Development Hegemonic Constructions and the Resistance with Alternative Voices

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Abstract

This paper examines a burgeoning anthropological literature on development and debates surrounding development discourse. Some of these raise question regarding the concept of development, arguing that it is a contentious domain. Reviewing major literature on the issue, I suggest, dominant paradigms of development oversimplify the notion as if it were homogeneous. I take post modern critiques of development as an example in order to examine the nature of deconstructing development discourse. I argue some writers oversimplify the notion of development by using dichotomies- developed/ underdeveloped. By critically examining knowledge in the developmental domain in anthropology, this paper presents some ethnographic examples which raises conceptual, and practical questions regarding the nature of neoliberal development. The main thrust of this paper, therefore, is to question whether neoliberal development can be forever marked or fixed, a question central to this paper.

Keywords: Development, Neoliberalism, Resistance, Hegemony, Power and Politics

Introduction

This paper will explore some of the material and ideological processes that have gained prominence in the diverse hegemonic constructions of neoliberal development. Neoliberalism, as a dominant economic and political ideology, has significantly influenced the construction of development discourse worldwide. This article explores how neoliberalism establishes a hegemonic narrative of development construction, shaping policies that often result in the marginalization and exclusion of certain groups. There are various hegemonic constructions we can find at our world history which excludes a large number of people from their participation and belongingness. The examination of the

politics of exclusion within the framework of neoliberal development reveals the inherent tensions between economic growth and social equity. This article also explores how the communities have resisted the exclusionary effects of neoliberal development construction.

In the first few segments of this paper, I shall focus on some theoretical strategies and experiences of dominance and exclusion that overlap, but express in different ways, and are surprisingly persistent. The second section discusses the four prominent theories that have shaped scholarly discourse are modernization theory, dependency theory, World-System theory, and neoliberalism. This section offers a theoretical background that shows how the gradual theoretical progressions have evolved throughout the diverse ideas of development. And then I shall explore some case materials of some alternative to development, and finally, I shall mention some ethnographic studies on the critique to development from South Asian context.

Understanding the Theoretical Background of Development

In the realm of development studies, various theories have emerged over the years to explain the dynamics of global development and the disparities between nations. Four prominent theories that have shaped scholarly discourses of development are Modernization Theory, Dependency Theory, World-System Theory, and Neoliberal Theory. Each offers a distinct perspective on the forces influencing the development of societies and economies. Identifying the hegemonic construction is an inherently contentious process and diversified as well. Both Neoliberal and Marxist theories rely on evolutionist archetypes. Neoliberal evolutionism can be traced from current manifestations of modernization theory, back through the writings of Rostow (1960) and Parsons (1937). However, this section delves into the tenets of these four theories, explores the critical perspectives of these theories, and examines the implications of these ideas on the trajectory of the notion of development.

Modernization theory, rooted in post-World War II optimism, posits that societies evolve through a linear process of modernization, characterized by industrialization, urbanization, and technological advancement. This theory assumes that all societies follow a similar path of development, progressing from traditional to modern stages. Advocates argue that development occurs as a result of internal factors such as education, technological innovation, and cultural changes. However, critics argue that this theoretical understanding oversimplifies the complex nature of development, neglecting external influences and historical context.

In contrast to modernization theory, dependency theory emerged in the 1960s as a critique of the Eurocentric view of development. Dependency theorists contend that global inequality is perpetuated by the unequal relationships between developed and developing nations. They argue that the development of wealthy nations is dependent on the underdevelopment of poorer nations, creating a cycle of exploitation. Dependency theory emphasizes the impact of historical and economic structures, asserting that global economic systems favor the already developed countries. Critics argue that dependency theory can oversimplify complex global relationships and neglect internal factors contributing to underdevelopment.

Building on dependency theory, World-System theory, developed by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein (1970), views the world as a complex system of economic and political relationships. The theory categorizes nations into core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral zones, reflecting their position in the global economic hierarchy. Core nations, often highly industrialized, exploit peripheral nations through economic relationships. Semi-peripheral nations play an intermediary role. The Neo-Marxist advocates emphasises on the notion of inequality, not balance - between people and between places. Gunder Frank's dependency theory (1967) is pioneer in this regard. According to this thought, the world is understood as relations between core and periphery; relations set up through colonialism, supply of cheap raw materials to capitalist core which processes them and keeps profit there (Frank, 1991). In contrast, Wallerstein shows another version of this – showing how world interconnected through global capitalism, tied into relations of inequality. According to this thinker the whole world, and global labour market are tied into one overarching system, dominated by Western capitalism. World-System theory provides a nuanced understanding of global interconnectedness, but critics argue that it may oversimplify the complexities of individual nation-states and cultural dynamics.

As a response to the economic challenges of the 1970s, neoliberal theory gained prominence, advocating for free-market principles, limited government intervention, and deregulation. Neoliberalism contends that economic growth is best achieved through market-oriented policies that encourage competition and private enterprise. Proponents argue that neoliberal reforms lead to increased efficiency and prosperity. However, critics such as Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey assert that these policies often exacerbate social inequalities and can result in uneven development. Neoliberalism has been associated with the rise of global institutions promoting free trade, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The interplay between neoliberalism, the spatial critique of Henri Lefebvre, and the Marxist analysis of Harvey

provides a rich framework for understanding the complexities of contemporary development. As nations grapple with the challenges of economic globalization and urbanization, a nuanced examination of these theories becomes essential.

These multifaceted development theories offer diverse lenses through which scholars and policymakers can analyze and interpret the complex dynamics of global development. While each theory has its merits, it is essential to recognize their limitations and the evolving nature of the global landscape. A comprehensive understanding of development requires an integration of multiple perspectives, acknowledging the intricate interplay of internal and external factors shaping the destinies of nations worldwide.

Neoliberal Development Hegemonic Constructions and the Politics of Exclusion

The hegemonic construction promotes the idea that economic growth, driven by market forces, is the primary driver of development. Policies guided by this perspective prioritize efficiency, competition, and private enterprise as the key instruments for achieving progress. While neoliberal rhetoric often champions the idea of inclusive development, the reality can be starkly different. Scholars argue that the neoliberal agenda tends to benefit the already privileged, exacerbating social inequalities. The emphasis on market-driven solutions may inadvertently exclude marginalized communities, as their needs often conflict with the profit-oriented motives of neoliberal policies.

The perspective on social exclusion views it as a consequence of societal structures and functions. It can be considered any disadvantage that endangers or weakens everyday economic, social, cultural, and political activities of people. Societies, according to this theory, establish norms and values that may inadvertently exclude certain groups of people. The concept of social exclusion is multidimensional, which emphasizes the processes, such as economic disparities, unequal access to education, and discriminatory policies, through which people are excluded from mainstream society and economic, social, and political participation. Exclusion reduces cultural life opportunities too (Duffy, 1995; Percy-Smith, 2000; Room, 1995; Silver, 1994). Numerous scholars (e.g., de Haan, 1998) have defined the ways that individuals or groups of people are completely or partially excluded from full participation within society e.g., from livelihoods, housing, consumption, utilities, employment, education, and citizenship (Khan, 2024).

According to President Truman, 'development' came to know us to 'develop' "underdeveloped areas". Though this statement was arrogant and ethnocentric,

but it became remarkably hegemonic to the developing countries. Less developed countries started to include a range of hegemonic constructions in the shed of development. In postcolonial era development strategies are different, but development 'discourse' is governed by the same old colonial principles. Lives of poor people in the Third World are often altered by the development ideologies and practices since the Second World War as hegemony of development has already diffused throughout the fabric of those countries. And in recent years, under the gigantic umbrella of neoliberalism, many societies adopt different types of hegemonic polices and constructions such as urbanization, various development projects, globalization, poverty reduction and so on.

Escobar examines the politics of development discourse and explains dogmatic and moralistic positions by the meanings of oppression and discrimination. He finds two mechanisms of hegemonic constructions such as development projects and programs which are structured by the forms of knowledge and power (Escobar, 1995; Ahmed, 2006; Khan, 2007). By using both of these mechanisms, state systems or national/international organizations exclude certain groups of people from participation. For example, in my own fieldwork in Bangladesh back in 1996 I saw how Bangladesh government following the prescription of the World Bank took countrywide urban development projects. As part of those projects, government bureaucrats were trained to work with international and national consultants and experts for the successful implementation of the project (Khan, 2007).

Mintz provided a clear and penetrating picture of one phase of Puertorican socio-cultural history, where he visualized the recent development history of sugar production, the rise of trade unionism, and political activities of the working class. In the book (1974), Mintz, by describing Taso's life story, not only portrayed a cane worker's life story but also documented profoundly the cultural, political, socio-economic conditions of modern rural Puerto Rico- the period of rapid agriculture and industrial expansion under American economic influence. Taso, who was a 'rural proletariat' had a grim history of struggle as a sugar cane worker, and his flash back stories reflect the impact of global expansion and its concomitant socio-cultural, economic, and political changes on a large number of poor people.

Mintz documented the experiences of exclusion and dominance by Taso's narratives where he described how American companies had introduced new irrigation system replacing *hoyados*, centralized and expanded production, and radically changed both the production system of sugar industry and the lives

of its personnel. This expansion not only destroyed the relationship between workers and managers, it also put an end to their traditional *pala* work from which they could make more money than regular wages. New technological production system led to job standardization and made the old skills outdated. Taso described: "From those jobs I earned a good amount of money because the Palero is rather shrewd and always looks for ways to make more money" (Mintz, 1974: 135). Like Taso, workers lost their identities as technology converted them as interchangeable parts of impersonal machine. So, a large number of people lost their job as their skills became obsolete.

By this time, individualism and class consciousness developed. Companies tried to resist the uprising through economic pressure. Taso himself was blacklisted for two years for being an activist of the uprising. From another example we can see how a certain group of people was excluded from their participation and belonging by dominant class. During the movement the Union promised Taso that he would be able to work if the Union wins. But after the election the Union forgot its promise. According to Taso, "I know they had money, and they collected money with our help. But they didn't give me a penny." Both examples demonstrate the process of material exclusion of certain population by various hegemonic constructions such as, development programs and political organizations, etc.

However, neoliberal hegemonic constructions not only excluded the lower working class, it also renders women exclusion. A number of feminist scholars, who explore the representation of Third World women in the academic discourses, argue that the representation is not only male biased but also dominated by First World's ethnocentric ideology, even though it assumes gender neutrality and women empowerment. Mohanty discovers the discursive practice of modernity where First World domination and Third World exclusion is clearly featured (Mohanty, 2003: 8-12). She criticizes the discourses of Western feminist scholarship as they implicitly assume western standards as the benchmark against the situation of Third World women. She further argues that Third World women have been represented as 'passive' and loss control over their own bodies and sexualities, and eventually have lost their freedom of choice to make own decisions (Mohanty, 1991: 56). In a similar vein, even though Marx, who talked about Repressive State Apparatuses and was aware of oppression, but justified British colonialism as a destructive force, and simultaneously that was regenerating and constructive. His hypothesis was that it would help India to move from feudalism to capitalism and which finally would turn in communism (Marx and Engels, 1978: 659- 664).

Similarly, in the material processes of globalization where privatization is viewed as an engine of growth, gender and often race remain excluded or invisible. In northern Mexico and China, Wright shows the underlying forces in projecting women as "disposable". In her work Wright illustrates transnational firms' deliberate effort to construct women through discourses of femininity, as being in the workforce as temporary and in the process justify their low wages through the gender ideologies (Wright, 2006: 72). She argues that it is the dominant discourses of neoliberal economic development that produces this subject position. Such strategy is linked to the imperative need for the restructuring of global capitalism which is related with the politics of representation. Kabeer's study pointed to the premeditated promotion of various socio-cultural practices in the garments factory by employers in their attempts to extract maximum profit from their female work force (Kabeer, 2000: 6). Kabeer studied on Bangladeshi female workers in the garments industry in Dhaka. As Bangladesh was perceived as a critical opponent in the garments sector and formed a major threat for England, they took the immediate measures to change the map of garments production. Thus, Bangladesh lost its glorious garment sectors during the British colonial period. Still Bangladesh is a subject for various hegemonic constructions practiced by First World. Development discourse claimed that globalization has contributed to bring women into labour market**.** But the reality in Bangladesh is- the factory owners pay them very low so that owners can increase their profit margin. The official minimum monthly wage is $25, where the women laborer earns $15 per month. The myth of global capitalism is that certain Third World women are disposable and replaceable and inherently valueless to the process of capitalism. This myth has been powerfully challenged by feminist writers. The 'disposable' third world women are in fact indispensable to the global economy (Wright, 2006: 3).

However, again I turn into the ideological processes of exclusion. Edward Said (1978) in his seminal work, present the idea of Orientalism, to mean a constellation of false assumptions underlying Western studies toward Eastern cultures. "Orientalism" has flashed a number of creative studies and inquiries about various colonial hegemonic constructions by misrepresenting the Eastern World in various contexts. Said contended that Orientalist scholarship was, as British and French scholarship for the centuries, and the scholars of twentieth century yet to viewed the Orient as "fundamentally lifeless". In Said's discussion, the key idea is "discourse," which Foucault (1972) describes 'as a system of thought' that indicates like 'the East is as the West knows'. Though this system (ideological process which coherently established by power and knowledge) is inextricably linked to domination and exclusion and which can

be interpreted by Foucault's famous formulation of "discourse, power and knowledge", but Said became dissatisfied with Foucault because his theory did not allow a way out from this politics, whereas, Gramsci to whom Said was grateful, delivered the concept of "hegemony," which allows for the possibility of resistance to inviolable discourses (Ahmed, 2006).

To sum up, theoretical analysis and ethnographic materials I discussed above clearly suggest that how people had become excluded by the dominant process of development. However, this hegemonic construction of development can also be contested or negotiated by people on the ground. Every hegemonic project has the seeds of counter hegemony within the hegemonic process, thus this development discourse is often challenged by the 'beneficiaries' of development.

Resistance to Dominant Development Discourses

In this section, I shall discuss the examples of such resistance and negotiations by people on the ground. I shall discuss few ethnographic experiences to understand the position of marginality from Gupta's "Postcolonial Development", Kabeer's "The Power to Choose" and from my own book " Inclusion and Exclusion of the Urban Poor in Dhaka City" under the purview of neoliberal ways of development.

Akhil Gupta's Postcolonial Development is an appropriate example that problematized the distinction between 'the global' and 'the local' (Gupta, 1998: 25). He argues that the relationship between 'global' and 'local' often depends on the process of 'naturalization' of the nation-state. Gupta examines the global discourses of development of agricultural projects and policies of modern nations and their discursive strategies through which they convince both local government and the rural peasants to forgo the traditional practices of growing wheat. Their conviction is based on: "Western," industrial countries have already arrived at the peak by using modern technologies and so, in India, peasants should adopt the same modern technology to improve their production and develop thereby.

Specifically in this case, this discourse made people subjects as these companies pushed the government to adopt relevant policies and laws. Moreover they were able to make people consider themselves as underdeveloped and established the discourse that these types of traditional practices would not ensure the maximum production of wheat and the poor peasant would not able to come out from their poverty, local government subjected to peasants by the relationship of control and dependence, which disciplined these peasants and this process could be analyzed by Foucault's theory on the practice of discipline (Gupta, 1998: 39).

In this domain of necrocapitalism, the government of the developing countries and the elite class make alliance with these western companies and stand against the interests of the poor segment of their societies to get access to the western markets. The neoliberal development planning reproduces this rich-poor cleavage and inducts the notion of global community in the society by excluding the poor people. And this perfectly fits with the political essence of Said's argument about Orientalism as a colonial and hegemonic power that serve the colonial interests of West through the need of its commodity consumption. However, it also resist exclusion often occurred in the developing areas to discard binaries of these global-local or rich-poor cleavage as Gupta refers Gangaprashad, a farmer of Alipur blamed the government for exclusion. He said: "A farmer who spends his day weeding is as intelligent as the Chief Minister. Our children should receive exactly the same education as that available to the children of ministers. We cannot tolerate this step-daughterly treatment" (Gupta, 1998: 83). Highlighting the inequalities exist in the government's loan collection policies, they raised their voices against hegemonic ideology and practices in the public places which may not be violent, but according to Scott, it could be take the form of "passive noncompliance, subtle sabotage, evasion, and deception" (Scott, 1985: 31).

Again, Gupta shows that farmers do not take the Western ideology easily. While speaking to them he got the impression that they examined any modern technology before practicing. For example, in the discourse of farmers, comparison between two fertilizers loomed large as they had different voices and explanations regarding the effectiveness of two types of fertilizers. A farmer, Prasad explained the scientific impact of those fertilizers on the soil by mentioning scientific names of those fertilizers, and it indicates that they are using those fertilizers not under the impression of modernity rather under the experimental judgment (Gupta, 1998: 252-258). Gupta also documented some terms what they use to describe chemical fertilizers such as "foreign fertilizer", "government fertilizer", or "English fertilizer", whereas they called manure fertilizer as "local fertilizer" or "country fertilizer" (Gupta, 1998: 259). After the self-judgment, they use both types of fertilizer. They used the same judgment while using weeding machines, irrigation systems, and preservative systems. Gupta indicates the existence of alternative forms of modernity, which fits with Bhabha's idea of 'hybridity' or 'interstitial space', where opposite identities are performed and contested and these new modes of governmentality are not going unchallenged by the "excluded groups of people" (Gupta, 1998: 321).

While acknowledging the major insights of Escobar, Ferguson and other deconstructionists that development is a discourse which operates in networks

of power relations, my ethnography (2023) situates these texts in their social and historical contexts'. My study is located within the capital city of Bangladesh, called Bhashantake Rehabilitation Project (BRP) in Dhaka. How place, power, politics and knowledge are interrelated and how local people who are known as urban poor continue their livelihoods in contingent conditions are important issues to understand the notion of 'development'.

This understanding enables us to unpack ways that the arguments about the relationships between the urban poor and the BRP project authority. Here, dominance and resistance are not simple opposites – local residents can work for inclusion in the midst of domination by showing their strength of resistance. Because of local complexities, as Khan's (2024) ethnographic data shows, people's power of resistance should not be seen as bounded but fluid and dynamic. Khan (2024) examines the interrelationships between different actors involved in the housing project's development work in study site, BRP, in terms of the relationships between different categories of bureaucrats, previous land occupiers, flat owners, project manager, media, and other stakeholders both government and Non-government organisations (NGOs). These relationships unveil how developmental power and politics is created and re-created by local people and translated into their socio-economic and political spheres of urban settings.

Kabeer (2000) attempts to highlight through stories of Bangladeshi factory workers, how the globalization myth has been challenged by women. To borrow from Foucault, women do not act as mere 'docile bodies', as they protest not only against male members in the family, against the factory owners as well, and engage themselves in a relationship of negotiation. Negotiation is a part of working women's lives and it is played out at various levels. She identified three such levels: intra household, inter household and inter class. Intra-household, as the name suggests, is played out within the confinements of the household. Inter-household takes place at a larger landscape and placed within the predominant notion of patriarchal society. When a woman decides to take up a job, she faces challenges from within the household. This emanate from the concern of losing prestige in society as the wives are doing job outside the household, which do not enjoy high standing in the eyes of society. The other source of battle comes from the husbands' apprehension. As their wives are earning money, husbands will lose their privileged status (Kabeer, 2000: 142). When women take up a job and bring salary at home, it impacts various aspects of life as it affects the power relations between the household members. Kabeer argues that the impact of wages on the women's lives is not uniform due to the fact that they have been drawn into waged work under different

circumstances. She argues that "the women consider that their earnings had made discernible economic 'difference to their households' collective welfare function' and improved the standard of living" (Kabeer, 2000: 159). They, however, shared commonality in the form of resistance and struggle against the patriarchal society. From my field experiences, I would add with Kabeer that after entering into the waged work, new types of negotiation starts within the household and in the work place, but these women become more confident as their earnings have wider implications.

Conclusion

This paper examines both material and ideological process of exclusion by dominant discourse of neoliberal development constructions. The neoliberal hegemonic construction of development, while emphasizing economic growth, often neglects the social dimensions of progress. The politics of exclusion embedded in neoliberal policies highlight the need for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to development. Recognizing the diverse needs of communities, addressing social inequalities, and fostering participatory decision-making processes are crucial steps towards a more equitable and sustainable development paradigm. This discussion helps us to understand that exclusion, whether material or ideological, has severe consequence on people's lives and livelihood and produces sufferings. However, like Scott (1990), I do believe the dominant discourse of development, no matter how monolithic and totalitarian it may seem, never go unchallenged. People try to confront or resist dominance. I have given examples from Gupta, Kabeer and from my own fieldwork in Bangladesh, to highlight the fact that people's level of consciousness and their strategies against dominant development discourses often championed by Neoliberalism. At the end, I would say, both hegemony and agency coexist in a society like above scholars, I saw in BRP case, some people suddenly expressed support to the local government authorities despite the fact all were aware of the intention of the authorities. Similarly, in Gupta's book, peasants applied both traditional and modern techniques in Alipur and finally, from Kabeer's work, I noticed, how Bangladeshi women entered into the garments (hegemonic constructions) and simultaneously, raised voice against management. So, as I understand it, I agree with the notion of hegemony that sustains in every sphere of the society, and at the same time, I have found agency, which does not blindly submit to the inevitable, and the fact is that they coexist dichotomously. Balancing economic growth with social equity and environmental sustainability requires a careful reconsideration of neoliberal principles and a thoughtful engagement with alternative perspectives, ensuring that the development agenda addresses the needs of diverse communities and fosters inclusive, sustainable progress.

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