

## 8 The Problematization of Poverty: The Tale of Three Worlds and Development

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The word "poverty" is, no doubt, a key word of our times, extensively used and abused by everyone. Huge amounts of money are spent in the name of the poor. Thousands of books and expert advice continue to offer solutions to their problems. Strangely enough, however, nobody, including the proposed "beneficiaries" of these activities, seems to have a clear, and commonly shared, view of poverty. For one reason, almost all the definitions given to the word are woven around the concept of "lack" or "deficiency." This notion reflects only the basic relativity of the concept. What is necessary and to whom? And who is qualified to define all that?

Majid Rahnema, *Global Poverty: A Pauperizing Myth*, 1991

One of the many changes that occurred in the early post-World War II period was the "discovery" of mass poverty in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Relatively inconspicuous and seemingly logical, this discovery was to provide the anchor for an important restructuring of global culture and political economy. The discourse of war was displaced onto the social domain and to a new geographical terrain: the Third World. Left behind was the struggle against fascism. In the rapid globalization of US domination as a world power the "war on poverty" in the Third World began to occupy a prominent place. Eloquent facts were adduced to justify this new war: "Over 1,500,000 million people, something like two-thirds of the world population, are living in conditions of acute hunger, defined in terms of identifiable nutritional disease. This hunger is at the same time the cause and effect of poverty, squalor, and misery in which they live" (Wilson 1953: 11).

Statements of this nature were uttered profusely throughout the late 1940s and 1950s (Orr 1953; Shonfield 1950; United Nations 1951). The new emphasis

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was spurred by the recognition of the chronic conditions of poverty and social unrest existing in poor countries and the threat they posed for more developed countries. The problems of the poor areas irrupted into the international arena. The United Nations estimated that per capita income in the United States was \$1,453 in 1949, whereas in Indonesia it barely reached \$25. This led to the realization that something had to be done before the levels of instability in the world as a whole became intolerable. The destinies of the rich and poor parts of the world were seen to be closely linked. "Genuine world prosperity is indivisible," stated a panel of experts in 1948. "It cannot last in one part of the world if the other parts live under conditions of poverty and ill health" (Milbank Memorial Fund 1948: 7; see also Lasswell 1945).

Poverty on a global scale was a discovery of the post-World War II period. As Sachs (1990) and Rahnema (1991) have maintained, the conceptions and treatment of poverty were quite different before 1940. In colonial times the concern with poverty was conditioned by the belief that even if the "natives" could be somewhat enlightened by the presence of the colonizer, not much could be done about their poverty because their economic development was pointless. The natives' capacity for science and technology, the basis for economic progress, was seen as nil (Adas 1989). As the same authors point out, however, within Asian, African, and Latin or Native American societies – as well as throughout most of European history – vernacular societies had developed ways of defining and treating poverty that accommodated visions of community, frugality, and sufficiency. Whatever these traditional ways might have been, and without idealizing them, it is true that massive poverty in the modern sense appeared only when the spread of the market economy broke down community ties and deprived millions of people from access to land, water, and other resources. With the consolidation of capitalism, systemic pauperization became inevitable.

Without attempting to undertake an archaeology of poverty, as Rahnema (1991) proposes, it is important to emphasize the break that occurred in the conceptions and management of poverty first with the emergence of capitalism in Europe and subsequently with the advent of development in the Third World. Rahnema describes the first break in terms of the advent in the nineteenth century of systems for dealing with the poor based on assistance provided by impersonal institutions. Philanthropy occupied an important place in this transition (Donzelot 1979). The transformation of the poor into the assisted had profound consequences. This "modernization" of poverty signified not only the rupture of vernacular relations but also the setting in place of new mechanisms of control. The poor increasingly appeared as a social problem requiring new ways of intervention in society. It was, indeed, in relation to poverty that the modern ways of thinking about the meaning of life, the economy, rights, and social management came into place. "Pauperism, political economy, and the discovery of society were closely interwoven" (Polanyi 1957: 84).

The treatment of poverty allowed society to conquer new domains. More perhaps than on industrial and technological might, the nascent order of capitalism and modernity relied on a politics of poverty the aim of which was not only to create consumers but to transform society by turning the poor into objects of knowledge and management. What was involved in this operation was "a

techno-discursive instrument that made possible the conquest of pauperism and the invention of a politics of poverty" (Procacci 1991: 157). Pauperism, Procacci explains, was associated, rightly or wrongly, with features such as mobility, vagrancy, independence, frugality, promiscuity, ignorance, and the refusal to accept social duties, to work, and to submit to the logic of the expansion of "needs." Concomitantly, the management of poverty called for interventions in education, health, hygiene, morality, and employment and the instilling of good habits of association, savings, child rearing, and so on. The result was a panoply of interventions that accounted for the creation of a domain that several researchers have termed "the social" (Donzelot 1979, 1988, 1991; Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991).

As a domain of knowledge and intervention, the social became prominent in the nineteenth century, culminating in the twentieth century in the consolidation of the welfare state and the ensemble of techniques encompassed under the fabric of social work. Not only poverty but health, education, hygiene, employment, and the poor quality of life in towns and cities were constructed as social problems, requiring extensive knowledge about the population and appropriate modes of social planning (Escobar 1992). The "government of the social" took on a status that, as the conceptualization of the economy, was soon taken for granted. A "separate class of the 'poor'" (Williams 1973: 104) was created. Yet the most significant aspect of this phenomenon was the setting into place of apparatuses of knowledge and power that took it upon themselves to optimize life by producing it under modern, "scientific" conditions. The history of modernity, in this way, is not only the history of knowledge and the economy, it is also, more revealingly, the history of the social.<sup>1</sup>

The history of development implies the continuation in other places of this history of the social. This is the second break in the archaeology of poverty proposed by Rahnema: the globalization of poverty entailed by the construction of two-thirds of the world as poor after 1945. If within market societies the poor were defined as lacking what the rich had in terms of money and material possessions, poor countries came to be similarly defined in relation to the standards of wealth of the more economically advantaged nations. This economic conception of poverty found an ideal yardstick in the annual per capita income. The perception of poverty on a global scale "was nothing more than the result of a comparative statistical operation, the first of which was carried out only in 1940" (Sachs 1990: 9). Almost by fiat, two-thirds of the world's peoples were transformed into poor subjects in 1948 when the World Bank defined as poor those countries with an annual per capita income below \$100. And if the problem was one of insufficient income, the solution was clearly economic growth.

Thus poverty became an organizing concept and the object of a new problematization. As in the case of any problematization (Foucault 1986), that of poverty brought into existence new discourses and practices that shaped the reality to which they reflected. That the essential trait of the Third World was its poverty and that the solution was economic growth and development became self-evident, necessary, and universal truths. This chapter analyzes the multiple processes that made possible this particular historical event. It accounts for the "developmentalization" of the Third World, its progressive insertion into a

regime of thought and practice in which certain interventions for the eradication of poverty became central to the world order. This chapter can also be seen as an account of the production of the tale of three worlds and the contest over the development of the third. The tale of three worlds was, and continues to be despite the demise of the second, a way of bringing about a political order "that works by the negotiation of boundaries achieved through ordering differences" (Haraway 1989: 10). It was and is a narrative in which culture, race, gender, nation, and class are deeply and inextricably intertwined. The political and economic order coded by the tale of three worlds and development rests on a traffic of meanings that mapped new domains of being and understanding, the same domains that are increasingly being challenged and displaced by people in the Third World today. [ . . . ]

### The Discourse of Development

#### *The space of development*

What does it mean to say that development started to function as a discourse, that is, that it created a space in which only certain things could be said and even imagined? If discourse is the process through which social reality comes into being – if it is the articulation of knowledge and power, of the visible and the expressible – how can the development discourse be individualized and related to ongoing technical, political, and economic events? How did development become a space for the systematic creation of concepts, theories, and practices?

An entry point for this inquiry on the nature of development as discourse is its basic premises as they were formulated in the 1940s and 1950s. The organizing premise was 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 necessarily 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. The advance of poor countries was thus seen from the outset as depending on ample supplies of capital to provide for infrastructure, industrialization, and the overall modernization of society. Where was this capital to come from? One possible answer was domestic savings. But these countries were seen as trapped in a "vicious circle" of poverty and lack of capital, so that a good part of the "badly needed" capital would have to come from abroad[ . . . ] 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 underdevelopment.

What, then, were the most important elements that went into the formulation of development theory? [ . . . ] There was the process of capital formation, and the various factors associated with it: technology, population and resources, monet-

ary and fiscal policies, industrialization and agricultural development, commerce and trade. There were also a series of factors linked to cultural considerations, such as education and the need to foster modern cultural values. Finally, there was the need to create adequate institutions for carrying out the complex task ahead: international organizations (such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, created in 1944, and most of the United Nations technical agencies, also a product of the mid-1940s); national planning agencies (which proliferated in Latin America, especially after the inauguration of the Alliance for Progress in the early 1960s); and technical agencies of various kinds.

Development was not merely the result of the combination, study, or gradual elaboration of these elements (some of these topics had existed for some time); nor the product of the introduction of new ideas (some of which were already appearing or perhaps were bound to appear); nor the effect of the new international organizations or financial institutions (which had some predecessors, such as the League of Nations). It was rather the result of the establishment of a set of relations among these elements, institutions, and practices and of the systematization of these relations to form a whole. The development discourse was constituted not by the array of possible objects under its domain but by the way in which, thanks to this set of relations, it was able to form systematically the objects of which it spoke, to group them and arrange them in certain ways, and to give them a unity of their own.<sup>2</sup>

To understand development as a discourse, one must look not at the elements themselves but at the system of relations established among them. It is this system that allows the systematic creation of objects, concepts, and strategies; it determines what can be thought and said. These relations – established between institutions, socioeconomic processes, forms of knowledge, technological factors, and so on – define the conditions under which objects, concepts, theories, and strategies can be incorporated into the discourse. In sum, the system of relations establishes a discursive practice that sets the rules of the game: who can speak, from what points of view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of expertise; it sets the rules that must be followed for this or that problem, theory, or object to emerge and be named, analyzed, and eventually transformed into a policy or a plan.

The objects with which development began to deal after 1945 were numerous and varied. Some of them stood out clearly (poverty, insufficient technology and capital, rapid population growth, inadequate public services, archaic agricultural practices, and so on), whereas others were introduced with more caution or even in surreptitious ways (such as cultural attitudes and values and the existence of racial, religious, geographic, or ethnic factors believed to be associated with backwardness). These elements emerged from a multiplicity of points: the newly formed international organizations, government offices in distant capitals, old and new institutions, universities and research centers in developed countries, and, increasingly with the passing of time, institutions in the Third World. Everything was subjected to the eye of the new experts: the poor dwellings of the rural masses, the vast agricultural fields, cities, households, factories, hospitals, schools, public offices, towns and regions, and, in the last instance, the world as a whole. The vast surface over which the discourse moved at ease

practically covered the entire cultural, economic, and political geography of the Third World.

However, not all the actors distributed throughout this surface could identify objects to be studied and have their problems considered. Some clear principles of authority were in operation. They concerned the role of experts, from whom certain criteria of knowledge and competence were asked; institutions such as the United Nations, which had the moral, professional, and legal authority to name subjects and define strategies; and the international lending organizations, which carried the symbols of capital and power. These principles of authority also concerned the governments of poor countries, which commanded the legal political authority over the lives of their subjects, and the position of leadership of the rich countries, who had the power, knowledge, and experience to decide on what was to be done.

Economists, demographers, educators, and experts in agriculture, public health, and nutrition elaborated their theories, made their assessments and observations, and designed their programs from these institutional sites. Problems were continually identified, and client categories brought into existence. Development proceeded by creating "abnormalities" (such as the "illiterate," the "underdeveloped," the "malnourished," "small farmers," or "landless peasants"), which it would later treat and reform. Approaches that could have had positive effects in terms of easing material constraints became, linked to this type of rationality, instruments of power and control. As time went by, new problems were progressively and selectively incorporated; once a problem was incorporated into the discourse, it had to be categorized and further specified. Some problems were specified at a given level (such as local or regional), or at various of these levels (for instance, a nutritional deficiency identified at the level of the household could be further specified as a regional production shortage or as affecting a given population group), or in relation to a particular institution. But these refined specifications did not seek so much to illuminate possible solutions as to give "problems" a visible reality amenable to particular treatments.

This seemingly endless specification of problems required detailed observations in villages, regions, and countries in the Third World. Complete dossiers of countries were elaborated, and techniques of information were designed and constantly refined. This feature of the discourse allowed for the mapping of the economic and social life of countries, constituting a true political anatomy of the Third World.<sup>3</sup> The end result was the creation of a space of thought and action the expansion of which was dictated in advance by the very same rules introduced during its formative stages. The development discourse defined a perceptual field structured by grids of observation, modes of inquiry and registration of problems, and forms of intervention; in short, it brought into existence a space defined not so much by the ensemble of objects with which it dealt but by a set of relations and a discursive practice that systematically produced interrelated objects, concepts, theories, strategies, and the like.

To be sure, new objects have been included, new modes of operation introduced, and a number of variables modified (for instance, in relation to strategies to combat hunger, knowledge about nutritional requirements, the types of crops given priority, and the choices of technology have changed); yet the same set of

relations among these elements continues to be established by the discursive practices of the institutions involved. Moreover, seemingly opposed options can easily coexist within the same discursive field (for instance, in development economics, the structuralist school and the monetarist school seem to be in open contradiction; yet they belong to the same discursive formation and originate in the same set of relations [. . .]; it can also be shown that agrarian reform, green revolution, and integrated rural development are strategies through which the same unity, "hunger," is constructed[. . . .] In other words, although the discourse has gone through a series of structural changes, the architecture of the discursive formation laid down in the period 1945–55 has remained unchanged, allowing the discourse to adapt to new conditions. The result has been the succession of development strategies and substrategies up to the present, always within the confines of the same discursive space.

It is also clear that other historical discourses influenced particular representations of development. The discourse of communism, for instance, influenced the promotion of those choices which emphasized the role of the individual in society and, in particular, those approaches which relied on private initiative and private property. So much emphasis on this issue in the context of development, so strong a moralizing attitude probably would not have existed without the persistent anti-Communist preaching that originated in the Cold War. Similarly, the fact that economic development relied so much on the need for foreign exchange influenced the promotion of cash crops for export, to the detriment of food crops for domestic consumption. Yet the ways in which the discourse organized these elements cannot be reduced to causal relations[. . . .]

In a similar vein, patriarchy and ethnocentrism influenced the form development took. Indigenous populations had to be "modernized," where modernization meant the adoption of the "right" values, namely, those held by the white minority or a mestizo majority and, in general, those embodied in the ideal of the cultivated European; programs for industrialization and agricultural development, however, not only have made women invisible in their role as producers but also have tended to perpetuate their subordination[. . . .] Forms of power in terms of class, gender, race, and nationality thus found their way into development theory and practice. The former do not determine the latter in a direct causal relation; rather they are the development discourse's formative elements.

The examination of any given object should be done within the context of the discourse as a whole. The emphasis on capital accumulation, for instance, emerged as part of a complex set of relations in which technology, new financial institutions, systems of classification (GNP per capita), decision-making systems (such as new mechanisms for national accounting and the allocation of public resources), modes of knowledge, and international factors all played a role. What made development economists privileged figures was their position in this complex system. Options privileged or excluded must also be seen in light of the dynamics of the entire discourse – why, for instance, the discourse privileged the promotion of cash crops (to secure foreign exchange, according to capital and technological imperatives) and not food crops; centralized planning (to satisfy economic and knowledge requirements) but not participatory and decentralized approaches; agricultural development based on large mechanized farms and the

use of chemical inputs but not alternative agricultural systems, based on smaller farms, ecological considerations, and integrated cropping and pest management; rapid economic growth but not the articulation of internal markets to satisfy the needs of the majority of the people; and capital-intensive but not labor-intensive solutions. With the deepening of the crisis, some of the previously excluded choices are being considered, although most often within a development perspective[...]

Finally, what is included as legitimate development issues may depend on specific relations established in the midst of the discourse; relations, for instance, between what experts say and what international politics allows as feasible (this may determine, for instance, what an international organization may prescribe out of the recommendation of a group of experts); between one power segment and another (say, industry versus agriculture); or between two or more forms of authority (for instance, the balance between nutritionists and public health specialists, on the one hand, and the medical profession, on the other, which may determine the adoption of particular approaches to rural health care). Other types of relations to be considered are those between sites from which objects appear (for instance, between rural and urban areas); between procedures of assessment of needs (such as the use of "empirical data" by World Bank missions) and the position of authority of those carrying the assessment (this may determine the proposals made and the possibility of their implementation).

Relations of this type regulate development practice. Although this practice is not static, it continues to reproduce the same relations between the elements with which it deals. It was this systematization of relations that conferred upon development its great dynamic quality: its immanent adaptability to changing conditions, which allowed it to survive, indeed to thrive, up to the present. By 1955 a discourse had emerged which was characterized not by a unified object but by the formation of a vast number of objects and strategies; not by new knowledge but by the systematic inclusion of new objects under its domain. The most important exclusion, however, was and continues to be what development was supposed to be all about: people. Development was – and continues to be for the most part – a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of "progress." Development was conceived not as a cultural process (culture was a residual variable, to disappear with the advance of modernization) but instead as a system of more or less universally applicable technical interventions intended to deliver some "badly needed" goods to a "target" population. It comes as no surprise that development became a force so destructive to Third World cultures, ironically in the name of people's interests.

#### *The professionalization and institutionalization of development*

Development was a response to the problematization of poverty that took place in the years following World War II and not a natural process of knowledge that gradually uncovered problems and dealt with them; as such, it must be seen as a historical construct that provides a space in which poor countries are known, specified, and intervened upon. To speak of development as a historical



construct requires an analysis of the mechanisms through which it becomes an active, real force. These mechanisms are structured by forms of knowledge and power and can be studied in terms of processes of institutionalization and professionalization.

The concept of professionalization refers mainly to the process that brings the Third World into the politics of expert knowledge and Western science in general. This is accomplished through a set of techniques, strategies, and disciplinary practices that organize the generation, validation, and diffusion of development knowledge, including the academic disciplines, methods of research and teaching, criteria of expertise, and manifold professional practices; in other words, those mechanisms through which a politics of truth is created and maintained, through which certain forms of knowledge are given the status of truth. This professionalization was effected through the proliferation of development sciences and subdisciplines. It made possible the progressive incorporation of problems into the space of development, bringing problems to light in ways congruent with the established system of knowledge and power.

The professionalization of development also made it possible to remove all problems from the political and cultural realms and to recast them in terms of the apparently more neutral realm of science. It resulted in the establishment of development studies programs in most major universities in the developed world and conditioned the creation or restructuring of Third World universities to suit the needs of development. The empirical social sciences, on the rise since the late 1940s, especially in the United States and England, were instrumental in this regard. So were the area studies programs, which became fashionable after the war in academic and policy-making circles. As already mentioned, the increasingly professionalized character of development caused a radical reorganization of knowledge institutions in Latin America and other parts of the Third World. Professionalized development required the production of knowledge that could allow experts and planners "scientifically [to] ascertain social requirements," to recall Currie's words (Fuenzalida 1983: 1987).<sup>4</sup>

An unprecedented will to know everything about the Third World flourished unhindered, growing like a virus. [...] The Third World witnessed a massive landing of experts, each in charge of investigating, measuring, and theorizing about this or that little aspect of Third World societies. The policies and programs that originated from this vast field of knowledge inevitably carried with them strong normalizing components. At stake was a politics of knowledge that allowed experts to classify problems and formulate policies, to pass judgment on entire social groups and forecast their future - to produce, in short, a regime of truth and norms about them. The consequences for these groups and countries cannot be emphasized enough.

Another important consequence of the professionalization of development was the inevitable translation of Third World people and their interests into research data within Western capitalist paradigms. There is a further paradox in this situation. As an African scholar put it, "Our own history, culture and practices, good or bad, are discovered and translated in the journals of the North and come back to us re-conceptualized, couched in languages and paradigms

which make it all sound new and novel" (Namuddu 1989: 28; quoted in Mueller 1991: 5). [ . . . ]

The invention of development necessarily involved the creation of an institutional field from which discourses are produced, recorded, stabilized, modified, and put into circulation. This field is intimately imbricated with processes of professionalization; together they constitute an apparatus that organizes the production of forms of knowledge and the deployment of forms of power, relating one to the other. The institutionalization of development took place at all levels, from the international organizations and national planning agencies in the Third World to local development agencies, community development committees, private voluntary agencies, and nongovernmental organizations. Starting in the mid-1940s with the creation of the great international organizations, this process has not ceased to spread, resulting in the consolidation of an effective network of power. It is through the action of this network that people and communities are bound to specific cycles of cultural and economic production and through which certain behaviors and rationalities are promoted. This field of intervention relies on myriad local centers of power, in turn supported by forms of knowledge that circulate at the local level.

The knowledge produced about the Third World is utilized and circulated by these institutions through applied programs, conferences, international consultant services, local extension practices, and so on. A corollary of this process is the establishment of an ever-expanding development business; as John Kenneth Galbraith wrote, referring to the climate in US universities in the early 1950s, "No economic subject more quickly captured the attention of so many as the rescue of the people of the poor countries from their poverty" (1979: 29). Poverty, illiteracy, and even hunger became the basis of a lucrative industry for planners, experts, and civil servants (Rahnema 1986). This is not to deny that the work of these institutions might have benefited people at times. It is to emphasize that the work of development institutions has not been an innocent effort on behalf of the poor. Rather, development has been successful to the extent that it has been able to integrate, manage, and control countries and populations in increasingly detailed and encompassing ways. If it has failed to solve the basic problems of underdevelopment, it can be said – perhaps with greater pertinence – that it has succeeded well in creating a type of underdevelopment that has been, for the most part, politically and technically manageable. The discord between institutionalized development and the situation of popular groups in the Third World has only grown with each development decade, as popular groups themselves are becoming apt at demonstrating.

### Conclusion

The crucial threshold and transformation that took place in the early post-World War II period [ . . . ] were the result not of a radical epistemological or political breakthrough but of the reorganization of a number of factors that allowed the Third World to display a new visibility and to irrupt into a new realm of language. This new space was carved out of the vast and dense surface of the

Third World, placing it in a field of power. Underdevelopment became the subject of political technologies that sought to erase it from the face of the Earth but that ended up, instead, multiplying it to infinity.

Development fostered a way of conceiving of social life as a technical problem, as a matter of rational decision and management to be entrusted to that group of people – the development professionals – whose specialized knowledge allegedly qualified them for the task. Instead of seeing change as a process rooted in the interpretation of each society's history and cultural tradition – as a number of intellectuals in various parts of the Third World had attempted to do in the 1920s and 1930s (Gandhi being the best known of them) – these professionals sought to devise mechanisms and procedures to make societies fit a preexisting model that embodied the structures and functions of modernity. Like sorcerers' apprentices, the development professionals awakened once again the dream of reason that, in their hands, as in earlier instances, produced a troubling reality.

At times, development grew to be so important for Third World countries that it became acceptable for their rulers to subject their populations to an infinite variety of interventions, to more encompassing forms of power and systems of control; so important that First and Third World elites accepted the price of massive impoverishment, of selling Third World resources to the most convenient bidder, of degrading their physical and human ecologies, of killing and torturing, of condemning their indigenous populations to near extinction; so important that many in the Third World began to think of themselves as inferior, underdeveloped, and ignorant and to doubt the value of their own culture, deciding instead to pledge allegiance to the banners of reason and progress; so important, finally, that the achievement of development clouded the awareness of the impossibility of fulfilling the promises that development seemed to be making.

After four decades of this discourse, most forms of understanding and representing the Third World are still dictated by the same basic tenets. The forms of power that have appeared act not so much by repression but by normalization; not by ignorance but by controlled knowledge; not by humanitarian concern but by the bureaucratization of social action. As the conditions that gave rise to development became more pressing, it could only increase its hold, refine its methods, and extend its reach even further. That the materiality of these conditions is not conjured up by an "objective" body of knowledge but is charted out by the rational discourses of economists, politicians, and development experts of all types should already be clear. What has been achieved is a specific configuration of factors and forces in which the new language of development finds support. As a discourse, development is thus a very real historical formation, albeit articulated around an artificial construct (underdevelopment) and upon a certain materiality (the conditions baptized as underdevelopment), which must be conceptualized in different ways if the power of the development discourse is to be challenged or displaced.

To be sure, there is a situation of economic exploitation that must be recognized and dealt with. Power is too cynical at the level of exploitation and should be resisted on its own terms. There is also a certain materiality of life conditions

that is extremely preoccupying and that requires great effort and attention. But those seeking to understand the Third World through development have long lost sight of this materiality by building upon it a reality that like a castle in the air has haunted us for decades. Understanding the history of the investment of the Third World by Western forms of knowledge and power is a way to shift the ground somewhat so that we can start to look at that materiality with different eyes and in different categories.

The coherence of effects that the development discourse achieved is the key to its success as a hegemonic form of representation: the construction of the poor and underdeveloped as universal, preconstituted subjects, based on the privilege of the representers; the exercise of power over the Third World made possible by this discursive homogenization (which entails the erasure of the complexity and diversity of Third World peoples, so that a squatter in Mexico City, a Nepalese peasant, and a Tuareg nomad become equivalent to each other as poor and underdeveloped); and the colonization and domination of the natural and human ecologies and economies of the Third World.<sup>5</sup>

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, a feature identified by Bhabha (1990) as inherent to discrimination. The signifiers of "poverty," "illiteracy," "hunger," and so forth have already achieved a fixity as signifieds of "underdevelopment" which seems impossible to sunder. Perhaps no other factor has contributed to cementing the association of "poverty" with "underdevelopment" as the discourse of economists. [ . . . ]

### Notes

- 1 Foucault (1979, 1980a, 1980b, 1991a) refers to this aspect of modernity – the appearance of forms of knowledge and regulatory controls centered on the production and optimization of life – as "biopower." Biopower entailed the "governmentalization" of social life, that is, the subjection of life to explicit mechanisms of production and administration by the state and other institutions. The analysis of biopower and governmentality should be an integral component of the anthropology of modernity (Urla 1993).
- 2 The methodology for the study of discourse used in this section follows Foucault's. See especially Foucault (1972, 1991b).
- 3 The loan agreements (Guarantee Agreements) between the World Bank and recipient countries signed in the late 1940s and 1950s invariably included a commitment on the part of the borrower to provide "the Bank," as it is called, with all the information requested. It also stipulated the right of Bank officials to visit any part of the territory of the country in question. The "missions" that this institution periodically sent to borrowing countries were a major mechanism for extracting detailed information about those countries.
- 4 Although most Latin American professionals avidly gave themselves to the task of

extracting the new knowledge from their countries' economies and cultures, in time the transnationalization of knowledge resulted in a dialectic through which the call for a more autonomous social science was advanced (Fals Borda 1970). This dialectic contributed to intellectual and social efforts such as dependency theory and Liberation Theology.

- 5 The coherence of effects of the development discourse should not signify any sort of intentionality. As the discourses discussed by Foucault, development must be seen as a "strategy without strategists," in the sense that nobody is explicitly masterminding it; it is the result of a historical problematization and a systematized response to it.

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