

Post-colonialism and international development studies: a dialectical exchange?

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Divergent or convergent dialogues?

- Postcolonial studies is the term given for the study of diaspora and the ideology of colonialism.
- Since the 1970s, when postcolonial studies was termed 'third World' literature and in the 1980s, 'Commonwealth' literature, the persistence of the framework of centre and margin, coloniser and colonised, has endured as a lens with which to view human identity and cultural expression.
- However, the relationship of postcolonial studies to international development is less well explored. Indeed, much of postcolonial studies are concerned with articulating the patterns of gain, loss, inclusion, exclusion, identity formation and change, cultural evolution and human geographical dispersment in the wake of the after-effects of colonial rule.
- As Altback suggests, "One cannot be optimistic about an immediate end to neo-colonialism in any sphere, and perhaps especially in education. If anything, the scientific and educational gap between the advanced and the developing countries is growing . . ." (2002, p. 384).

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Immutable dialogical differences?

- As Mongia suggests, "... the term postcolonial refers not to a simple periodization but rather to a methodological revisionism which enables a wholesale critique of Western structures of knowledge and power, particularly those of the post-Enlightenment period." (2).
- From the perspective of marginalised voices and cultures who are concerned with the provisionality of identity, place and culture, postcolonial studies may seem occlusionary nevertheless as Sylvester states "development studies has spent its intellectual capital in toing and froing between top-down and bottom-up creeds of developmentalism, all of which are too steeped in Western bureaucratic authority to generate substantially new ideas" (1999, 718).
- Such ideas might include the postcolonial desire to reinvent cultures of marginalised in collaboration with development studies desire to raise the living standard of that culture structurally.

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Knowledge management in development of human resources

- Development studies is driven by the application of human capital to the furtherment of the development and potential of other forms of capital applied to a geographical area in which a need is identified to alleviate the stress of under-resourcing.
- As McLean and McLean state "Human resource development is any process or activity that, either initially or over the long term, has potential to develop . . . work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organisation, community, nation, or, ultimately, the whole of humanity" (McLean & McLean, 2001, p. 322).
- Thus it may be informed by geographical, political, economic, sociological, health and educated-based concerns. More generally development studies is characterised by the importance for growth, trade and security; green investment for climate and energy security, food security and health; resuscitating the global economy; re-regulating the financial system (2001, p. 607).

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Similarities and differences

- According to Sivey and Rankin, development studies in the twenty-first century is informed by "the retrenchment of millennial capitalist interests and the reinscription of historic patterns of uneven development, all aggressively buttressed by new technologies of social control and tactics of domination." (2010, p. 696).
- Thus neo-liberalism continues to result in uneven patterns of resource distribution among diverse groups that necessitate mobilisation and planning to remediate the effects of displacement and or to consolidate growth in undeveloped economies and societies. More specifically development studies continues to be concerned with issues such as "immigrant rights, poverty action, climate justice, and indigenous sovereignty" (2010, p. 697).
- However, strategists of development studies are quick to point out that their movement does not align itself with that of anti-capitalism or even with some extremist environmentalist causes, as Sivey and Rankin state, "[a]nti-capitalist social movements promote geographic imaginaries that differ in almost every respect from those at the centre of developmentalist renderings of spaces of globalisation" (2010, p. 697).

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Closer dialectical affinities: a shared geo-politics

- It is also within these liminal border-zones of trans-national geo-spatial relations that development studies has an affinity with post-colonial studies. Like post-colonial studies, development studies concerns itself with the shifting balances of resourcing, geospatial and geo-political power between North and South, it also celebrates the role of international migration in locating sites of intervention in cross-border control.
- Thus development studies, like postcolonial studies may be concerned with critiques of ethnicity, of the local vs. the global, of nationalism, race and racism including unexamined racial representations, and as Sivey and Rankin point out of "colonial geographic imaginaries and deep-seated hierarchies of 'first'/'third' worlds that continue to haunt most development thought and practice" (2010, p. 268).
- Development studies is concerned with a redistribution of the 'justice-oriented post-development map' (2010, p. 700) while postcolonial studies is concerned with the aesthetics, identity formation, culture, ideology, and theory of geo-political experience and media imaginary.

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Closer dialectical affinities: aesthetics or practicalities?

- But whereas post-colonialism might be accused of reflecting 'universalisms and ideals' development studies is more concerned with 'earthly interests' the direct confrontation of 'ideologies and prejudice' in their experienced locales' and the complex inter-balances of competition, struggle and co-operation' that comprise responses to alleviate these liminal zones of suffering.
- Consequently where postcolonial studies may be concerned primarily with an aesthetic understanding of cultural forms development studies focuses on the economic and social realities as central to the understanding of the 'spatiality of development' (2010, p. 701).
- Both postcolonial studies and development studies are thus linked to modernization, the first in examining the rhetoric of knowledge systems as instruments of 'power and coercion' and the latter in the mix of affordances it offers to remediate the living conditions of those who have been displaced by ideology or from whom resources have been taken or denied.
- The main challenge that developmental studies provides to postcolonial studies is that which perplexes both – that is the validity and recognition of different systems of thought. In fact the very real necessities of development studies broadly encompassing those patterns of geo-political concern which fall under the gaze of the United Nations (but not exclusively so), the lived realities of starving, war-torn and displaced peoples through into relief the ambiguities of the modernism within post-colonialism that may hinder produce but also positively effect change.

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Closer dialectical affinities: modernism and indigenity

- Furthermore, there is another aspect from which post-colonial studies and development studies may converge in modernisation, "[a] modernist identity is a historical-political construct based upon convergence of individuals and communities (abstract) interests for pursuing common goals" (2007, p. 361). To perceive of a modernist identity in this way is refreshing for theorists of postcolonial studies who regard modernism in many respects as the voice of the colonial oppressor rather than an aspirant of post-colonial identity. This suggests the fragility, mutability and 'provisional' nature of modernity. Perhaps this points to a 'common ground' whereby both the general and particular are themselves symptoms of a wider mis-reading of identity. As Behera suggests, "Nativism is the exact reverse of universalism; both lack forms of self-reflexivity" (2007, p. 359).
- Development studies also differs from postcolonialism in so much as it is not reliant on recontesting voice of the past – narratives, traditions and politics – it is rather concerned with allowing voice of those in present and ameliorating the resource needs of those who are suffering. The over-reliance on the past as a pathway to the future may be a symptom of the West's 'over-production' of knowledge. As Behera suggests, "The past can be a resource, or a great source of inspiration and self-confidence, but it can never become a model blueprint for the present" (2007, p. 359). Thus a distinct feature of indigenity is the accommodation and adaptation to change. However, postcolonial studies and development studies do strike a parallel in as much as they give voice to those on the margins but they do so from different socio-economic viewpoints – postcolonialism by a form of discourse-politics and development studies by the practical effects of geo-spatial identities.

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Conclusion: Postcolonialism and development studies - a dialectical exchange

- It is timely that both postcolonialism and development studies stop ignoring each other's dialogue. On the one hand postcolonial studies is concerned with tracing the patterns of colonial retreat and in examining the cultural legacy of its aftermath on the other it risks, as Rajan suggests, ignoring the political and socio-economic realities of the post-colonial nations from which it has retreated – including issues of "poverty, resource distribution, state violence, human-rights violations, urban sanitation, development" (1997, p. 615).
- On the other hand development studies has both 'theory' and the power of the "Western purse out in the 'Third World'" as Sylvester has put it with which to construct its agentive discourse (1999, p. 703). Yet there are potentially shared areas of convergence.
- Whatever form such integration takes it has to be acknowledged that the third word of postcolonial studies shares with development studies a desire to "insert the periphery, the marginal, the non-expert into their own destinies" (1999, p. 712). The debates over theoretical and methodological ideologies are conceptually closer than is widely known.
- The major difference from a discursive perspective, is rather the understanding of and orientation toward history. In the former, tending to be backward looking, hence the 'post' in postcolonial studies (perhaps akin to many indigenous communities view of time) and in comparison forwards looking in development studies.

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