the rapid degradation of Earth's natural resources have identified yet another contradiction within the capitalist system – one which it is not likely to outmanoeuvre. This second contradiction is quite simple: within a global capitalist system, which is the natural evolution of capitalism, the accumulation of surplus cannot be sustained at its present rate (much less a growing one) without self-destructive resource degradation and depletion (O'Connor, 1998; Kovel, 2002; Johnston, Gismondi & Goodman, 2006).

Indeed, anti-ecological tendencies are inherent to capitalism because it tends to degrade the conditions of its own production and because it must expand without end in order to exist (Kovel,

2002; Robbins 2005). It is also inherently exploitative because the goal of production under capitalism is not use, but profit, and therefore prices must be kept as high as possible, and costs as low as possible (Marx, 1995; Baran & Sweezy, 1968). Although many liberal economists would argue that a competitive equilibrium is found at the intersection of supply and demand, their abstract model of a market economy does not account for social complexities that give reason for varying conditions among different geographies or demographics at different times, thus rendering them unrepresentative of contextual social dynamics (Stiglitz, 2002). Nor do most liberal economists account for the inherent drive in capitalism to outperform through the externalization of all costs that are not directly associated with production – thus exploiting both human and natural resources (Marx 1967, 2002; Kovel, 2002; Robbins, 2005). Capitalism has proved resilient to the first contradiction, but it cannot overcome the second which is embedded within its very means of sustenance – perpetual growth (O'Connor, 1998; Kovel, 2002; Johnston, Gismondi & Goodman, 2006; Robbins, 2005).

Of course, continued increase in production means continued increase in resource consumption. Many societies have been able to manage this system to a certain extent and reintegrate consumed matter into the system via recycling strategies, but the rapid rate of consumption and immense transformation and degradation of resources make it impossible to sustain the system without significant ecological erosion, which has a destructive effect on human life (Kovel, 2002). Wackernagel and Rees (1996) paint an alarming picture of ecological exhaustion by exposing the interconnections between ecosystems and human societies; and recent reports on climate change warn of irreversible catastrophic damage to ecosystems if global emissions of green house gases do not peak by 2015 to 2020 (Allison, N. L. Bindoff, R.A. Bindoff, Bindschadler, Cox, de Noblet, England, Francis, Gruber, Haywood, Karoly, Kaser, Le Quéré, Lenton, Mann, McNeil, Pitman, Rahmstorf, Rignot, Schellnhuber, Schneider, Sherwood, Somerville, Steffen, Steig, Visbeck & Weaver, 2009).

Imperialist and interventionist mechanisms

The interventionist approach to development has been severely criticized by post-development theorists such as Escobar (1992, 2004) and Crush (1995) who compare the process to the 'Orientalism' of Edward Said – where images of the 'East' are shaped as deprecatory in Western culture. As they explain, development creates a 'Third World' made to be perceived as underdeveloped, and to be treated as such – including by those within it. International development operates as a complex social apparatus that ties knowledge about the Third World to development forms of power and intervention; it is a complex mechanism that produces the Third World and then manages it (Escobar, 1992). Such a development model generates a language of 'crisis' – for which the causes are mostly endogenous – and creates a logical need for external intervention and management (Crush, 1995). They argue that development follows in the legacy of colonialism and dominates through its “desire to define, categorize and bring order to a heterogeneous and constantly multiplying field of meaning” (Crush, 1995: 2). The discourse of development, its arguments and authority, are constructed as self-evident and the

primary purpose of [development] is to convince, to persuade, that this (and not that) is the way the world actually is and ought to be amended. But ideas about development do not arise in a social, institutional or literary vacuum. They are rather assembled within a vast hierarchical apparatus of knowledge production and consumption sometimes known, with metaphorical precision, as the 'development industry' (Crush, 1995: 5).

Indeed development has become an industry and a job market necessitating trained disciplines and where foreign experts and projects invade countries and colonize their reality by operating under the authority of modernity (Escobar, 1992). Escobar (2004) even associates the development industry to

an imperial drive for domination where the new empire does not operate so much through conquest, but through the imposition of norms such as free markets, liberal democracy and a culture of consumption.

The association is not far fetched when considering that development exists alongside a capitalist system that needs ever-increasing opportunities for surplus investment in order to avoid a recession and also needs to secure control over sources of cheap human and natural resources for exploitation (Baran & Sweezy, 1968). Hardt and Negri (2000) also explain the imperial drive and hegemony of capitalist interest through the parallel evolution of transnational governance bodies such as the UN and the WTO alongside transnational industrial and financial capitalist institutions. This then engenders a process within which nation-states relinquish their sovereignty to a dominant normative discourse which responds to the interventionist needs of capitalism in the name of development and universal peace, and thus gives form to an amorphous transnational Empire of capitalism.

However, Crush (1995) warns against a “master-narrative in which development is a mere instrument of Western domination, drained of ambiguity, complexity and contestation” (11). Crush agrees that development discourse is “rooted in the rise of the West, in the history of capitalism, in modernity, and the globalization of Western state institutions, disciplines, cultures and mechanisms of exploitation” (10), but argues that postcolonial critique tends to homogenize power as a unitary operation in a single direction. Development, says Crush, is “far more diffuse, fragmented and reciprocal” (8). Development is not immune to resistance or to reformulation in face of a challenge and should be seen as “reflecting the responses, reactions and resistance of the people who are its object” (8).

Morgan Brigg (2002) makes a clearer distinction between colonialism and development, and illustrates a more thorough understanding of the operation of power through development by remaining more faithful to Foucault's model of a normalizing *dispositif*, or apparatus, than others who according to him rely inaccurately on Foucault's theory. Brigg first recalls Foucault's distinction between sovereign power and biopower. The former operates through suppression and appropriation, such as

under the rule of a monarch or dictator. Biopower, on the other hand is “power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit or destroying them” (Foucault, 1981: 136). Brigg calls to attention the lack of distinction between these two types of power in most critiques of development and the problematic notion that power operates through a singular intentional historical force such as 'the West,' or the USA. He argues that “[b]oth the rhetorical efficacy and accuracy of these claims is severely undermined because development operates through the mobilisation of interests and aspirations of Third World subjects and nation-states, in contrast to the deductive modality of colonial power” (Brigg, 2002: 424). He explains that during decolonisation, a shift occurred in the operation of power from force to mobilisation – including self-mobilisation – of human subjects and nation-states through the notion of development. However, he also notes that sovereign power and biopower are not mutually exclusive. Brigg offers Foucault's observations on the operation of power in modernity through two interwoven aspects: 1) “a series of techniques emerged to discipline bodies in ways which make them more productive”; and 2) the production of “regimes of truth” – “individual identities and systems determining what can count as true or false”; thus fixing power relations in such a way “that they are perpetually asymmetrical” (Foucault in Brigg, 2002: 425).

To describe how development operates in the manner of a *dispositif* through the use of biopower, Brigg (2002) explains that a *dispositif* is both a heterogeneous ensemble of discursive and material elements and the system of relations established between those elements. “Although elements do not have tight interdependent relations, and while the *dispositif* may generate contradictory effects, it also achieves an overall or dominant strategic function” (427). This, claims Briggs (2002), does not aggregate the operation of power or allow the default position that development is 'bad' and “allows recognition of both the good intentions of agents and a wide range of both positive and negative outcomes generated through development, while still providing a basis to understand an operation of power which has the effect of governing the Third World” (427). The overall governing effects that

occur through a *dispositif* can then be understood as a mechanism of normalization. A single social field is established within which a norm is also established; in this case the norm is

represented by those orientations and practices geared towards producing the sort of material wealth embodied in the USA. The norm is in turn necessary as a standard against which social action can be evaluated and regulated. At the same time the delineated social field must be sufficiently inclusive to obviate the accusation of oppression, to assemble enough subjects for a 'useful' operation of power, and to allow subjects 'freedom' in relation to the norm such that they take responsibility for regulation of their own actions (ibid: 429).

This establishment of an inclusive single international social field and the norm of development were fabricated primarily through the Washington Consensus, a political and economic plan devised in the aftermath of World War Two, and the organizations it gave birth to: the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). They have established a social field and norm that “constitute the field of differentiation and basis for a massive operation of power in which entities [...] are acted upon and act upon themselves in relation to the norm of development” (ibid: 429) In this field, systems of hierarchical observation like the Gross Domestic Product and a normalizing judgement come together to examine and differentiate individuals and societies, and establish a 'truth' about reality (Brigg, 2002).

While Brigg's analysis is essential to consider as it does offer a more detailed and thorough examination of the mechanisms of development, it does not rule out Escobar's (2004) concerns of “a single globalisation process emanating out of a few dominant centres” (211) as part of an imperial project. As Brigg (2002) says himself, while his analysis reveals contradictions and complexities in development mechanisms, it nonetheless also reveals a dominant strategic function – one which is perfectly in line with the imperialist and crusading natures of capitalism and modernity. Furthermore, there is substantial historical evidence (Zinn, 2008) that the influence of powerful individuals has a

particular role to play in establishing an international social field and the norms within it.

Those norms, as was mentioned, are set along notions of what is considered developed and modern according to modernization theory. Yet, of course, modernization theory has not come unchallenged over the course of its prevalent role in the history of development. Its most hefty challenge, for example, has been formulated within what is termed dependency theory. Dependency theorists such as Andre Gúnder Frank (2000), Raúl Prebisch (1971) and Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) have pointed to the inadequacies of international development and its role as a process of underdevelopment rather than development. Indeed, they claim that underdevelopment is not a state or a failure to develop, it is an active process of impoverishment whereby 'developed' countries 'underdevelop' Third World countries by including them in a global system of economic relations in which they become dependent and subservient to the economic and political wishes of dominant countries (Isbister, 2006). John Isbister (*ibid*) summarises the arguments of dependency theory thus: it refutes the notion that poor countries are in a primitive and unchanged state; for better or worse

they have been changed by centuries of contact with the world's rich countries. For the most part, say the dependency theorists, they have been changed for the worse. The poverty of the third world is not traditional, and it is not accidental. It is the necessary companion to the richness of the developed countries. As a condition of its own development, the industrial world requires cheap raw materials from the third world. The expansion of the industrial world therefore shaped the structure of the emergent third world, deforming it, impoverishing it, and rendering it incapable of balanced development (*ibid*: 43)

Third World countries are not traditional, they have been altered by the societies of European origin since colonialism and the slave trade, and exploitative processes continue to occur in today's international economy. Large multinationals with their centre of power in developed countries control operations in multiple Third World countries where they have significant influence over domestic policies. Governments in developed countries and international agencies influenced by them – such as

the IMF and the World Trade Organization – also affect underdevelopment in the Third World by imposing trade regulations, structural adjustment programs and conditions for development and industrialization through aid, loan and trade policies (Robbins, 2005; Isbister, 2006). As a result, a hierarchy of power centres is created within a global economic and political system in which Third World countries are subjugated to North-America and Western Europe (Frank, 2000, Wallerstein, 2004) and where the relations of exchange in the international economy are unequal (Prebisch, 1971).

Needing to simplify problems in order to build a convincing case for their intervention strategies, development projects also construe their role as apolitical (Ferguson, 1998) within this 'taken for granted' geo-political platform. Most development projects – originating from core 'developed' countries – restrain themselves from affecting any radical restructuring of power distribution (unless, of course, that restructuring is modelled on a normalized modernization schema) and do not substantively tackle issues of suffering due to the mechanisms of social structures. Without addressing structural violence by challenging political and economic organizational structures, a substantial reduction of poverty and oppression is simply not possible (Farmer, 2003). Paul Farmer (ibid), in his anthropological case studies of structural violence in Haiti examines how certain populations are vulnerable to poverty and AIDS because of their low status along axes of oppression. Examples of such axes are that of gender, race, class and sexual preference – all of which are maintained by social structures that must be dismantled if the axes of oppression and their effects are to be removed. I must make note here that I am not advocating the toppling of states and institutions through direct and forceful foreign interventionism, but rather pointing to the fact that development as foreign interventionism in the way it is currently construed in 'developed' countries, does not alleviate poverty and oppression where structural violence is present and may in many cases be responsible for its perpetuation.

Beyond certainty, beyond development

Propositions to overcome the shortcomings of development as a modernization process are varied even within the encompassing label of dependency theory. Escobar (in Crush, 1995) however, is sceptical of dependency theorists who, he argues, still function in the same discursive space as those they criticize and do not envision beyond development or modernity. Indeed, quests for alternative development models are misplaced and the argument for autonomous development is nonsensical in a critique of development as a Eurocentric power structure since development, a concept of modernity, cannot be anything else because modernity itself is Eurocentric (Crush, 1995). There is therefore a need for a new conception of social amelioration, one which seeks to radically alter systems of oppression within social structures by redefining how the world and individuals in it are perceived. Post-development discourse is optimistic in finding alternatives *to* development and suggests that counter-modernism can serve as a basis for thinking beyond development (Crush, 1995). Escobar (1992, 2004) for example, as well Esteva and Prakash (1998), see New Social Movements (NSM) as the medium through which a grassroots alternative will be articulated. Whether social movements that fall under the term NSMs really are new is debatable, but regardless their discourses are by definition polyvalent, local, dispersed and fragmented. As Crush (1995) explains, the hope in NSMs is that they strive for “analyses based not on structures but on social actors; the promotion of democratic, egalitarian and participatory styles of politics; and the search not for grand structural transformations but rather for the construction of identities and greater autonomy through modifications in everyday practices and beliefs” (21). Mohanty (2003), Spivak (1999), Lyotard (1984) and others believe that the recovery of silenced voices and subjugated knowledge will undermine the power of development. Josée Johnston, Michael Gismondi and James Goodman (2006) look to the formation of multi-scale movements that can manage the eco-social commons of communities within a “commons worldview [that] prioritizes local participation, strives to protect our ecological support systems, takes a long-term

multi-generational perspective, and recognizes the connections that link distant communities” (14).

All stress the importance of local struggles as an essential component to countering the hegemony of development and modernity, and to foster a new worldview where all worlds fit. As Bauman explains, truth “is a social relation (like power, ownership or freedom): an aspect of a hierarchy built of superiority-inferiority units; more precisely, an aspect of the hegemonic form of domination or of bid for domination-through-hegemony” (Bauman 1993:11). Modernity has been such a form and bid in which a rational order is installed in order to achieve the triumph of a universal truth; and where political order and true knowledge have blended “into a design for *certainty*” indistinguishable from “the crusading spirit and the project of domination” (ibid). Modernity thought itself to be an entity destined to replace all other entities and achieve universalization through the abolishment of differentiation. “This was,” according to Bauman, “modernity's self-deception” (ibid). And it was this very self-deception – the pursuit of universality – that spawned ever more difference, resulted in ever more ambivalence and produced an awareness of contingency. However, proclaims Bauman, “we can transfer contingency from the vocabulary of dashed hopes into that of opportunity, from the language of domination into that of emancipation” (Bauman 1993:12). The emancipation made possible through the recognition of what Bauman calls “contingency as destiny”

entails the *acceptance* that there are other places and other times that may be with equal justification (or equal absence of good reason) preferred by members of other societies [...] The preference of one's own, communally shared form of life must therefore be immune to the temptation of cultural crusade. Emancipation means such acceptance of one's own contingency as is grounded in recognition of contingency as the sufficient reason to live and be allowed to live [...] Like truth, emancipation is not a quality of objects, but of the *relation* between them. The relation opened up by the act of emancipation is marked by the end of fear and the beginning of *tolerance* (Bauman 1993:13).

However, warns Bauman (1993), to achieve emancipation, it does not suffice to endure others, to

ignore them or to avoid humiliating them. We must also respect all others – their otherness, their preferences and their right to make preferences – and we must remember that “it is being different that makes us resemble each other and that I cannot respect my own difference but by respecting the difference of the other” (Bauman 1993:14). Moreover, we are linked with strangers through responsibility, not just indifferent neutrality or simple acceptance of similar conditions. We are linked through a “commonality of destiny, not mere resemblance of fate,” says Bauman, “[s]hared fate would do with mutual *tolerance*; joint destiny requires *solidarity*” (ibid). Through such a relation, responsibility for others becomes synonymous with responsibility for one's self.

But does this discourse not constitute itself a meta-discourse dependant on the rational consensus between the sender and addressee of a statement with truth-value in regards to emancipation and destiny? Habermas (1993), who wants to salvage the emancipatory potential of enlightened reason and complete the “project of modernity,” says that modernity involves a moral imperative to free humanity from inequality and oppression and that the only way to achieve this is by fostering “a formation of opinion in discursive style mediated by reading, reasoning, information” (ibid:97). He argues that the Enlightenment had established communal grounds for consensus that would lead to “the rational organization of everyday social life” (Habermas ibid:98) and that there is no reason for abandoning the rationalist “*intentions* of the Enlightenment” (ibid). This, Bauman counters by saying that it is just as much a moral necessity not to apply modern totalizing principles to synthesize ambiguity. In the search for a universal community, the “only consensus likely to stand a chance of success is the acceptance of the heterogeneity of the dissensions” (Bauman, 1991:251). In a matter of speaking then, what Bauman also proposes is a consensus – a consensus of dissent.

As Derrida explains, since we possess no syntax or lexicon completely foreign to what we challenge; “we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest” (Derrida 1993:226). Therefore, postmodernists can only pretend to operate completely outside the repetitions of

power they critique. Postmodernism's incapability to position itself in complete opposition to modernity paradoxically proves its point that modernist dialectical oppositions (both Hegelian and Marxian) are false – but also proves *itself* a false distinct opposition to modernism. Foucault (1993), in examining the operations of power – embedded within accepted knowledge – in societies, claimed that there is “no binary and all-encompassing opposition between ruler and ruled” (Foucault, 1993:335) and that power and resistance instead form a non-localizable web of discourses. Rather than in an abstract linear Hegelian or Marxian dialectic, the evolution of ideas and power relations therefore occur within a complex non-linear feedback system such as those described in complexity theory. But, be dialectical oppositions false or not, if within modernism one cannot fully escape this logic of abstract systems and discursive positions, then one is left to understand that it is necessarily how human's relate to and make sense of the world. In an Althusserian sense, these abstractions and our use of them compose the ideology – the symbols and concepts as well as the material practices – through which we live and relate to a reality that is too complex to be understood except through imaginary models.

Derrida (1994), by invoking the spectres of Marx, pronounced the imperative to follow in the spirit of critique and questioning, a deconstructive thinking operating under the guidance of an undeconstructible idea of justice toward a new Enlightenment. He therefore resolves to use abstract binary oppositions of justice and injustice in order to produce political action toward a new, more self-reflexive, discourse of emancipation. So too do any postmodernists who take on the quest to emancipate humanity from dominating meta-narratives and who therefore necessarily make a judgement that is embedded in values of what must, or at least should, be done. There is always present a “meta” value judgement even for promoting a postmodernist transcendental claim about the condition of thought. The desire to be self-reflexive, to deconstruct or to invoke the spectre of Marxian critique is also value-based on a notion of good human conduct. The quest for a real postmodernity, a real state of monism without any dialectical opposition from which to launch a Marxist or Hegelian critique is therefore an impossible human achievement. Subsequently, while postmodernity (a world without any

hegemonic discursive oppression) is an impossible utopia, postmodernism, as practice, is a necessary tool to challenge cultural hegemonies toward that utopian goal – *as long as the caveats of the practices are taken into consideration*. We must strive to avoid imposing standards and ideals of life onto others, but recognize that such impositions will always be present in one form of consensus or another and that self-reflexive standards and ideals will always be needed to keep others in check among a multitude of other standards and ideals. If a dominant set of standards and ideals is identified as oppressive, then an oppositional critical consensus must be taken in order to challenge the domination and attempt to redirect discursive patterns toward, as much as possible, a balanced consensus.

It must be well understood however that to practice postmodernism under the assumption that postmodernity is possible or already existing within the context of advanced capitalism is to work in the service of capitalist oppression (Jameson, 1993; Eagleton, 1985; Norris, 1990). To take no oppositional standpoint, to engage in no political action, equates to a neutral relativism that necessarily supports the current hegemonic discourse, which in the present context is capitalism and its symbiotic political counterpart liberal democracy. Indeed, to have a libertarian attitude of “anything goes” without ever questioning the structural composition of the society which permits you such freedom is to fall into the trap of what Lenin called formal freedom. Defining Lenin's terms, Žižek explains that “Formal freedom is the freedom of choice within the coordinates of the existing power relations, while actual freedom designates the site of an intervention that undermines these very coordinates” (Žižek, 2002:544). Žižek (2002), who is careful in invoking Lenin, selectively re-iterates Lenin's demand that we must always question whom does freedom serve and that “today, actual freedom of thought must mean the freedom to question the predominant liberal-democratic post-ideological consensus or it means nothing” (Žižek, 2002:545). That is to say that to understand freedom of thought (or postmodernism) as the condition of liberal-democracy or the economic structure it sustains, and to adopt a relativist refusal of ideological position, or even to critique within those coordinates of existing power relations without considering who they serve and who they don't, means then to allow and

encourage their perpetuation as well as the ensuing disastrous consequences mentioned previously. To be truly postmodernist, one then must deconstruct overarching power coordinates within *any* hegemonic consensus and challenge them if they are found to impede both the tolerance of alternatives and the solidarity amongst all toward a common destiny of contingency.

For this, we have no choice but to use abstractions. The only way we can make sense of and understand reality is through abstraction – formulas, rituals, symbolic codes and languages – that ultimately carry ideologies (therefore never always entirely objective and always tainted with some level of subjectivity) that allow us to make sense of life itself. We must recognize this and always strive to use the best suited abstract languages for particular contexts. A language, and any other abstract code through which we communicate knowledge, is necessarily a consensus between communicants who must always remain mindful that these abstractions will always fall short of reality's complexities, and also be wary of the formation of hegemonic overarching discourses. While there is no such thing as a purely objective truth, or objective good, we are forced to come to consensus as to what these should be in regards as to what would be most useful in our quest toward mutual solidarity in our shared contingency as destiny. “Solidarity,” explains Bauman, “comes into its own when the language of necessity – the language of estrangement, discrimination and humiliation, falls out of use” (Bauman, 1993:15). The ideal society we strive toward, he claims, is the society where no one would need to justify their sense of human solidarity (ibid).

Consensus of consensuses

The matter of alleviating poverty and oppression does not depend on reforms of development or even the concept of development itself. Like a Russian matryoshka doll, the hegemonic truths of the development discourse operate within the larger hegemonic narratives of capitalism and modernity who exacerbate the very problems development proposes to solve. Rather than a solution, development is a

vector carrying a pathogenic poison. The entire 'developer' and modernizing mentality must be deconstructed and reformulated anew into a worldview that not only accepts, but embraces a destiny without the certainty of universal truths. This, of course, is no simple task. Our human limitations to making sense of the world we live in forces us to make imperfect compromises. Yet, regardless of that impediment, we must continually strive toward perfectibility through self-critique of our consented assumptions of truth and uproot the systems we construct to enact them. The only universal consensus we can allow ourselves to adopt is that of solidarity within a destiny of forever plural and changing truths. In other words, a consensus is needed that allows for an infinite plurality of consensuses continually re-adapted to best serve each individual within a larger whole. By embracing this destiny, we necessarily disarm the widely oppressive and poverty inducing operations of capitalism and modernity.

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