CHAPTER 4

POST-DEVELOPMENT AND ALTERNATIVES TO DEVELOPMENT

Eunice N. Sahle

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To learn about the historical context in which the post-development perspective emerged.
- ◆ To understand the core arguments put forward by post-development scholars.
- ◆ To understand the criticisms levelled against the work of post-development scholars.
- ◆ To discover examples of alternatives to development projects offered by leading post-development thinkers.

As in other academic fields, the evolution of development studies has been characterized by shifting ideas about political and economic processes. Further, it has been marked by vigorous debates concerning our understanding of and the analytical tools necessary for explaining social change in the 'Global South'.[1] From the late 1970s, the field has become highly contested, with the rise of new debates that challenge how development has been conceptualized and practised since the immediate post–World War II period. These ideas have emerged from various fields, including economics, anthropology, geography, political science, and critical feminist thought. This chapter discusses the core claims made since the 1980s by what has been commonly referred to as the post-development school in development studies and examines proposals framed as alternatives to development by leading post-development thinkers. It is important to note from the outset that scholars associated with the post-development school have different analytical entry points and stress a diverse range of concerns. Thus, the chapter looks at the principal issues on which the understanding of these scholars converges in regard to development theory and practice. To achieve this objective, the chapter

is divided into four sections. The first section highlights the historical conjuncture that marked the emergence of the post-development school; the second discusses the core claims made by scholars situated in this tradition; the third highlights alternatives to development projects articulated by post-development thinkers; and the final section briefly highlights criticisms levelled at post-development thought by a range of scholars.

THE POST-DEVELOPMENT TURN IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Theories of development, or for that matter all theories of social change, do not emerge out of a political, cultural, intellectual, and economic vacuum. Examining the historical context that characterizes the rise of a given development perspective provides us with a broader lens through which to understand and interrogate the claims that it embodies. In the case of the post-development turn in development studies, it has its roots in the conditions surrounding the field in the

1980s and 1990s. Three aspects are pivotal to understanding the historical conjuncture that marked its emergence: the crisis of post-1945 development theories; the perceived failure of development practices informed by dominant theories of development (specifically modernization and neoliberalism); the rise of postmodern thought in scholarship generally and the emergence of critical social movements in Latin America and other parts of the Global South.

The Crisis in Development Theorizing and Practice in the 1980s and 1990s

As other chapters have indicated, the 1950s saw the emergence of powerful ideas about processes of social, political, and economic change in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Latin America. These ideas, which came to be embodied in modernization theory, originated from various academic fields, although mainly in sociology, psychology, political science, and economics. In essence, while the colonial era was marked by the notion of 'civilizing' the savage 'other' in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Latin America, the rise of a new world order (Sahle, 2010) after World War II, dominated by the geopolitics of the Cold War, as well as decolonization struggles in Africa and Asia, led to the reproduction of the same civilizing idea but under the non-offensive-sounding rubric of 'development'. As Arturo Escobar argues,

> This transformation took place to suit the demands of the post-war development order, which relied heavily on research and knowledge to provide a reliable picture of a country's social and economic problems. Development disciplines and sub-disciplines—including development economics, the agricultural sciences, the health, nutrition and education sciences, demography, and urban planning—proliferated. (Escobar, 1995b: 213–14)

As discussed in Chapter 3, by the 1960s the central elements of modernization theory's ideas and vision of economic and political change had been significantly challenged by dependency theorists, whose perspectives dominated development debates from this period until the 1970s. By the 1980s, modernization theory and the economic and political practices

it informed, as well as the critical tradition in development studies generated by the rise of the dependency perspective, had begun to unravel. Beyond the conceptual blinders of modernization theory that were highlighted by dependency theorists, its envisioned Third World modernization project was considered a failure by a broad range of actors in the development community—a community defined by Colin Leys (1996: 29) as 'a network of people professionally concerned with development—the staff of "donor" and recipient country's development ministries, multilateral aid agencies, financial institutions and non-government organizations, and academic and non-academic consultants'.

The crisis of modernization theory and practice did not mean the end of what Gilbert Rist (2002) terms the 'messianic' belief in the idea of development, which he argues is deeply rooted in Western ideas about progress and industrialization. The 1980s saw the ascendancy of a new development perspective, referred to as the neoliberal approach because it was underpinned by ideas of classical liberal economic thought. This perspective reproduced the messianic belief in the possibility of development in the Global South—with a caveat: from the neoliberal point of view, the old model of development informed by modernization theory and other ideas from the immediate post-1945 period, especially Keynesian ideas about the role of the state in the economy, had to be dismantled (Sahle, 2010; Toye, 1993). For neoliberal thinkers, the way forward for these countries was to institute measures that created favourable conditions for market-led development. For almost three decades, then, the neoliberal development perspective has influenced development policy and practice. Its core tenets are **privatization** of publicly owned enterprises; removal of tariffs and other bottlenecks that limit international free trade and foreign direct investment; a focus on primary commodity export-led development strategy, with emphasis on the comparative advantage of each country; and rolling back the state through such strategies as downsizing the civil service, removing subsidies in sectors such as agriculture, cutting government social expenditure in education, water, and health sectors, and devaluing local currencies.

Even as neoliberal development theory and practice gained global ascendancy, orthodox (modernization, neoliberal) and critical (dependency, Marxist) theories of development were increasingly

challenged from various sites. Feminist scholars contended not only that these approaches were gender-blind but that the economic and political practices they envisioned had gendered effects— i.e., they had different effects on women and men (Sahle, 2008). Thus, such approaches offered very limited insights into political and economic processes because they failed to account for the gendered nature of these processes, particularly how they reconfigured power dynamics between women and men (Scott, 1995; Cook and Roberts, 2000; Cook et al., 2000). These theories—specifically modernization and neoliberalism—also were seen to generate economic practices that contributed to the marginalization of women in the differentiated Global South, especially women from lower social and economic classes and members of historically neglected communities, such as the low castes in India, indigenous peoples in Latin America and Asia, and peasant women in Africa.

From the standpoint of the critical tradition in development studies, theorizing was considered by some scholars to be at an impasse during the 1980s. For leading scholars in this tradition, the Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches to the study of economic processes in the context of an unequal world system (Wallerstein, 2000; Amin, 1976) had significant limitations. Scholars associated with the impasse debate felt that the limitations of these approaches stemmed from their economistic, essentialist tendencies and their epistemological roots. In the case of Marxist development theory, these scholars argued that social, political, and cultural realities and developments in what was termed the 'periphery' (Third World) were mainly analyzed as serving the needs of local and global power structures (Frank, 1969). Furthermore, according to David Booth (1985), for instance, dependency theory and Marxist accounts of development represented capitalism in teleological and tautological terms: the ironclad laws of capital were unmovable, and the end results were known a priori. For these scholars, Marxist-inspired theories of development were similar to modernization theory in that they were marked by deep essentialism, resulting in the characterization of countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Latin America as having the same political and economic features and being destined to follow the same unilinear developmental path. The questions raised in the impasse debate generated a vigorous response from Marxists and within the impasse camp itself through most of the 1990s. The debate disrupted and problematized assumptions that had informed what was considered progressive and radical theorizing on the development question, including theorizing on the nature and role of the state in economic and political arenas.

The ascendancy of neoliberal development theory and practice, like that of its earlier, orthodox counterpart (modernization), also was facing major challenges from a diverse group of political movements by the mid-1980s. The rise of global neoliberalism and the economic practices it generated were considered a major failure by a range of social actors in the Global South (Sahle, 2010). For example, Tunisia in 1984 and Zambia in 1985 experienced social protests as local people challenged higher prices for grain products and other commodities as a result of the implementation of neoliberal economic policies, especially devaluation of local currencies. For many critical analysts and members of civil society groups and social movements, these economic practices inspired by neoliberalism had contributed to deepening economic stagnation, growing poverty, and a declining ability on the part of governments in the Global South to fulfill their traditional functions, such as the provision of public goods like education. Thus, from the 1980s on, as the works of Edward Osei-Kwadwo Prempeh (2006), Benjamin Kohl and Linda Farthing (2006), and others have demonstrated, a number of social movements—indigenous peoples' movements, women's movements, organized labour, student associations, faith-based communities, local and transnational environmental movements, as well as others—have been contesting the dominant development ideas and practices embodied in post-1945 modernization theory and the current neoliberal development theory.

Out of this historical conjuncture in development studies a new tradition arose: the post-development school. While this conjuncture is crucial to our understanding of the emergence of the post-development school, other scholarly developments are no less important: in particular, *postmodern* and *post-structuralist* debates. Although Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida were not the only scholars mapping out postmodern and post-structuralist thought, they are nonetheless considered important thinkers in

the beginning of these shifts in Western social theorizing and scholarship. In regard to development issues, postmodern and post-structuralist thought share the following common features, which are relevant to our discussion of the post-development turn in development studies:

- Language (words, concepts) is central to the understanding of social reality, or the 'world-out-there' and to shaping the 'real world-out-there' (we will elaborate on this point later).
- Knowledge is socially constructed and thus not neutral. Thus, attempts to universalize knowledge lead to the colonization or subordination of other forms of knowledge. In this respect, scholars working within the postmodern and post-structuralist school challenge the notion of universal or totalizing knowledge that can be applied to all societies. Furthermore, power dynamics underpin knowledge production and dissemination.

INTERROGATING POST-1945 DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE: POST-DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES

The questioning and disruption of the concept of development itself as it had been conceived and practised in the post-1945 period underwent a significant 'vivisection', to use James Ferguson's (1994) phrase, in the 1990s with the ascendancy of the post-development perspective. While Frans Schuurman (1993) and others had conceived of the increasingly 'fragmentary' and limited nature of the dominant critical development theories of the 1960s and 1970s as an impasse and were attempting to tease out possible openings in development theorizing, a new challenge emerged, mainly from anthropology, that called into question 'the myth of development', modernity, and other assumptions that had informed development discourse as it had been conceptualized and practised in the post–World War II period. Their texts, while focusing on diverse geographical sites and marked by different analytical entry points, laid bare the structuring, colonizing, disciplining, and depoliticizing nature of post-1945 development discourses.

According to Ferguson, for example, development discourse cannot be ignored or trivialized just because whatever claims it makes are either 'untrue' or end up not achieving the objectives it upholds as its raison d'être: e.g., poverty alleviation, helping Third World societies become modern, and so forth. Ferguson (1994: 18) contends that development discourse needs to be questioned, for, like other forms of discourse in different historical conjunctures,

> it is a practice, it is structured, and it has real effects which are much more profound than simply 'mystification'. The thoughts and actions of 'development' bureaucrats are powerfully shaped by the world of acceptable statements and utterances within which they live; and what they do and do not do is a product not only of the interests of various nations, classes, or international agencies, but also, and at the same time, of a working out of this complex structure of knowledge.

Another central contention of scholars writing from the post-development perspective is that while the notion of development is not new, it took a different turn in the post-1945 period. Arguing along these lines, Escobar (1995a: 39) states:

> Behind the humanitarian concern and the positive outlook of the new strategy, new forms of power and control, more subtle and refined, were put in operation. Poor people's ability to define and take care of their own lives was eroded in a deeper manner than perhaps ever before. The poor became the target of more sophisticated practices, of a variety of programs that seemed inescapable.

While diverse in their approaches, scholars associated with the post-development turn converge on the following themes, which they consider to be hallmarks of post-1945 development theory and practice: representation, knowledge–power, depoliticization, universalism, and homogenization. Further, the post-development school's critique of the concept of development is very different from that of other critical traditions, as will be highlighted later in the discussion on alternatives to development.

Development Discourse: Colonial Representations, Knowledge–Power, and Depoliticization

Following the post-structuralist argument that words or language and meaning contribute to political, cultural, and economic social reality, post-development thinkers argue that the texts, images, and concepts of development cannot be taken at face value. In essence, they are not neutral. According to these thinkers, the words we use generate meaning—of a place, political-economic processes, and cultural practices—and form a mode of representation. For post-development scholars, representation matters: it enables the production of the social reality that development institutions and theorists claim to be analyzing. What do these scholars mean by representation? Further, what is the role of language in the production of meanings embodied in systems of representation? Stuart Hall's (1997) discussion of the notion of representation and the role of language in the creation of meanings is worth quoting at length here to help us understand why post-development scholars are concerned with these issues in the context of development studies (see Box 4.1).

From a historical perspective, post-development scholars argue that representational systems were central to the political, cultural, and economic project in colonial times, and they contend that this trend has been reproduced in post-1945 development theory and practice. What do they mean by this? The central idea is that during the imperial era, colonial interests—as expressed by writers (e.g., Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*), travellers, missionaries, traders, and government officials—created powerful narratives of non-European peoples that constructed them as backward and subhuman savages. As some scholars have shown (wa Thiong'o and Sahle, 2004: 64–5) in the case of Africa, for example, Georg W.F. Hegel, a leading nineteenth-century European philosopher, represented the continent as a place that 'exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state' (quoted ibid.). He counselled his fellow Europeans, whom he considered the central focus of human history—'World-Historical individuals', as he termed them—to 'lay aside all thought of reverence and morality—all that we call feeling—if we would rightly comprehend [the African]' (quoted ibid.). For Hegel, all aspects of an African's life were governed by untamed desires and passions, 'volition in its rough and savage forms', features that consequently placed

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS BOX 4.1

STUART HALL ON REPRESENTATION

Language . . . operates as a *representational system*. . . . Language is one of the 'media' through which thoughts, ideas and feelings are represented in a culture. Representation through language is . . . central to the processes by which meaning is produced. . . . Sounds, words, notes, gestures, expressions, clothes—are part of our natural and material world; but their importance for language is not what they *are* but what they do, their function. They construct meaning and transmit it. They signify. They don't have any clear meaning in *themselves*. Rather, they are the vehicles or media which carry meaning because they operate as *symbols*, which stand for or represent [i.e., symbolize] the meanings we wish to communicate. . . . Signs stand for or represent our concepts, ideas and feelings in such a way as to enable others to 'read', decode or interpret their meaning in roughly the same way that we do. . . . The conventional view used to be that 'things' exist in the material and natural world; that their material or natural characteristics are what determines or constitutes them; and that they have perfectly clear meaning, outside of how they are represented. . . . Since the **'cultural turn'** in the human and social sciences, meaning is thought to be produced—constructed—rather than simply 'found'. . . . Representation [then] is conceived as entering into the very constitution of things; and thus culture is conceptualized as a primary or 'constitutive' process, as important as the economic or material 'base' in shaping social subjects and historical events—not merely a reflection of the world after the event. (Hall, 1997: 1, 5–7)
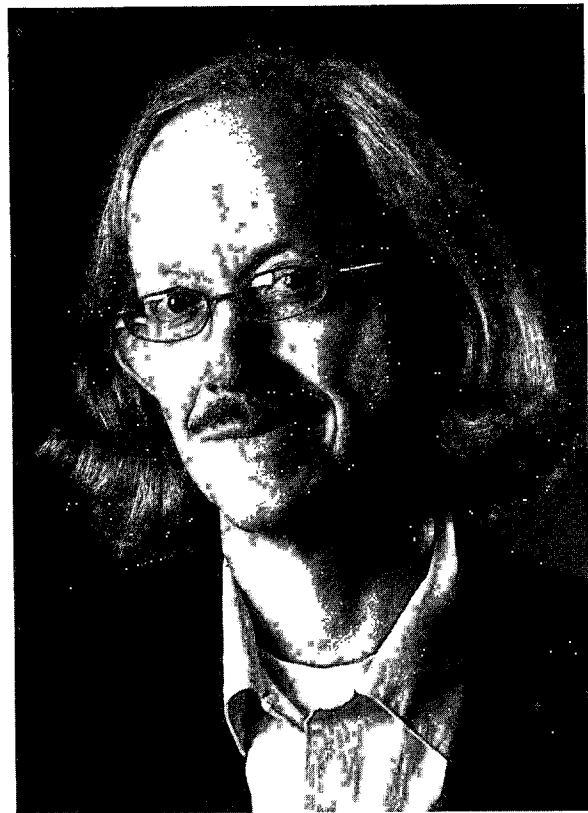
PHOTO 4.1 Arturo Escobar
Source: *University Gazette:* http://gazette.unc.edu/archives/06apr26/photos.html

Africans outside 'the scene and sphere of universal history' (quoted ibid.) (see Box 4.2 for an alternative post-colonial literary representation of Africans). Hegel's representational system enabled colonial authorities to construct African societies as being greatly in need of a civilizing political, economic, and cultural project designed and implemented by the Europeans—hence the coining of the expression 'white man's burden' during the era of European colonialism in Africa and elsewhere in the non-European world. Hegel's concepts and those of other European intellectuals provided colonial authorities with ideas to frame and legitimize their political, cultural, and economic agendas in Latin America, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean.

The colonial representational system had a significant and detrimental impact on Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Middle East, and yet Colonialism was represented as being of benefit to the people of these regions, given their savage and backward status. The gains that the European colonizing societies made in the process were erased in this representational system. But as Walter Rodney (1981) has demonstrated in the case of Africa, the extraction of resources and the establishment of unequal economic relations between the European colonizing powers and Africa had significant and long-lasting effects in both regions. While African countries contributed to Europe's economic development, colonial authorities established weak monocultural economic systems that saw African countries incorporated into the world economy on unequal terms, a historical development that continues to haunt the continent's economic processes up to the contemporary era of neoliberal globalization, as discussed in Chapter 3. Further, the colonial representation of the European political project in Africa as laying the foundation for the emergence of civilized political systems and practices was very far from what was happening in actual practice. On the one hand, this language enabled the legitimization of colonialism in Africa; on the other, it contributed to the emergence of despotic state forms, which have been succinctly analyzed by Mahmood Mamdani (1996). In essence, the colonial representational system silenced any expression of the true political nature and economic, cultural, and political effects of the European colonial projects, a social practice that in post-development studies is referred to as **depoliticization**. The latter, examples of which will be offered shortly, refers to approaches that represent political and economic issues as technical political problems. For post-development thinkers, political and economic processes are in the main political issues that are deeply embedded in national and international political-economic developments at a given historical moment. For post-development thinkers, the post-1945 development discourse has facilitated reproduction of the colonial representational system of societies in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa (Escobar, 1995a; Sahle, 2010).

Overall, the geopolitics of development knowledge production and dissemination has played a central role in this process. Arguing along these lines and building from his contention that the notion of development and its attendant practices took a new form in the post-1945 period, Escobar states that 'the making of the Third World through development discourses and practices has to be seen in relation

CRITICAL ISSUES BOX 4.2   BEYOND THE HEGELIAN VIEW OF AFRICANS

Even prior to colonialism, through cultural practices such as epic poems, songs, mime, and armed resistance, Africans contested injustices and engaged in political and economic practices geared to creating and reproducing their communities. Thus, as in other societies, resisting and contesting power structures and ideologies were a feature of pre-colonial African societies. This tradition, which continued in the era of European imperialism, as examples of legendary uprisings such as the 1905 Maji Maji rebellion in present-day Tanzania and the 1915 Chilembwe uprising in Malawi indicate, disrupts the Hegelian view of Africans as docile simpletons without political agency. Following the end of formal colonialism, Africans have continued to 'speak truth to power' and demand accountability from members of the hegemonic ruling elites. Below is a literary representation, from Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977: 143), of the political agency of members of a rural community in Kenya who decide to take a long trip to the city to challenge the neglect of their community by their local political representatives.

They did not know it, but that night was to be the peak of their epic journey across the plains. It was true that Abdulla's feast, as they called it, had leased them new life and determination,

and the following day, despite the sun which had struck earlier and more fiercely than in the other days, as if to test their capacity for endurance to the very end, despite indeed the evidence of the acacia bush, the ashy-furred leleshwa bush, the prickly pears, all of which seemed to have given in to the bitter sun, they walked with brisk steps as if they too knew this secret desire of the sun and were resolved to come out on top. . . . Abdulla's story had made them aware of a new relationship to the ground on which they trod . . . everything in the plains had been hallowed by the feet of those who had fought and died that Kenya might be free: wasn't there something, a spirit of those people in them too? Now even they of Ilmorog had a voice in the houses of power and privilege. Soon, tonight, tomorrow, some day, at the journey's end, they would meet him, face to face. . . . During the last election campaign, some recalled doubtfully, he had promised them many things including water and better roads. . . . Recalling, too, Abdulla's heroism in the past and also yesterday . . . they walked with eyes fixed on a possibility of a different life in Ilmorog, if not for them, at least for their children.

to the larger history of Western modernity, of which development seems to be one of the last and most insidious chapters.' He goes on to say that in the post-1945 era 'development can best be described as an apparatus that links forms of knowledge about the Third World with the deployment of forms of power and intervention; resulting in the mapping and production of Third World societies' (Escobar, 1995b: 213).

Institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have been crucial sites for the generation of development knowledge and its circulation. Development knowledge produced in these sites is closely linked to hegemonic theories of development and the geopolitical conditions at the global level at a given historical moment (Sahle, 2010). Con-

sequently, for a comprehensive understanding of, for example, President Harry Truman's famous Point 4 (see Box 1.1), it is crucial to go beyond the emphasis on how the Global North was going to contribute to the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment in the various parts of the Global South and examine the political, intellectual, and economic conditions that marked the world at the historical juncture when the Point 4 schema was produced.

Going back to the notion of hegemonic theories of development, here are some thoughts on what, to a large extent, scholars mean when they invoke the concept of hegenomy in their examination of these theories and their effects. A hegemonic development theory sets the parameters of, for instance, how we think about the role of the state in economy, and

if you are a citizen of a country such as Bangladesh and you encounter the representation of your country as one of the least developed countries in the world, plagued by famine and so forth, the neutral language of development projects as communicated by the government and international development institutions might sound quite reasonable, since they are supposed to address the lack of development and the perpetual problem of poverty in your country. Consequently, even if a number of development projects in your country fail to address their technically stated objectives, the idea of development process that is supposed to address poverty and also help your country 'catch up' with the developed world—which has reached the highest stage of development on the development ladder (as described by Rostow [1960])—may seem plausible. This process of consent formation occurs not only in local contexts such as Bangladesh but also within countries that extend development loans to the Global South. To a range of citizens in the Global North, having their countries 'help' poor countries in the developing world sounds both reasonable, normal, and morally right.

For post-development scholars, hegemonic theories of development have come to function as *discourse* akin to European colonial ideas on Middle and Near East societies, which were analyzed by Edward Said in his seminal text, *Orientalism*. Building on Foucault's work, Said (1979: 3) observed: 'Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it', and in the process producing 'the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively'. From the perspective of post-development scholars, hegemonic theories of development such as modernization and neoliberalism, which since the post-1945 era have informed government and international institutions such as the World Bank, function as discourse because they create 'a space in which only certain things could be said and even imagined' (Escobar, 1995a: 39). For Escobar, 'discourse is the process through which social reality [political, cultural, economic] comes into being . . . [it is] the articulation of knowledge and power, of the visible and the expressible' (ibid.). In the case of societies in the Global South, the entry point for the discourse of modernization development was

PHOTO 4.2 Stuart Hall

Source: Clinton Hurton. Courtesy of Annie Paul. Originally appeared in the interview 'David Scott by Stuart Hall', *BOMB Magazine* 90 Winter 2005.

the role of development institutions in economic and political processes in the countries in the Global South. A theory or idea is considered hegemonic when it is taken for granted and assumed to be articulating the truth about a social reality, such as the need for development, the domination and apolitical nature of Third World women, or the superiority of a given society when compared to others. **Hegemony** emerges when powerful actors in a given society or at the international level do not have to rely heavily on force to get citizens to accept their visions of the good life, the common good, and, in the case of the Global South, the concept of development as it has been articulated in a prevailing theory of development.

One way this process—which scholars refer to as the construction of 'consent' (Gramsci, 1971)—works is through the representation of the visions or other projects of ruling elites in neutral and apolitical terms. Thus,

the belief in the role of modernization as the only force capable of destroying archaic superstitions and relations, at whatever social, cultural, and political cost. Industrialization and urbanization were seen as the inevitable and necessary progressive routes to modernization. Only through material advancement could social, cultural, and political progress be achieved. This view determined the belief that capital investment was the most important ingredient in economic growth and development. . . . Moreover, it was absolutely necessary that governments and international organizations take an active role in promoting and orchestrating the necessary efforts to overcome general backwardness and economic development. (Ibid., 39–40)

For post-development thinkers, clearly, knowledge production and its circulation are underpinned by power dynamics, and thus the generation of development theory and its circulation in various parts of the world, despite its technical and neutral language, are underpinned by power. Those who have power locally and internationally determine what relevant knowledge is, how it is used, and so forth at a given historical moment (Sahle, 2010). Knowledge and power are two interlinked pillars that enable the crafting and dissemination of development theory and its attendant practices. Two examples from leading scholars in the post-development school illustrate this point. Timothy Mitchell's work in Egypt since the 1980s has demonstrated how the representation of the country in development theory has enabled economic practices with significant political and social effects, even though they have been presented in technical and neutral terms (Mitchell, 2002). According to Mitchell, development theory represents Egypt as an overpopulated country characterized by a geographical landscape—limited arable land and water sources—that significantly constrains development. The representational system for Egypt includes the following features:

> The geographical and demographic characteristics of Egypt delineate its basic economic problem. Although the country contains about 386,000 square miles . . . only a narrow strip in the Nile Valley and its Delta is usable. This area

of 15,000 square miles—less than 4 per cent of the land—is but an elongated oasis in the midst of desert. . . . Crammed into the habitable area is 98 per cent of the population. . . . The population has been growing rapidly and is estimated to have doubled since 1947. (Ibid., 209)

This representational system underpins the view of development agencies involved in Egypt, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (ibid.). Yet, representing Egypt in this manner offers at best a limited understanding of the country's history and contemporary conditions, as is indicated by the popular uprisings in early 2011 that led to the fall of President Hosni Mubarak (Shenker, 2011). At any rate, from a post-development perspective, the hegemonic representational system embodied in development theory presents Egypt as a place without history in the Eurocentric terms that have framed post-1945 theories of development, in addition to being a political and economic geography not influenced by broader external forces, much as the colonial representational system did. For Mitchell, this representation is not only **ahistorical** but it opens a space for development agencies to craft development projects that they purport will address Egypt's economic underdevelopment and move the country towards modernity. According to Mitchell, the 'poetic imagery' of Egypt as in the text quoted above creates 'the entire relationship between the textual analysis and its object'—in this case Egypt's development. Thus, the language used to describe Egypt facilitates its constitution as a country with population and natural resource problems even before development aid or economic development programs arrive in the country.

From a post-development framework, Egypt is not the only country in the Global South that has been represented in ahistorical terms by powerful actors in the international development machinery. For instance, while Lesotho's colonial history and the rise of an economic system dependent on migrant labour resulted in its being incorporated into broader international and regional economic and political systems, it is represented as an enclosed society of peasant farmers surrounded by intimidating mountains, confronted by problematic agricultural resources, and lacking development. According to James Ferguson, the 'development apparatus' operating in Lesotho

generally represents the country in the following way (drawn from a World Bank report):

> Few developing countries faced such bleak economic prospects and were so ill-prepared as Lesotho when it gained independence in October 1966. . . . In spite of the fact that Lesotho is an enclave within highly industrialized South Africa and belongs with that country, Botswana, and Swaziland to the rand monetary area and the Southern African Customs Union, it was then virtually untouched by modern economic development. It was and still is, basically, a traditional subsistence peasant society. But rapid population growth resulting in extreme pressure on the land, deteriorating soil, and declining agricultural yields led to a situation in which the country was no longer able to produce enough food for its people. (Ferguson, 1994: 25)

The way countries in the Global South are represented constitutes a strong foundational framework for development agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), USAID, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund to generate development projects aimed at what they consider undeveloped countries that need to get on the historical road and become developed like their counterparts in the industrialized North. Such representations provide these institutions with a rationale to intervene in the economic and political processes of these countries, yet their development projects are always presented in neutral and non-political terms. In the case of Lesotho, for instance, this approach facilitated the generation of a development project focused on the mountain region during the 1970s. The mountain region—and Lesotho in general—is represented as a geographical area lacking development and underpinned by what Ferguson calls an 'Aboriginal economy' dominated by peasant production. Building on this representational system, officials of the World Bank, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and CIDA, in conjunction with the Lesotho government, instituted the development project at a cost of about $15 million in its first phase (ibid., 75). The project's objective was to facilitate the development of the Thaba-Tseka area, which in the view of the

parties proposing the project had lagged behind in development because of the lack of infrastructural modernization. The Thaba-Tseka journey to development was to be helped by the building of roads, a modern regional centre, and a farmer training centre, and the economy was to be modernized through livestock and cash crop production geared for the market. For the development institutions supporting the introduction of cash crop production, the driving assumption was that the non-modern farmers who had engaged in peasant production for so long would be keen on becoming modern commercial farmers once they had access to the market (FAO/World Bank, 1975: Annex 1, 11, cited ibid.). These efforts, as well as others, including the decentralization of political and economic authority, were expected to empower local people in the rest of the country, who were poor and isolated from modern development processes.

As Ferguson relates, by 1979 the project's sponsors considered it a failure—especially CIDA, which pulled out. To be sure, the proposed road and regional centre were built, but the main aim of the project—to transform the Thaba-Tseka Aboriginal peasant economy from its traditional stage to a higher stage of economic development as defined by hegemonic development actors and their ideas—did not occur. A failure such as this is common in the international development industry. However, a close examination of the project reveals the ahistorical and depoliticizing nature of the hegemonic development theory that underpins it. For instance, the roles of the development institutions and the local state were represented in technical and neutral terms. Nonetheless, despite the neutral language, the project resulted in expansion of the bureaucratic and coercive power of the state in a region of Lesotho that was a strong base for oppositional forces (Ferguson, 1994).

As with Lesotho, the representation of Egypt as a traditional society led development agencies such as USAID to conclude that for Egypt to get on the train to unilinear modernity, 'the impetus and the means must come from outside' (Mitchell, 2002: 223). The need for 'outside' designers and implementers of Egypt's development project led in the 1980s to USAID having a central role in explaining and enabling reconstitution of the country's grain production sector. Since the 1970s, Egypt had

become increasingly dependent on imported grain. In USAID's view, this development was the result of high population growth that made it impossible for the country to feed itself, coupled with the lack of arable land for agrarian production, which contributed to a decline in food production. To respond to this agricultural development crisis, USAID, with support from the US government, provided 'at reduced interest rates more than three billion dollars worth of Egyptian grain purchases from the United States between 1975 and 1988, making Egypt the world's largest importer of subsidized grain', claiming that the grain was 'to help the poor' (ibid., 216). Over the years, as the country's dependence on imported grain increased, the Egyptian government had to borrow money from other countries to cover the costs. This trend resulted in increasing external debt, which by 1989 amounted to $51.5 billion, placing Egypt among the most highly indebted countries in the world. The US, based on its own geopolitical interests, mainly Egypt's support in the 1990–1 Gulf War, provided debt relief to the country (ibid.).

The development representational system that led to this outcome, however, does not stand up to historical and structurally grounded analysis. Egypt's rising dependency on exported grain had nothing to do with declining agricultural production or overpopulation. Analysis of the country's agricultural sector indicates that although it had sufficient production to keep up with population growth, with grain production increasing by 77 per cent and population growth standing at 75 per cent between 1966 and 1988, studies influenced by the hegemonic theory of development claimed that there was a decline in agrarian production during that period (ibid., 215).

At the centre of the grain importation trend was the nature of the country's social class dynamics, the nature of local state power, and broader international conditions such as the strategic role that Egypt had historically played and continued to play on the US geopolitical map (ibid., 217). In social class terms, the historical processes of economic and political change that contributed to the formation of the contemporary Egyptian state also led to the emergence of various classes. Political, military, and economic elites emerging out of this process formed the privileged strata of Egyptian society and the social class foundation of the state. What did this have to do with the grain importation ques-

tion? As Mitchell explains, changing consumption patterns among the Egyptian upper classes and the demands of tourists and other foreigners saw increased consumption of meat products. To service the consumption patterns of a powerful segment of Egyptian society, the local grain industry was reconfigured: 'Rather than importing animal feed directly, Egypt diverted domestic production from human to animal consumption. Human consumption of maize (corn) and other coarse grains (barley, sorghum) dropped from 53 per cent in 1966 to 6 per cent in 1988' (ibid., 215). Thus, grains that had historically been available for human consumption were transformed into animal feed, a development that led to a crisis of food security for the majority of Egyptians while the 'needs' of the privileged minority were taken care of by the government in conjunction with USAID through the implementation of a new strategy in the grain industry. These sorts of strategies are what have led some post-development scholars to refer to development practices as 'planned poverty' (Illich, 1997).

As the examples of development practices in Lesotho and Egypt indicate, at issue is development theory's construction of the state and international development institutions in depoliticized terms. In the case of the state, its role in the development process is presented as neutral, serving the needs of the citizens through the adoption of sound economic and political practices. Yet the state is a site of power, and state forms do not exist in local or international vacuums. In the main, and as Ferguson (1994: 253) argues,

[although] 'development' discourse tends to see the provision of 'services' as the purpose of government, it is clear that the question of power cannot be written off quite so easily. 'Government services' are never simply 'services'; instead of conceiving this phrase as a reference simply to a 'government' whose purpose is to serve, it may be at least as appropriate to think of 'services' which serve to govern.

While Ferguson's work and that of others demonstrate the ways in which so-called government services enable the achievement of the political objectives of ruling elites and in the process result, at times, in the expansion of state power in the Global South,

CRITICAL ISSUES BOX 4.3   POST-DEVELOPMENT THEORY IN PRACTICE: ALTERNATIVES TO DEVELOPMENT

In an effort to move beyond the hegemonic development discourse, most post-development scholars promote the framework of 'alternatives to development' in economic, cultural, and political practices. For some advocates of this concept, social movements in various parts of the Global South represent an important development in the struggle to imagine a post-development epoch (Escobar, 1995b: 216). These movements, while not monolithic, tend to engage in participatory forms of politics, value local ways of knowing and solutions, seek autonomy from the state and international development institutions, and promote pluralistic ways of thinking in terms of economic, cultural, and political practices. These features contrast sharply with hegemonic theories of development and practice, which have historically and currently pushed one way of thinking—or what post-development thinkers (drawing on the work of Foucault) refer to as a 'regime of truth'—concerning, for example, economic production and state forms. For Foucault, a 'regime of truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operations of statements. 'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power that produce and sustain it, and to effects of power that it induces and that extend it (Foucault, 1980: 133). In his view, 'this regime is not merely ideological or superstructural; it [is] a condition for the formation and development of capitalism' (ibid.). In the current era of the hegemony of neoliberal development theory and practice, the idea that the invisible hand of the market should be the sole determinant of economic development is an example of a regime of truth in the Foucauldian sense.

According to scholars such as Escobar, through self-organizing knowledge-production practices (which tend to be based on progressive research approaches, such as participatory action research) that focus 'on the encounter between modern and popular forms of knowledge' (Escobar, 1995b: 224), social movements have the potential to contribute to the emergence of a new era in which the naturalized and depoliticized need to develop that has always been embodied in hegemonic development discourse is finally put to rest and replaced with new ways of thinking and practice in the economic, cultural, and political arenas. In addition to the practices of social movements, post-development scholars offer a range of economic practices that epitomize alternatives to development (see Box 4.4).

In addition to locally based social movements, since its first meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001, the World Social Forum (WSF) has offered a space for movements from various parts of the world to gather and share ideas about alternative ways of organizing societies and lives beyond the neoliberal vision that frames the contemporary phase of the historical process of **globalization**. For social movements involved in the WSF, neoliberalism promotes a singular model of economic practice for all societies. Departing from such a standpoint, participants involved in the WSF during the past decade have contended that 'another world is possible' and have presented alternatives to neoliberal development projects such as solidarity economic activities. The latter 'embody, and innovate creatively on, more than a century of workers' struggles to organize. . . . Central to Solidarity Economics is the valuing of human labour, knowledge and creativity, rather than capital' (Quintela, 2003: 100–1).

as the Lesotho case indicates, the same phenomenon occurs in the Global North. For example, in democratic political systems such as Britain, ruling parties tend to represent their political and economic agendas as neutral, serving the interests of all citizens. For instance, a neoliberal ruling party, such as the coali-

tion government that emerged in the UK following the defeat of the Labour Party in 2010, may represent such practices as downsizing the public sector, cutting social spending on health and education, and privatization of publicly owned enterprises as being informed by neutral economic principles and geared

CRITICAL ISSUES BOX 4.4   EXAMPLES OF ALTERNATIVES TO DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

A. Community-Supported Agriculture

The concept of community-supported agriculture has gained traction in numerous places. Esteva and Prakash describe this process:

> Thousands of small grassroots groups are realizing that there is no need to 'think big' in order to begin releasing themselves from the clutches of the monopolistic food economy. . . . Among the most promising solutions is the movement towards Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), inspired by both local thinking and action. It involves urban consumers supporting small local farmers who farm with wisdom and care for local soils, waters and intestines. And who, in doing so, simultaneously ensure that unknown farmers from far-away places like Costa Rica or Brazil are not exploited with inhuman wages and left sick with cancer or infertility. By taking care of our local food, farms and farmers, those of us who are members of CSAs are slowly learning to overcome the parochialism of 'industrial eaters'—those who are 'educated' to be oblivious to the harm done by supporting multinationals and others who 'think big', destroying millions of small family farms across the globe. (Esteva and Prakash, 1997: 280–1)

B. Community Economies

In recent years, the notion of 'community economies' (Gibson-Graham, 2005) has been embraced by some post-development scholars (see Harcourt and Escobar, 2005). These community economic practices take a range of forms—for example, the agricultural producer co-operatives in Kenya's Central Province and the coffee co-operatives among the Oromo community in the southern part of Ethiopia (see the film *Black Gold*). Here is another example—from Kerala in India, as described by Gibson-Graham.

> Currently Kerala is engaged in what they call the 'Mararikulam experiment'—an adventure in generating local income and employment for the poorest of the poor . . . as part of this experiment, over fifteen hundred neighborhood savings groups made up of twenty to forty women are transforming themselves from credit associations to production cooperatives. The exclusive emphasis on women's involvement is a way of addressing issues of gender equity and women's empowerment in Kerala, developing women's productive power to enhance their social and political power. The first step has been to generate capital by organizing women to redefine some of their meagre earnings as a surplus to be saved and invested rather than as a part of the necessary consumption fund. . . . The Mararikulam experiment is both building on and going beyond the development approach of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which has demonstrated the benefit that savings and small-scale loans can have on women's livelihoods. In Mararikulam the lending structure is organized and controlled by elected committees of the women's neighborhood groups, not an outside bank bureaucracy . . . the initial co-ops started by producing soap . . . by 2003 the second stage was underway, with co-ops producing semiprocessed foods. . . . The basic idea of the Mararikulam experience is that local 'wealth' can be collectively marshaled to bring people out of poverty. (Gibson-Graham, 2005: 151–3)

to serving the needs of society at large. Yet these practices are not neutral, and they have social and political effects. They lead to job losses and other forms of human insecurity, and they serve the interests of a neoliberal government's strong constituency: political actors who are fiscal conservatives and

ideologically committed to limiting the role of the state; national and multinational corporations that might view large publicly owned firms as potential assets in the context of privatization.

In any event, the experiences of Lesotho and Egypt illustrate some of the central claims that post-development scholars make in their analysis of the power of the language of development as an idea and practice. For these scholars, such language enables the design and implementation of development practices that are not only implicated in power dynamics from the outset but also have what Ferguson—building on Foucault's work—terms 'instrument-effects', which means 'effects that are at one and the same time instruments of what "turns" out to be an exercise of power' (ibid., 255). This exercise of power is not limited only to the local states in a given political geography in the Global South. It also includes institutions whose rhetoric remains focused on helping the poor and pushing recipient countries forward into a Western capitalist trajectory of development. Overall, these institutions are very much implicated in their own country's geopolitical designs, as the case of USAID in Egypt indicates.

As for CIDA, the 'failure' of a development project such as the one in Lesotho is domestically and internationally problematic. In terms of domestic economic and political dynamics, Canadian foreign aid, like that of other countries in the Global North, tends to be 'tied' aid, meaning that the receiving countries are required to pay back the loans and to guarantee Canadian firms and other actors involved in the development industry, such as Canadian non-governmental development organizations, a stake in the implementation of the projects (see Chapter 8). For Canadian businesses, this takes the form of contracts to supply machinery or other goods or services, depending on the project. At the international level, Canada has constructed itself, since the early part of the past century, as a leading actor in the creation and maintenance of multilateral institutions and in the post-1945 period as a generous and progressive provider of development assistance to countries in the Global South. Nevertheless, while institutions such as CIDA present their development intervention programs as neutral and for the 'service' of poor countries, Ferguson's idea that 'government services' are 'never simply "services"' can be applied to the role of Canadian development agencies and

those of other countries, such as USAID, in the case of the US.

Universalism and Homogenization

The previously mentioned ahistorical approach that permeates development theory and practice has led to a strong tendency to universalize European and (since World War II) American processes of political and economic change as the reference point for countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. For post-development scholars, this **universalizing logic** is not difficult to deduce, given the linear view of history that marks hegemonic theories of development, which in turn inform development practices. From a post-development perspective, hegemonic development theories represent the European and American economic and political trajectory as the normal course of historic development, and it is this 'logic' that drives the promotion of the Westernization of the world (Sachs, 1993: 4). In doing so, these theories ignore the historical specificity of the Western experience and the factors that contributed to the rise of capitalist forms of modernity, such as colonization of other regions of the world. But more importantly, the universalistic logic results in a denial of global diversity, since it recognizes only one (Western) way of thinking about the economy and political arrangements. As Wolfgang Sachs contends, '[t]he worldwide simplification of architecture, clothing, and daily objects assaults the eyes; the accompanying eclipse of variegated languages, customs and gestures is already less visible; and the standardization of desires and dreams occurs deep down in the subconscious of societies. . . . The mental space in which people dream and act is largely occupied today by Western imagery' (ibid.).

Closely linked to the universalistic logic is the tendency of hegemonic theories—e.g., modernization, women in development, and neoliberal perspectives—to portray the diverse societies in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Latin America as marching on the same path towards developmental modernity regardless of their historical experiences and where they are positioned in the evolving world political and economic system. This tendency, which post-development scholars refer to as **homogenization**, is reductionist and simplistic

and does not facilitate our understanding of the complex and diverse histories and cultures of the various societies in these regions. Further, the tendency to homogenize has significant effects not only on development policy but also on the political and economic processes in these parts of the world. In the main, this trend has generated the creation of development blueprints that are informed by the logic of 'one size fits all': an economic development project crafted for Lesotho might also be applied to Malaysia. Such an approach, which, for instance, is embedded in neoliberal development theory, informs structural adjustment policies. These policies have had (and continue to have) significant political, cultural, and economic effects in the Global South, because what might work for Chile will not necessarily generate the same results in India, given the different historical and contemporary political, cultural, and economic trajectories of the two countries. For post-development scholars, historically grounded analysis has tended not to apply to hegemonic theories of development.

Post-Development Thought in Practice: Alternatives to Development

When compared to other critical perspectives in development studies (such as dependency, Marxism, and even approaches promoting the notion of 'another development' as articulated by scholars such as Bjorn Hettne [1990]), the post-development school departs significantly from these traditions (see Boxes 4.3 and 4.4). While offering interesting insights into the limitations of hegemonic theories of development (such as modernization and neoliberalism), these other critical traditions are still wedded to the concept of development. The objective of scholars working within these traditions is to find better conceptual tools and development practices, not to transcend the discourse of development. For example, for dependency theorists, what is at stake is understanding the historical and structural conditions that have constrained development processes in the Global South. In the case of scholars such as Hettne [1990], the concept of 'another development' is presented as a tool for dismantling the **Eurocentric** roots of hegemonic development theories and for facilitating the institution of economic and political practices that take account of environmental concerns, local cultural practices,

deeper forms of democratic participation in the development process, and self-reliance. For post-development thinkers such as Escobar, traditional critiques in development studies remain entangled in the discourse they aim to interrupt. As he states,

> such analyses have generated proposals to modify the current regime of development: ways to improve upon this or that aspect . . . even its redeployment with a new rationality (for instance, socialist, anti-imperialist, or ecological). These modifications, however, do not constitute a radical positioning in relation to the discourse. (Escobar, 1995b: 214–15)

THE POST-DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL: BRIEF NOTES ON CRITIQUES

The powerful critiques levelled against the traditional development apparatus in the 1990s by scholars such as James Ferguson, Arturo Escobar, Jonathan Crush, and Wolfgang Sachs made thinking and writing about development no longer 'business as usual', as a colleague in Malawi once stated, reflecting on Ferguson's work in Lesotho. Suddenly, with the emergence of their work, the emperor of development had no clothes. Since its emergence, however, the post-development perspective has been criticized by a range of scholars in development studies, and post-development thinkers have responded to dominant critiques (see generally, Escobar, 2006). Some critics of post-development thought claim that while this perspective may offer scathing critiques of development discourse, it does not provide concrete alternative models based on the Derridean deconstructionist roots that inspired its original claims (Watts, 1993, 1995). Other critics contend that the post-development approach to the concepts and practices of development is ahistorical. Scholars of 'doctrines of development', writing from a historical perspective (e.g., Cowen and Shenton, 1996), argue that contentious debates about the concept of development, such as those prompted by the work of Ferguson, Escobar, and others, are nothing new. As an example, they note that similar debates were the hallmark of nineteenth-century writings by Saint-Simonians in France and others on the nature and definition of concepts such as progress and development.

The post-development perspective also has been charged with having a romanticized vision of non-Western societies. It allegedly fails to account for complex histories (although its scholars claim that this is one of their concerns when they examine the totalizing hegemonic theories that rely on a universalistic logic). Seen through a historical lens, colonial political, cultural, and economic processes left indelible traces that have influenced identity formation (e.g., Christianity, class) and that continue to influence the diverse historical trajectories of countries in the Global South. Thus, for instance, a simple binary representation of a 'corrupt' Western and a 'pure and human' non-Western knowledge form does not capture the nuanced and multi-layered social reality of post-colonial societies. Arguing that post-development theory fails in that regard, Christine Sylvester (1999: 709) states: 'Like most development thinking, it seems devoid of a sense of the devious ways that knowledge has been "worlded" by the forces of globalization such that local ideas become hybrid. It places faith in new social movements the way Marxists did in guerrilla movements of the 1970s.' Looking through a critical feminist lens, Sylvester accuses post-development scholars of neglecting the ways in which 'local struggles, such as those that are feminist and those that are patriarchal, can get in each other's way, work at cross-purposes, or amplify reactionary elements' (ibid.).

SUMMARY

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

QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL THOUGHT

1. What do scholars mean when they claim that development discourses are ahistorical and that they depoliticize political and economic processes in the Global South?
2. In what ways does a representational system influence development policy?
3. Discuss the link between colonial ideas and post-1945 development discourses.
4. What historical conditions influenced the rise of post-development thought?
5. Why is it claimed that the question of knowledge production and circulation is central to students of development?
6. What contributions have the 'alternatives to development' framework made to development studies?

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RELATED WEBSITES

Arturo Escobar webpage
www.unc.edu/~aescobar

Gustavo Esteva webpage
gustavoesteva.org/09

Stuart Hall (biography on Wikipedia)
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stuart_Hall_(cultural_theorist)

World Social Forum
www.forumsocialmundial.org.br

NOTE

1. While the term 'Global South' is used in this chapter in its discussion of development discourses and their representation of politico-economic processes in Latin America, Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East, it is mainly aimed at signalling the significant power divide reflected in the contemporary 'world order' (Cox, 1981). Thus, it does not assume that social formations in what is commonly referred to as the Global South share a homogeneous history and are destined to follow a unilinear and uncontested political, economic, and cultural trajectory, as has been articulated by post-1945 hegemonic development theories.

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