

# Interrupting the Discourse of Development: On a Collision Course with Postcolonial Theory

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**Abstract** *This article examines the possibility of an engagement between the discourse of Development and postcolonial theory. To open up a space for this kind of engagement, the article proposes first that, while there is no singularity of project within the field of Postcolonial Studies, there is a productive set of debates; and second that the necessity of questioning Development as an idea springs out of these debates around the nature and existence of Postcoloniality itself. It attempts to show how the critiques which have currency within postcolonial theory can be used to deconstruct Development and expose the mechanisms and tropes of power which Development as a discourse has in common with colonial discourse and modernity as a project. The scope of this article is to lay the groundwork for a continued engagement of Postcolonial with Political Studies, and in particular with the discourse of Development.*

Despite its bitterness and violence, the whole point of Fanon's work is to force the European metropolis to think its history *together with* the history of colonies awakening from the cruel stupor and abused immobility of Imperial dominion [ . . . ]

(Edward Said (1989))

The critical double bind these charges raise is clear enough. You can empower discursively the native, and open yourself to charges of downplaying the epistemic (and literal) violence of colonisation; or play up the absolute nature of colonial domination, and be open to charges of negating the subjectivity and agency of the colonised, thus textually replicating the repressive operations of colonialism. In agency, so it seems, begins responsibility.

(Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1991))

## Introduction

In spite of the institutional clout of postcolonial theory and the home it appears to have made for itself in many academic institutions under such rubrics as English, Cultural Studies and Critical Theory, the most damning of the critiques it could possibly make with regard to international politics and

power have never been carried to their full force and implication. There is a limited number of disciplines upon which postcolonial theory has made an impact and it is time for theorists who take up the critiques raised within Postcolonial Studies to force the issue beyond the domain of literary and cultural studies.

There is no consensus in the field of Postcolonial Studies either about its object of study or the terminology it uses to describe both itself and its various objects. The field can be loosely characterised as a series of debates around who is 'postcolonial', when is the 'postcolonial', and what it means to be 'postcolonial'. In a recent article in *Third World Quarterly* entitled 'Development Studies and Postcolonial Studies: Disparate Tales of the Third World', Christine Sylvester (1999) notes the complete lack of critical engagement between Development Studies (which I would extend to include Political Studies in general) and Postcolonial Studies. Sylvester proposes that there is a gap where these two fields of inquiry could fruitfully be brought into conversation with one another. She points out that, where Development Studies as a discipline is historically unapologetic in its Eurocentrism, Postcolonial Studies has in recent years come under fire for its theoretical self-reflexivity and lack of political engagement. According to Arturo Escobar, the number of 'third-world' voices calling for a dismantling of the entire discourse of Development is fast increasing (Escobar 1995: 15). And as Sylvester points out,

most of today's Development work either makes no mention of the colonial period or makes no apology for it [...] One gets the impression that the structural adjustment wing of mainstream Development studies aims to finish once and for all the task of fitting the colonies to the still-modern models of Western political economy. (Sylvester 1999: 717).

I would assert that this elision of colonial history occurs in almost all Development writing since its inception as a discourse in the post-war years and that this elision within mainstream Development Studies is both *operative* and *enabling* and is the key to understanding its inherent Eurocentrism. At the same time there has been a growing critique that the term 'postcolonial' has no clarity of usage and has come to include so many different locations and time periods to which, according to Michael Sprinker in *Late Imperial Culture*, it seems that anyone, anywhere can lay a claim (Sprinker 1995: 5).

Sylvester's article proposes an engagement between Development and Postcolonial Studies, where the latter could expand its field of inquiry to include some material from its own terrain, for example imaginative literature and travel writing, and she points out that some strands in alternative Development Studies (for example New Social Movements, dependency theorists and 'post-Development thinkers', in particular Arturo Escobar) could be honed by the critiques raised by Postcolonial Studies to 'pull out and analyse the stuff of everyday postcolonial deprivation and desire' (Sylvester 1995: 719). I would argue that the problematic as Sylvester outlines it needs to be revised and expanded upon in several ways but within the scope of this paper I shall offer only the following: that there is a problematic of

periodisation around the colonial and postcolonial moments, a problematic which haunts the academic term 'postcolonial'. It needs to be emphasized – in contradiction to Sylvester's recommendations – that there is no singularity of project within all that goes under the heading 'Postcolonial Studies', but instead there is a *productive* set of debates which need, in combination with Development Studies, to be vigorously rethought. This paper will aim, therefore, to show briefly and in a preliminary way, how a productive set of debates within Postcolonial Studies and left-wing cultural criticism can be applied to begin to question the very logic and desirability of 'Development'. To do this necessitates problematising first and foremost the 'post' of postcolonial inquiry so as to address the problems and disagreements that exist within the field itself. Arising out of these debates around the very constitution of the 'postcolonial' are critiques of historicism and dialectics which, when applied to the very idea of Development, have the power to expose certain mechanisms and tropes of power which Development as a discourse has in common with colonial discourse and modernity as a project. The scope of this paper is to lay the groundwork for a continued engagement of postcolonial theory with Political Studies, and in particular the discourse of Development.

### **Problematising the post**

Much of the debate among theorists who self-classify or who, for convenience, are classified as 'postcolonial' critics centres around terminology, but what is more broadly at stake within these debates is a consensus around conceptions of history, power and the ability to self-represent. The inability to define 'postcoloniality' in any satisfactory way that is not immediately contested by others in the field speaks volumes for what I am calling the problematic of periodisation. The debate over what it means to be 'postcolonial' – in addition to arguments for the term's theoretical usefulness but descriptive inadequacies – signals the necessity of attempting to theorise the continuities in global power, rather than trying to delimit political, temporal and spatial intervals of history. The debate seems to hinge on the shift back and forth from a post-structuralist, post-modernist relativism, which, when gauged on the political spectrum, tends to look more like a privileged and celebratory liberalism, to a more materialist and Marxist bent which tends to want to retrieve and cling to marginalised identities and the ontic facts of inequality, and positions itself against the discursivity of the post-structuralist turn. The debate over for whom, how and when post-coloniality begins is complicated by the fact that European colonisation was a multiple, varied and complex endeavour undertaken at different times, in different ways by many different countries and by the fact that decolonisation has spanned three centuries. In light of this complexity, it is more appropriate according to Ahmad 'to think of the many genealogies of [colonial] dominance than to speak of an undifferentiated "postcoloniality"' (Ahmad 1995: 26).

Ahmad and other critics of the post-structuralist turn (Ella Shohat, Terry Eagleton, Benita Parry and Arif Dirlik) have taken issue with the tendency ahistorically to conflate colonial histories. According to Parry (1994) there is a

tendency towards too strong a reliance on the linguistic turn to avoid issues of ontological violence. It must never be forgotten, over-written or under-emphasised that the *political effects* of certain discourses are enacted *upon people's bodies*. Missing this point is what is at stake in too heavy an emphasis on the discursive mechanisms of power.

Ahmad argues that the national particularities of decolonisation are not only country-specific but also that in many countries 'as time passes, decade by decade, their colonial backgrounds become more remote' (Ahmad 1995: 24). Furthermore, Ahmad suggests that there is no one-to-one relationship between late colonial regimes and what gets called neo-colonialism or, in contemporary terms, globalisation. He argues that it is only since 1989 that India has succumbed to the military and economic structures of imperialism, thereby pointing to a transition in power from late colonialism to global capitalism which implies that it is staggered and discontinuous. While I would agree that the conflation of globalisation with colonialism would be an erroneous reduction, Ahmad's position keeps us from asking the question which most desperately needs posing: How has the global division of power established by colonialism been maintained through relations of global capital, the international trading regime and its preponderant discourses?

The post-structuralist counterposition (Jorge Klor de Alva) insists that the term 'postcolonial' should signify not so much a temporal 'coming after', that is demarcating an historical period as such, but rather that it should signify a subjectivity which opposes colonial and any otherwise subordinating practices (Loomba 1998: 12), thereby becoming (Ato Quayson) a strategy of resistance, a state we should be working to bring about, rather than a descriptive period marker. What is valuable in post-structuralist thinking is its persistent questioning and deconstruction of linear modes of historical thinking upon which Ahmad relies in part for his critique. I would argue that while there is a definite danger in the way that post-structuralist theories can be taken up to serve liberal ideological ends, there is also a danger in adopting too stringent a materialism or positivism (as Jameson, Ahmad and Eagleton tend to do) which inevitably run the risk of congealing into more conservative and authoritative claims about ontological 'truth'. The political effectivity of the work of Bhabha, Spivak and Said, for example, is crucial when it is considered how hard colonial discourse works both to mask the colonial relation and to erase the impact of the colonial 'other', since all of these projects are praxes of *interruption*, *recollection* and *exposure* of a wilful cultural amnesia. I would maintain that the self-reflexive, deconstructing, anti-authoritarian manoeuvres of post-structuralist theories need to be rigorously and *responsibly* employed while endeavouring at the same time to make a political claim about what is 'wrong' in the world, all the while maintaining a rigorous positionality around every claim made, recognising that there is always and inevitably something at stake, and always and inevitably a vested interest.

Another danger articulated by critics of the post-structuralist turn is signalled by its prefix. I would argue that what all of the 'posts' in recent epistemic concerns perform is a masking of the continuities between the shifts in power, making it more difficult to theorise these continuities and make assertions about their persistence when it is so widely accepted and posited,

in spite of the complexities of the critique, that colonialism, modernism, industrialism etc., have ended.<sup>1</sup> Rather, global power needs to be theorised in a way that emphasises its continual reorganisation, restructuring and reconstitution. What occurs at this juncture is not an easy transition, but a complicated, if subtle, shift. McClintock maintains that the use of the proliferation of the 'post' signals a 'widespread, epochal crisis in the idea of linear, historical progress' (McClintock 1992: 10). But I would argue to the contrary that the proliferation of these periodising markers signifies implicit assumptions directly in line with the dominant European historicism which, in spite of the critiques of many theorists on the left, continually posits and re-posit itself.

The argument often put forward at this juncture is that, via the very theorising of colonial power, the agency of the colonised has been written out, thereby rehearsing the very same mechanism of power one seeks to dismantle by exposition. There is a growing consensus that postcolonial theorising must do justice to 'both levels', the agency of the colonised and the power of the coloniser – understanding the complicated, competitive and sometimes intersecting manoeuvres of each. While there is insufficient space to undertake it here, an integral part of the project I am proposing is an examination of 'third-world' responses to the mainstream modernisation narrative via the translation and dislocation (in Bhabha's sense of the word [Bhabha 1994: 19–39]) of Marx(ism) into 'third-world' contexts, the resulting circumstance of which exposes the limits of the original Marxian narrative. Since this paper is merely an introduction to and the proposal of a project to come, it will only set out in a provisional way some of the critiques of mainstream Development writing that postcolonial theory can add to the critiques already engaged in by alternative schools of thought on Development (for example, Samir Amin and the dependency school and more recently Arturo Escobar and Wolfgang Sachs).

The fact that by the 1930s colonies and ex-colonies covered 84.6% of the globe's surface (Loomba 1998: xii), and the fact that by and large all of the divisions in economic and political power created by the processes of colonialism are still in place means that in spite of the incongruities, contestations and specificities of colonial relations and histories, there are continuities, a constancy of succession, *a perpetuation of relations similar enough to necessitate their theorisation*. The 'trans-historicism' with which Ahmad charges postcolonial theorists, and which he so fears will put historical specificity under erasure is not a naïve conflation of all the complexities of history, but rather a recognition of historically, materially and politically specific set of circumstances which has brought so many disparate histories into collision with one another. I would argue that the agency of the colonised is not necessarily eroded by an analysis of the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Post-industrialism' and observations of changes in particular economies toward a service-based industry (like those made by Castoriadis in 'The Retreat from Autonomy: Post-Modernism as Generalised Conformism' [1997: 32–33] for example) are particularly unwarranted given that industrialism has not ended – it has simply *shifted* by and large to the export processing zones of various 'developing' countries.

continuities in power, but rather that the agency of the colonised is *presupposed* in such an analysis. Rather than configuring the problematic in such a way that Europe and Eurocentrism repeatedly and inherently contaminate any mode of resistance, the emphasis should be placed rather on Europe's 'contamination' from its inception with its own violence against its colonial 'other', a contamination which continually serves as a source of anxiety, paradox, contradiction and impetus for repeated violence. The agency of resistance is presupposed by and moreover is a *precondition* for colonial violence. It is a very specific set of historical circumstances that requires 'the European metropolis to think its history *together with* the history of colonies' (Said 1989: 208, my emphasis) and it is this imperative '*thinking together*' which informs the project I undertake here.

### **Interrogating the telos: questions of 'whiteness', historicism, dialectics and the discursive effects of elision**

Postcolonialism's critiques of temporality and modernity (particularly in the work of Homi Bhabha) need to be brought to bear on mainstream strands of Development thinking because of its construction of a teleology of industrial development. While this construction is something that both mainstream and alternative narratives share (for example, neo-Marxism, the Dependency school and Samir Amin) in all cases this telos is constructed and constituted via an elision. While most neo-Marxist schools have tried to show that Development and colonisation are part of the same process, most left-wing theorising on Development (for example, dependency theorists and Arturo Escobar in particular) fail to notice this elision or theorise its consequences and effects. This is a specific element of understanding Eurocentric power which postcolonial theorists bring to the table.

At the same time, there are other strands of leftist cultural theory inflected by post-structuralism which do not fall under the postcolonial rubric strictly speaking, but whose anti-authoritarian, anti-colonial/patriarchal critiques are complementary to and partially enabled by the critiques raised by postcolonial theorists. I am thinking particularly of race and representation theories (bell hooks, Henry Louis Gates Jr), and the adjacent field of critical 'whiteness' studies (Richard Dyer, David Roediger, Robert Young), as well as gender and queer theories (Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler) and combinations and crossings between these fields (Kobena Mercer, Isaac Julien), recognising between them the ontological intersection of the categories (race, gender/sexuality, class) with which they deal. These theories and the debates within them, when cross-sectioned and combined, produce an effective and potentially radical set of critiques. Subsequently, not only does postcolonial theory need to extend its object of analysis, but the disciplinarianisation of Postcolonial Studies itself also needs to be rigorously questioned, extended, revised and possibly renamed to overcome its internal contradictions and to include and engage with other like-minded fields of inquiry, bringing them all to bear on constructions and discourses of history and politics. With that in mind I can begin to show the kinds of critiques that post-colonial and anti-oppressive cultural theories can bring to the discussion of Development.

## 'White/Euro supremacy'

After World War II Development was posited by the World Bank and other post-war institutions as universal, inevitable and inherently valuable and as something that naturally springs from the boon of enlightenment. And yet, paradoxically, the Development of the 'poor' countries after the war was constructed as something which must be actively undertaken. This contradiction between the assumed *inevitability* of Development and the *necessity* of its being actively undertaken in 'third-world' contexts works both to underscore and to undermine a white and/or euro-supremacy, that is, the positing of Europe and the West as the ineffable and inevitable site of human progress. White/Euro supremacy is facilitated by this contradiction because according to its logic the highest forms of human Development would only naturally spring from Europe and the West, whereas the 'third world', characterised within most Development theories as backward, static, traditional and lacking in the capacity to produce wealth, would 'naturally' require the assistance of the West. The supremacy is partially undermined within this very same logic because, while the 'third world' of necessity requires 'first-world' assistance to achieve the highest goals of humanity, according to the logic of supremacy and the myth of cultural primacy it should only really be achievable by the West. Inferior alterity, the 'other', is needed for the West's self-construction as *developed*. If it were possible for Western commercial industrialisation to spread the world over, the West would lose its primacy.

Richard Dyer in *White* theorises the mechanisms of white supremacy as an idea which rests upon the paradox of being at once both present and absent, both of the body and transcending the body, 'never reducible to the corporeal' (Dyer 1997: 14) and yet fully able to organise the material into projects of imperialism. In his words: 'it has *enterprise*' (Dyer 1997: 15). Dyer gives a thumbnail sketch of the 'white' or 'white supremacist' ideal which registers itself as a dynamic of aspiration and transcendence whereby material achievement can be construed as the temporary and partial triumph of mind over matter, the progressive, developmental nature of which is of necessity continually deferred. Dyer identifies in the dualistic nature of whiteness, the control of mind over body, that the appeal to the non-corporeal, the disembodied *enterprise* of whiteness, is a threat to its reproduction. 'The very thing that makes us [sic] white [that is, control, aspiration and asexual disembodiment] endangers the reproduction of whiteness' (Dyer 1997: 27). Whiteness and the West need to reproduce themselves without being 'contaminated' at the level of the body. The trope of enterprise comprises the characteristics of energy, will (control of self and others), ambition and the ability to 'see things through'. The effects of enterprise are 'discovery', science, business, wealth creation, the building of nations, the organisation of labour, in a word, *Development*.

The ambivalence around reproduction and what I have called the politics of *not resembling* rest upon the fact the un/underdevelopment of the 'third world' is a reminder to the 'developed world' of all that it needs in order continually to reproduce itself. And yet the logic of modernity demands that Development spread the world over, so that when the 'third world' persistently *does not resemble* the 'first', it gives the lie to the notion of universal

Development. The result is that this failure to resemble becomes a source of deep anxiety to the Western episteme because the logic of a universal subjectivity, the unquestionable value of Development and the spread of the Western model necessitate that the 'third world' *resemble* the 'first'. This notion of an inevitable *enterprise* – the figure of a universal humanity to be realised in the providently and fatefully sanctioned enterprises of 'white'/European people – works in the context of Development theory if and only if the necessity of colonial conquest, the violent necessity of subordination, is written out of the equation. Herein lies a second aspect which undermines the 'myth of historical origination – racial purity, cultural priority' in the *inevitable/necessary* tension. At the heart of white supremacy and the Western telos is anxiety for a non-existent originary presence. It is for this reason that the figure of the colonial moment, when it is actively, purposefully remembered and theorised *together with* the figures of modernity and Development, can serve to shatter the illusion of Western supremacy culminating in Development. The strategy of *thinking together* reveals the absurdity of the project of global Development and thereby the staging of the historicist narrative becomes exposed. The critique of modernity articulated by Postcolonial Studies – that it is a teleological self-construction predicated on the principle of an elision – has the potential to deconstruct and dismantle the entire idea of 'Development' and hold neo-classical, liberal, neo-liberal and some Marxist strands of Development thinking accountable for their complicity in the continuities in global power.

### *Historicism and Dialectics*

Arturo Escobar's thesis in *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* is that the discourse of Development is a discursive construct which produces its object – the 'third world' (Escobar 1995: 11). Escobar comes close to concretising the link between Development and colonial discourse and makes use of Homi Bhabha's description of colonial discourse, making the crucial point that the construction of the 'third world' in Development literature is a process of the recognition and construction of difference and its subsequent disavowal. He argues:

Development assumes a teleology to the extent that it proposes that the 'natives' will sooner or later be reformed; at the same time, however, it reproduces endlessly the separation between reformers and those to be reformed by keeping alive the premise of the 'Third World' as different and inferior, as having a limited humanity in relation to the accomplished European. Development relies on this perpetual recognition and disavowal of difference. (Escobar 1995: 53)

Development constitutes itself via the creation of degenerative types which it can then treat and reform (Escobar 1995: 41). The category 'less developed' becomes a trope within Development literature which assumes the existence of an aboriginal economy, a peasant population with 'traditional' modes of agricultural production, and a national economy whose task it is the national government's to develop (Escobar 1995: 47).



The 'third world' as 'other' is constructed as a space to be mapped out and known, a need which was met by the increasing professionalisation of Development as a discipline with the establishment of Development Studies programmes in most major universities and the creation and restructuring of 'third-world' universities to suit the needs of Development agencies (Escobar 1995: 45). The institutional and international spread of Development discourse and the implementation of its theories and assumptions in the policies of the (European-Asian-American dominated) 'international' financial and trading infrastructure consolidates an effective network of power, one which I would argue signals an aspect of the shift from older modes of colonial organisation which could never have been so successfully pervasive, in part because the unquestioned narrative of development has been spread by both mainstream and left-wing practitioners. In the cases of Kenya and Tanzania, the Dependency school was instrumental in introducing the notion of development in the universities, even if the reign of dependency was short-lived (Blomström and Hettne 1984: 155). The agency and complicity of internal governments in their own 'underdevelopment' has always been a central subject of debate between Marxists and Neo-Marxists. While there is no space to rehearse that debate here, the success of Development as an idea over the 'civilising mission' of the late colonial project could be due in part to a shift in rhetorical emphasis, because, while no-one wants to be colonised, everyone wants to 'develop'.<sup>2</sup>

Escobar also makes the point that central to all theories of Development is the modernist trope of visibility (Escobar 1995: 56), that is, the necessity of composing the world as a picture to be consumed panoptically at a glance. The modern, according to Homi Bhabha, is the culmination of visibility and self-reflexivity, its essential gesture is an 'ethics of self-construction' (Bhabha 1994: 171). Entailed in this self-construction is not only a violence of subordination of others and an *elision* of other histories, but an anxiety for all that can possibly resurface to disrupt its self-constitution and expose it as such – revealing the fact of its staging.

It is because postcolonial theory has theorised so thoroughly the problematics of dialectics and of historicism that it has the potential to expose the historical amnesia at work in every linear, progressive model of history. In the article, "'Race", Time and the Revision of Modernity', Homi Bhabha poses the question of modernity as a problematics of temporality, a 'time lag'. He asks: 'what is the now of modernity? Who defines this present from which we speak?' (Bhabha 1994: 244). He opens his discussion with Fanon's refusal of 'the Hegelian-Marxist dialectical schema whereby the black man is part of a transcendental sublation: a minor term in a dialectic that will emerge into a more equitable universality' (Bhabha 1994: 238). The 'third' and 'first' worlds operate according to this transcendental sublation whereby the 'third world' is perceived to be located somewhere in the Western past, 'pre-capitalist', 'pre-industrial', in a liminal space. The

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<sup>2</sup> Asian countries (Japan and China in particular) actively sought industrial Development in their efforts to avoid being colonised by expanding hegemonically, that is, colonizing in their own regions (Arndt 1987: 13).

dialectical manoeuvrings of modernity are meant to incorporate colonised space into history proper. The 'development' of the entire globe is prophesied to bring 'a more equitable universality'. In order that modernity fulfil its own prophecy, the 'third world' must be made to *resemble* the 'first' so that the colonising and subordinating activities can be justified in the name of a greater good, that is 'global Development'. Bhabha asserts that when the 'dialectic of modernity is brought to a standstill' then the very staging of colonial power is exposed (Bhabha 1994: 253–54).

It is for this reason that the application of various debates within postcolonial theory can so effectively call into question the idea of Development as such. It is via the pervasive logic of historicism and this operative elision within political writing on Development that colonised spaces can be characterised for example as 'pre-capitalist' or 'pre-industrial', as in the following passage from *The Theory of Economic Progress* (1944) by C.E. Ayres:

[...] the technological revolution is itself irresistible, the arbitrary authority and irrational values of pre-scientific, pre-industrial cultures are doomed. Three alternatives confront the partisans of tribal values and beliefs. Resistance, if sufficiently effective, though it cannot save the tribal values, can bring on total revolution. Or ineffective resistance may lead to sequestration like that of the American Indians. The only remaining alternative is that of intelligent, voluntary acceptance of the industrial way of life and the values that go with it. (Quoted in Sylvester 1999: 705)

According to this logic, which classical Marxists and liberal economists shared, not only are capitalism and modernity posited as inevitable and as the beginning of history proper, but also the implicit elision or division inscribed by the affix 'pre' rhetorically disengages colonial spaces from capitalist spaces and masks the fact that colonial spaces are inseparably and integrally an enabling part of 'developed' capitalist spaces. It is the recollection of this fact that has the potential to stop the discursive impetus of dialectics dead in its tracks. What this passage signals more explicitly is a paradoxical *ambivalence* around the entire notion of Development. Development is seen as inevitable and *irresistible*. 'Pre-scientific', 'pre-industrial', by which is also meant pre-historic, cultures are doomed and had therefore better succumb to the forces of *History* 'voluntarily'. And yet, if resistance against the *natural*, dialectical forces of History is futile, why must 'Development' be so actively undertaken and forced upon societies that may or may not wish so to organise themselves? While this logic underpins a doctrine of white/Euro supremacy whereby un/underdeveloped spaces are perceived as inferior, primitive, pre-historic and *lacking* in the capacity to develop as has Europe (via colonialism), the accompanying rationale that this responsibility for developing the world should naturally and benevolently fall to Europe works nevertheless in tension with the whole notion of the inevitable, dialectical forces of history and modernity. The same discursive logic which posits the 'pre' also posits the 'post' of recent epistemic concerns, making assumptions around and placing a value and emphasis on a European historicist version of History which requires for its narrative logic the positing of an artificial closure and rupture.

Anne McClintock explores this ambivalence and contradiction in relation to tropes of domesticity and nature within nineteenth-century colonial discourse:

The historical idea of domesticity thus bears an ambivalent relation to the idea of imperial nature, for 'domestication' bears energetically upon nature in order to produce a social sphere that is considered to be natural and universal in the first place. (McClintock 1992: 35)

So too must European Development work energetically upon the 'third world' for its 'salvation', in spite of the fact that Development is supposed to be contingent on the 'natural forces of history'. The ambivalence around colonial self-construction via such tropes as nature, history, progress, domesticity are theorised to be always/already disrupted by the alterity of their binary antithesis (that is, the unnatural, prehistory, stagnation and the public sphere). The 'other', while it is always housed and subsumed within the dialectical construction, is always theorised as a source of anxiety and unease. For Anthony Vidler this alterity manifests itself aesthetically as the 'uncanny' and he links this sense of unease, with particular reference to the aesthetic uncanny in architecture, historically with the post-war disillusion in Europe as homeland and the growing sense of the transcendental homelessness of modern man, the feeling of fundamental rootlessness that accompanies near global domination (Vidler 1996: 3). I would argue that because this alterity is always caged within the dialectical schema it can only ever serve as a motivating source of anxiety which prompts a repetitious and continuous will to subsume the self's constituting alterity within the 'one', enabling a constant, frantic and schizophrenic reassertion of power. According to Vidler it is the 'fearful invasion of an alien presence' (Vidler 1996: 3) already within the constitution of the self/same which is at the heart of modern anxiety, but I want to argue that, rather than disrupting the binary logic, this anxiety gets put to use towards its continuance. This possibility of dislocating dialectical or historicist logic by remembering what the prefix 'pre' wants us to forget (that is, that colonised spaces are integrally and inseparably an enabling part of 'developed' capitalist spaces) does not operate according to the same dialectical logic, it is not immanent within the binary opposition since the amnesia must be actively questioned. There is an *agency* and political strategy here, enabled by adding a 'postcolonial' perspective to the debate, because the remembering is not entailed within the forgetting as something that will inevitably develop. Remembering in the face of this elision is active and purposeful and must be emphasised strategically if it is not to be subsumed under the same subordinating dialectical logic, and incorporated and housed, as postcolonial theory almost invariably is, within the academy as a tokenism that is seldom allowed to disrupt the already pervasive disciplinary organisation and power structure of the Western academy and its curriculum.

### *The discursive effects of elision*

The application of postcolonial critiques of teleology is crucial for understanding and exposing the Eurocentrism at the heart of the very idea of

Development. What this paper hopes to illustrate in the following textual examples of elision in political writing is that, working rhetorically, this discursive mechanism has an ideological effect, which has in turn a political effect. Rhetorically, Development is always considered just to have 'happened' in the West. In the 1948 World Development Report (the first of its kind), the World Bank defined as 'poor' any country with an annual per capita income below \$100, prescribing what became a 'self-evident' solution: economic growth (Escobar 1995: 24). This new definition of poverty was couched in the language of 'discovery', the 'discovery' of mass poverty in formerly colonised regions and a wholesale rhetorical (re)construction of two-thirds of the world's population as 'poor', as if these new institutions had no idea how this had come to be the case. The 'discovery' of poverty as an anomaly and threat is more precisely an elision of colonial relations of power and economics as surely as it is an imposition of an arbitrary monetary measurement which facilitates the needs of a Western trading regime in need of markets. And just as with the World Bank's 'discovery' of poverty, virtually every consideration of the 'North-South' divide occurs with no consideration of how this 'gap' was produced in the first instance. And, as in W. W. Rostow's 'Five Stages of Growth' (1998), any historical account of the West's 'ascent' into 'Development' is given with no consideration of the vast economic and industrial gains enabled by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, favourable terms of trade within colonial domination and contact with other cultures. But what is crucial is that within the Eurocentric teleology of Rostow's five stages of economic growth is posited a primacy for Europe and a 'naturalness' of its ascendancy that completely elides the role of colonial conquest.

Working in concert with this mechanism of elision is the ethics of self-construction, already alluded to via Bhabha, which is part and parcel of the discursive power of modernity and Development. The ethics of self-construction – teleologically projecting a more equitable universality – manifests itself in mainstream Development writing in the articulation of 'one-worldism'. This 'one-worldism' is key both to the history of European colonisation, which systematically drew disparate cultures together under an increasingly singular trading regime, and to the teleological historicism embedded in the idea of Development itself. A prime example of this kind of 'one world' thinking and Eurocentrism in Development theory occurs in J.B. Condliffe's *Agenda for a Post-War World* written in 1943. Condliffe was a Professor of Economics at the University of California and his book is a prescription for peace, trade and reconstruction for the US and Western Europe after the war. In his preface he explicitly states that his book will contain 'no discussion of colonies' (Condliffe 1943: 16) because he predicts that that the colonial system will not long survive the war, and yet two of his chapters, 'International Economic Development' and 'The Dilemma of Commercial Policy', address the continued penetration of investment and access to raw materials in decolonising spaces. They suggest the importance of the colonised and de-colonising world to the colonising and re-colonising world and the absolute necessity of retaining colonial relations after the war under the guise of a Liberal trading regime. In his preface he argues with respect to colonialism that 'territorial imperialism, annexing colonial territories outright, is one way to link industrially advanced and backward peoples.

A *truly international* administration of undeveloped territories as “a sacred trust of civilisation” is the real alternative to such imperialism’ (Condliffe 1943: 16, my emphasis). In other words, the initiative for a new trading and financial order is a preferable alternative to colonialism. He goes on to wonder ‘whether truly international institutions can be organised, whether free capitalist enterprise is likely to survive the great expansion of government initiative caused by the war . . .’ (1943: 17) and he assumes, like Arndt and many others, that ‘truly international’ in fact merely entails a reference to the ‘West’ and subsumes colonised and/or ‘poor’ and/or newly independent spaces into its universality.

To examine further how these kinds of assumptions work textually, I have chosen as an example Angus Maddison’s ‘Income Growth, Income Gaps and the Ranking of Nations’ (1998). Maddison’s article was originally published by and was reproduced with the permission of the OECD and appeared in a work entitled *Monitoring the World Economy: 1820–1992* (1995). According to Seligson and Passé-Smith, Maddison ‘has long been one of the most prominent economic historians, providing Development scholars with some of the most reliable historical data with which to judge long-term economic growth patterns’ (Seligson and Passé-Smith 1998: 17). Describing early capitalism from 1500–1820, Maddison writes:

There were some advances in technology, living standards and productivity in Western Europe and its offshoots, and more limited progress in the European periphery. But the rest of the world was economically stagnant, and by 1820 the West had established a substantial leadership margin. (In Seligson and Passé-Smith 1998: 18)

The rhetorical elision is achieved first and foremost by the use of impersonal constructions, as in ‘there were some advances’. This is an authoritative discursive mechanism which alleviates the narrative voice of the necessity of specifying *why* or *how* these advances in technology, living standards and productivity occurred. The elision is also achieved by the use of euphemistic diction, as in ‘Western Europe and its offshoots’, as if the expansion of Western Europe into North America, Australia and New Zealand were an involuntary occurrence which did not require the systematic holocaust of indigenous populations to clear lands for agricultural productivity and the forced immigration of indentured and slave labour to extract agricultural produce and raw materials. The remainder of the passage is explicitly Eurocentric in its positing of an unspecified ‘other’ as it conflates ‘the rest of the world’, whose myriad differences are reducible to, and only characterisable as, ‘economically stagnant’. This implies a degeneracy and lack of *enterprise* (the inability to produce surplus capital) and a liminality or ‘blank slate’ (history/progress only begin with ‘freeing’ of ‘economic forces’ according to the Western model). In the last phrase of the passage, ‘by 1820 the West had established a substantial leadership margin’, there occurs a decisive linguistic elision whereby the adverbial information, that is, *how the West established a substantial leadership margin*, is simply left out. As a result, the tautological narrative one takes away from this passage is that the West is the

West because it developed – development happens to and because of the West. This kind of logic is also echoed in the writings of economist H.W. Singer (writing in the 1960s), who describes a ‘vicious circle’ of underdevelopment, ‘an underdeveloped country is poor [. . .] because it is poor’, and ‘one thing leads to another, but nothing leads to nothing’ (quoted in Arndt 1987: 58). Singer goes on to say that ‘the fundamental problem is no longer considered to be the creation of wealth, but rather the *capacity* to create wealth’ which resides in people, ‘it consists of *brain power*’ (quoted in Arndt 1987: 60).

Further examples from Maddison continue in the same vein as the passage quoted above with a clear and consistent rhetorical evasion of colonial history. I will provide a further three examples from the same excerpt:

The most prosperous have retained their privileged position, and the poorest have remained relatively poor. (1998: 19)

In demographic terms, the most rapid long-term growth has been in places which were relatively empty in 1820 and attracted large-scale immigration from Europe. (1998: 24)

It now seems clear that growth was generally much faster after 1820 than it was in the ‘proto capitalist’ period from 1500–1820, when Western Europe was slowly pulling ahead of the rest of the world. (1998: 25)

Alongside the recurrence of the phrase ‘catch up’ within Maddison’s article (which occurs very often in political writing on Development and which signals the presence of historicist assumptions of a time-lag for colonised spaces), these passages all illustrate the effects of the rhetorical elision of the colonial moment. The first assigns an inevitability to the global division of wealth by not specifying *how* either the poorest and most prosperous have continuously occupied these positions. The second passage echoes the well cited ‘myth of empty lands’ trope which has been well theorised by postcolonial critics and constitutes a complete elision of the historical and economic specificities of genocidal land clearance and the use of indentured and slave labour that would have been the cause of ‘rapid long-term growth’. The third passage likewise skips the fact that the period it identifies as ‘proto-capitalist’, 1500–1820, mirrors almost exactly the span of the slave trade in Britain<sup>3</sup> from 1500–1834 and leaves unexamined via what *agency* the West managed to ‘pull ahead’ of the rest of the world. Escobar suggests that these models ‘overlook’ (Escobar 1995: 82), as if by accident, the colonial context, but I want to suggest that grasping this elision as *operative* and *enabling* is crucial to understanding the way that Development discourse operates as colonial

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<sup>3</sup> It should always be remembered that like formal colonisation, the slave trade was perpetrated by many different countries and its demise was varied and staggered, and that slavery and forced labour occurs to this day.

discourse. It is for this reason that we can exist in a reorganised colonial world whose relations and structuring are directly related to the old colonial order but whose discourses and rhetoric work vigorously to mask the relation. It is as Bhabha points out in "'Race", Time and the Revision of Modernity', that hegemonic structures of power are 'maintained in a position of authority through a *shift in vocabulary* in the position of authority' (Bhabha 1994: 242). It is precisely via this shift and the elision and masking of its relations of power that the current colonial order manages to maintain and preserve itself.

## **The death of 'Development'**

The 'death knell' has been sounded many times within the discourse of Development itself most notably when it attempts to shift towards a more 'social' or humanitarian consciousness. In spite of these shifts and (r)evolutions, the Western-centric core of mainstream discourse, particularly in its liberal and neo-liberal manifestations, has remained intact while seeming to take on board criticisms launched at it from the left. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the varied nuances of the shifts and debates in left-wing and mainstream Development writing. This remains a research agenda to be taken forward. However, I shall devote a small space to examining briefly how shifts in policy work to incorporate and thereby nullify alternative voices. A good example is the World Bank's recent shift towards empowerment for the world's poor which is yet another instance of the appropriation of 'issues of social concern' and the adoption of a 'humanitarian' stance without ever proposing to change its *modus operandi*. In fact, this appropriation of 'social issues' has been made several times by Development agencies, and has occurred within colonial policy as well, and it is used to justify the same old policy directives of growth and market creation. This is an era when the World Bank is coming to be seen as an increasingly progressive organisation, expressing an unprecedented critique of its own past policies and acknowledging their 'failures'. Economic growth has become relativised, in the sense that it is conceived as one of the many aspects of development but not its chief goal, but it has never been called radically into question and is still seen to have an important role. An increasing GDP is still considered essential to achieving other objectives and the World Bank has (*re*)redefined poverty as the central purpose around which its policies would be based (Pender 2001: 406), which harks back to every major shift in development thinking since the World Bank's initial claims made in 1948.

The 2000/2001 World Development Report is titled *Attacking Poverty*, and claims as its mission 'a world without poverty'. The report (*re*)defines poverty as 'encompassing not only low income and consumption but also *low achievement* in education, health and nutrition, and other areas of human development' (World Development Report, 2000/2001, Foreword, my emphasis). From its outset then the report constructs poverty as a sign of degeneracy according to standards it alone can posit and police. Poverty, the report claims, 'remains a global problem of huge proportions', thus recalling the threat 'poverty' has always been conceived as posing to the 'world', by which is meant those countries in danger of losing valuable markets. In addition, the report expresses anxiety over the increase in population, estimating that, in

the next 25 years, approximately two billion people will be added to the world's population, 97% of which will be located in developing countries. This harks back to the tropes of whiteness and Western supremacy articulated earlier in this paper, that is, it expresses anxieties over primacy and reproduction, a fear of being overrun by a degenerate population which is incapable of controlling its birthrate. Endemic to this anxiety is the idea that the 'third world' cannot control itself and is therefore, of necessity, in need of management by the 'first world'. The very phrase 'managing vulnerability' appears in relation to poverty within the very first pages of the report.

This shift in vocabulary, like others before it, constructs those who are 'worse off' as the touchstone of policy and practice when it is World Bank policy and practice which in many cases put them there in the first place. As a result, the World Bank has shifted its policy from Structural Adjustment Programmes to a Comprehensive Development Framework, an insidiously broader policy initiative which encompasses every aspect of society. The conditionality of SAPs has shifted towards the necessity of 'good policy environments' for the Comprehensive Development Framework which becomes a revised conditionality for receiving financial support on the most favourable terms; in short, there must be demonstrated a clear commitment to the establishment of 'pro-poor' policies as defined by the Bank (Pender, 2001: 408). Those countries without 'good policy environments' will face aid restrictions and the active cultivation of opposition movements. The World Bank sees its redefined role in partnership with the 'third world' as that of a 'knowledge bank'. Its revised purpose is to define and propagate a model of development 'best practice' and the future role it defines for itself includes 'financing the overseas education of policy makers' (which is no departure from practices in place since the nineteenth century), and nurturing a 'strong domestic movement for change' in countries where the government is not committed to creating a 'good policy environment' (Pender 2001: 409). Such formulations are simply a shift in rhetoric from the conditionality of structure imposition for which the World Bank is presumably the best and only judge. The shifts from liberalism to embedded liberalism and back again to the supreme logic of the market which occurs in colonial policy and then is mirrored in development policy, project on to the 'third world' or 'dependencies' the necessity and problematic of *resembling* the metropolis and the promise of a 'development' which will never, because it *can* never arrive. It is for this reason that current critiques of Development on the left have begun using a postcolonial perspective to *think beyond* Development.

## Conclusion

In the last 10 years 'post-Development' thinkers (Escobar, Sachs and others) have given voice to some of the issues raised by postcolonial critics in other contexts. However, I would suggest that there is a broader scope for the manifestation of a project which engages postcolonial theory in an analysis of Development as a discourse. The purpose of this paper has been to suggest some of the kinds of analysis that can be brought to bear on the assumptions entailed in 'Development'. An engagement between Postcolonial Studies and the discourse of Development has the potential to unearth continuities



masked by the problematic historical periodising of the colonial and 'postcolonial'. A furthering of this research agenda could aim to show, for example, how deeply post-war Development discourse is embedded in late British colonial policy and practice, so that what has occurred is not a closure of one history (the colonial) and the instauration of another (the postcolonial), but rather, as Homi Bhabha has put it, 'a shift in vocabulary' from within the discourses of authority. This can be done by showing how Development as an idea has its genealogical roots in the Scottish Enlightenment and the translation of the Scottish Enlightenment into colonial political and trading policy. The introduction of Free Trade is central to political shifts and debates both within Development writing after the Second World War and also within British colonial policy and theory, c.1834–46. The genealogy of the modern political notion of 'Development' begins with the shift toward free trading colonial policies and has Free Trade and the various debates and changes issuing therefrom operating as a thread throughout.

Concurrent with its examination of shifts and continuities in mainstream policy-making and discourse, a collision between postcolonial studies and Development would necessitate, an examination of alternative, left-wing and 'third-world' commentary on the issue of Development, analysing what is at stake in these accounts and advancing the debate significantly. In response to the recent turn toward specificity, locality and agency, I would argue firstly, that there is still much work to be done understanding how colonial/post-and/or neo-colonial power (however contested) operates and continues to operate and, secondly, that theorising power in this way does not underwrite or negate the agency and resistance of the colonised but rather that it is the very place one should begin to theorise agency and resistance by singling out the gaps and anxieties in the operation of power.

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