

# **On the Edges of Development**

Cultural Interventions

**Edited by Kum-Kum Bhavnani,  
John Foran, Priya A. Kurian and  
Debashish Munshi**

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# Introduction

## From the Edges of Development

*Kum-Kum Bhavnani, John Foran,  
Priya A. Kurian, and Debashish Munshi*

After some six decades of circulation, *development* continues to be a contested term, referring both to the ideal of improvement in people's well-being and to a far more dystopian reality on the ground. Because of our commitment to a noneconomistic development as an important way to ameliorate poverty, we start from the premise that the post-1940s development project has clearly "failed the Third World" (Bhavnani, Foran, and Kurian, 2003b, 2). In the contemporary neocolonial age, the nexus of big business, financial institutions, and capitalist regimes have wreaked havoc on the Third World in the name of development, usually making the word a euphemism for the exploitation of the world's natural resources to benefit minuscule transnational elites located in all sections of the world.

Flames of death and destruction, fueled by the desire of the United States, the United Kingdom, and their allies to control the cash-rich resource of oil, have engulfed large parts of the world, most visibly in the Middle East, from Iraq to Lebanon, but also in places such as Sudan and Venezuela, which are firmly in the media gaze but whose oil resources are often not discussed at length. The battles to control water—the other vital resource—have had no less devastating consequences (see, for example, Bhavnani and Bywater, Chapter 4, this volume). Much of the strife in the Middle East has been about Israel's relentless push for a development that is based on a disproportionate control of water systems that has left Palestinians with scarce access to a vital resource. In fact, as Vandana Shiva (2002) points out in *Water Wars*, some of the most important conflicts of our time revolve around contested needs for resources that are crucial for being seen as part of this apparently modern, technologically advanced, and strongly scientific era. So obsessed have neoliberal governments and market libertarians become with their need to control water that they have systematically promoted the privatization of a resource that every living being ought to take for granted, an obsession that has had tragic consequences for the poor in regions as diverse as Bolivia, South Africa, and India. Development-driven projects funded by the World Bank in South Africa that redrew water distribution networks on commercially viable lines sparked cholera epidemics in the poorest regions of the country (Bond 2001; see also Conca 2006).



State terror was unleashed on the residents of the Bolivian city of Cochabamba to quell protests against the exorbitant prices of water set by Aguas del Tunari, a subsidiary of the transnational corporation Bechtel (Shultz 2005b). The government annulled the contract only after sustained public protests and rebellion (Olivera 2004).

That these regions were predominantly populated by Black people would come as no surprise to those who have followed the development agenda in much of the world. In most cases, the worst impacts are felt by Third World subaltern publics who are at the receiving end of the environmental havoc and social upheaval caused by an endless quest for resources on their lands (Munshi and Kurian 2005, 2007). Some of these Third World publics include the Adivasis<sup>1</sup> in India (see, for example, Kurian 2000; Baviskar 2003), the Ogoni peoples who bore the brunt of multinational oil exploration in Nigeria (Rowell 1996), the Kayapo in Brazil (Turner 1999), and the Meratus Dayaks of Indonesia (Tsing 1993, 2005).

In each of these cases, development as a project that centers growth as its main goal has failed the most vulnerable people of the Third World because of a misplaced emphasis on varieties of top-down, elite-devised “modernization” strategies, a lack of attention to the central contributions of women and people of color, and a disregard for culture. For this form of development project, the Third World has been used as space for the creation of new “resource frontiers . . . made possible by Cold War militarization of the Third World and the growing power of corporate transnationalism” (Tsing 2005, 28). As Anna Tsing (2005, 28) points out, these “resource frontiers” were places where business and the military joined hands to “disengage nature from local ecologies and livelihoods” and rebrand natural resources as commodities for trade and profit. As Tsing (2005) shows, through a powerful study of the South East Kalimantan region of Indonesia, the relentless pursuit of resources to fire the engine of development has devastated local populations not just economically but also culturally, as local ways of living and being give way to the profit-and-loss logic of capitalism. This is not totally new of course. Retelling what is a familiar story, the ravages of colonialism meant that European colonizers had embarked on what they saw as a mission to “civilize” the colonies but, as Frantz Fanon says, we now “know with what sufferings humanity has paid for every one of their triumphs of the mind” (1965, 252). This link between the civilizing mission of colonialism and the modernization project of development is rarely discussed within mainstream publications on development. As a result, much of conventional development is founded upon a set of fictional narratives that overlook many of its exploitative practices—fictions which might suggest some reasons for its failure for the peoples of the Third World.

There is another face to development, however. For us, this is an apt moment to insistently interrogate the dominant paradigm of development that has—along with the rather different approaches in Harry S. Truman’s 1949 inaugural presidential address and at the 1955 Bandung Conference—

served to produce the idea of the Third World (Hadjor 1992; Prashad 2007). Truman, in his 1949 inaugural presidential address said: “We must embark on a bold new programme for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. The old imperialism—exploitation for foreign profit—has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a programme of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing” (quoted in Sachs 1992, 6).

As Wolfgang Sachs says, “Two billion people became underdeveloped on that day,” and, we would argue, despite Truman’s insistence otherwise, that it provided a legitimation to continue the colonial relationship albeit in a more modern guise. Truman’s way of thinking about development is in contrast to, for example, the notion put forward at the 1955 Bandung Conference when Third World countries emphasized the importance of Third World nations relying on each other for scientific technical assistance and expertise, rather than relying on, and thus becoming dependent on, First World nations for such knowledge. Although the thinking about development at Bandung was top-down, nonetheless, those at that conference envisioned development as having the potential to be mutually supportive through a reciprocal exchange of scientific and technological expertise. In other words, development, at Bandung, was not viewed merely as a site for the entry of capitalism.

In our interrogations, we also seek to show how a critical element of development is about access to resources by the poorest and most marginalized populations and, as Mike Keefe-Feldman says, this access is “a struggle that is at once cultural, political, and ideological” (2006). The struggles over life-sustaining “goods” such as water, land, and forests epitomize not only the ongoing process of commodification of such resources but also a reframing of essential resources, within the antiprivatization movement, “from public good to human right” (Conca 2006, 215, 246). In this way, new concepts of development—from below, democratically engaged, and seeking empowerment by those most affected—are constantly bubbling up. It is this refusal of globalization, with its many entangled and complex dimensions, as well as the refusal of an economistic development-from-above, that are explored in this volume.

## POST-DEVELOPMENT AND ITS CHALLENGES

Wide-ranging critiques of the modern development project from a variety of perspectives have been present at least since the 1970s. Perhaps the most radical of these critiques are those that have emerged since the 1990s over the rejection of the development project itself—sometimes grouped together under the umbrella term of *post-development*, *alternative development*, or *neo/populist development*, to name the most prominent (see,

among others, Escobar 1992, 1995; Rahnema 1997; Esteva 1992, 2006). Post-development perspectives scrutinize the narrow rationalist thinking upon which mainstream development—its institutions and practitioners—rely. The philosophical basis for the failure of development is this rationalist approach founded on a belief in a unilinear notion of progress and the conviction that the Third World is deficient in both knowledge and information (McFarlane 2006; Ziai 2004). The struggles “between global capital and biotechnology interests, on the one hand, and local communities and organizations, on the other, constitute the most advanced stage in which the meanings over development and postdevelopment are being fought over” (Escobar 1995, 19).

Arturo Escobar’s post-development argument, drawing from Foucauldian thinking, identifies three major discourses—democracy, (cultural) difference, and antidevelopment—which could serve as the basis for envisioning new struggles and expanding “anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, anti-productivist, and anti-market struggles to new terrains” (1992, 431). Through this emphasis on discursive analyses, as well as the significance it gives local and indigenous knowledges, post-development offers a move away from “the centring of economic relations” (Brigg 2002, 421), which characterize mainstream development studies. Indeed, Foucauldian notions of discourse and power have been central to the efforts of many post-development authors in focusing on the discourses of rationality that drive mainstream development institutions and development practices (see also, for example, Ferguson 1994; Escobar 1995; Kothari 2001).

The post-development critique of development dovetails with feminist, indigenous, and environmentalist critiques of the development project (see, for example, Fernandes and Menon 1987; Sen and Grown 1987; Shiva 1988; Marchand and Parpart 1995; Spivak 1999; Kurian 2000; Bhavnani, Foran, and Kurian 2003a). Each of these critical trajectories has demonstrated, in varying detail, the flaws, absences, and the explicitly destructive nature of modern economic development.<sup>2</sup> There are, also, however, many who question this modern development project and simultaneously take issue with the writings of those sympathetic to post-development, who appear to simplify and homogenize mainstream development and underestimate its appeal for Third World states (see, for example, Pieterse 1998). Thus, in his comments on post-development, Piers Blaikie calls for “a more politically astute and practical reconstruction of certain aspects of ‘development,’ particularly in the neopopulist mode of developmentalism” (2000, 1033). Further, he criticizes what he considers to be a “romanticised notion of the local,” the failure to question problematic “social agendas that appear at the local sites of power” (Blaikie 2000, 1038–1039), and, alongside others, the absence of credible alternatives offered by post-development work (Blaikie 2000; Pieterse 1998, 2000; Schuurman 2000; Matthews 2004). A number of other analysts have attempted to moderate post-development’s argument that development is one form of colonization and have argued that such a

notion not only stems from a misinterpretation of Foucauldian notions of power, but is also “a hyperbolic rhetorical device” (Brigg 2002, 422; see also Rossi 2004). Indeed, as Aram Ziai succinctly states, the “ambivalence of post-development” lends itself to either a “reactionary neo-populism” or an emancipatory radical democracy (Ziai 2004, 1045, 1058).

Against this background, Sally Matthews (2004, 380) offers the argument that the African context “with its rich variety of ways of understanding and being” is a source that “can provide the seeds for thought for all those . . . who question the PWWII [post-World War II] development project.” In contrast to the lamenting of the loss of African values that some argue occur in the wake of mainstream development (Etounga-Manguelle, 2000), there are others such as Jean-Marc Ela (1998), whose argument we embrace, albeit critically, in this volume:

Africa is not against development. It dreams of other things than the expansion of a culture of death or an alienating modernity that destroys the fundamental values so dear to Africans. . . . Africa sees further than an all-embracing world of material things and the dictatorship of the here and now, that insists on trying to persuade us that the only valid motto is “I sell, therefore I am.” In a world often devoid of meaning, Africa is a reminder that there are other ways of being. (Ela 1998)

This eloquent statement offers much food for thought, despite the fact that it homogenizes “Africa,” a homogenization that is a little too close for our comfort to how colonizers and Eurocentric perspectives view the continent.

## FROM THE EDGES OF DEVELOPMENT

In this volume, we as editors, along with the chapter contributors, take account of the contributions of the post-development scholarship. We are mindful that some of the critiques of post-development scholarship stem partly from the desire for answers—for alternatives to existing paradigms and practices of development. Our volume does not offer prescriptions or “how-to” formulae for doing development. The primary goal of this volume is to reenvision development through a rigorous yet imaginative exploration of how alternative conceptualizations—many of which emerge from the edges of development—can recenter the myriad refusals to contemporary mainstream development policy and thought. These conceptualizations draw on a variety of approaches from the realms of cultural studies, postcolonial studies, critical geography, and literary criticism. Most specifically, we adopt a Third World Cultural Studies perspective that represents “a political approach to culture, and a cultural approach to politics, focusing on how political discourses circulate and compete” (Foran 2002, 3). Our approach in this volume builds on the Women, Culture, Development

(WCD) paradigm, which rearticulates development by centering women and viewing culture as lived experience, thereby making visible the agency of subaltern women and men in the facilitation of social change and transformation in the Third World (see Bhavnani, Foran, and Kurian 2003a).

Mapping these cultural, political, and ideological fault lines is a major step in demystifying development. We put forward our cartography as a way to demonstrate how the articulation of the labor, cultures, and histories of women and men outside the mainstream frame of development offers more helpful insights to ameliorate injustice and inequality, the ultimate goal for all forms of development. The subaltern women and men centered in our approach are not seen, first and foremost, as victims in a system of cruel and unjust inequalities, but rather, as leading agents of change. This emphasis on racialization, ethnicization, and gender includes, by definition, a discussion of indigenous modes of agency. That we base our thinking on cultural studies approaches means that paradigms of development can be propelled toward an active engagement with subaltern agency. This, in turn, decenters the top-down approach to development we have critiqued previously.

A special aim of our volume is to shift development from its Eurocentric focal points much as the subaltern historians (see Chakrabarty 2000) “provincialized” Europe by positioning European art, history, literature, and philosophy as simply one of many strands of intellectual thought rather than the primary one. In line with the idea that Europe is “an imaginary figure that remains deeply embedded in clichéd and shorthand forms in some everyday habits of thought” (Chakrabarty 2000, 4), we argue that mainstream development is largely elitist, functionalist, and inclined to privilege First World ways of being. From this it is possible to see that this unilinear or progressivist concept of development is entrenched in policymakers’ and practitioners’ minds along with top-down science and technology. We address this unilinearity through a series of critical interrogations. This only becomes possible when drawing on multidisciplinary perspectives which emanate beyond the borders of the mainstream development literature. In our insistence that we closely examine the edges of development rather than an epistemological core, we put forward an idea of development that focuses on the realities of people’s lives in the Third World. What this means is that, in this volume, we turn the spotlight onto the lived experiences of the largely unsung but key protagonists of the South such as “peasants, tribals, semi- or unskilled industrial workers in non-Western cities, men and women from the subordinate social groups—in short, the subaltern classes of the third world” (Chakrabarty 2000, 8). It is this multidisciplinary approach—one that peels away the fictions of development, that centers refusals to development, and that understands the significance of science and technology as being crucial in creating greater equality as long as it is not under the control of those

whose only motivation is to create greater and greater profits—that we offer here. That is, we privilege an analysis of ways in which development has been, and continues to be, refused. In so doing, this collection focuses our critical gaze on the discourses that create an inferiorized Third World and which quickly translate into forms of development that are inherently oppressive (see Bayoumi, Chapter 1, and Munshi and Kurian, Chapter 7, this volume).

In the quest to articulate this new conception, we have organized the volume to address three questions: (1) How is mainstream development “refused,” and how can such a refusal suggest ways toward a more equitable and livable development? (2) How are emergent discourses around science, sexuality, and gendered economies challenging dominant approaches to development? (3) How do fictions and other cultural productions help us to analyze mainstream development as well as envision alternatives?

## ORGANIZATION AND CONTENTS

In Part I, we look at the notion of “refusing” development as being both a utopian ideal and a necessary aspect of many struggles from below which aim to alter the terms of globalization from above. To “refuse” development is to show its devastating consequences as it is propounded by governments, global financial institutions and trade agreements, and transnational capital. Refusing development simultaneously redefines cultural symbols and political agents in ways that point toward effective opposition and credible alternatives. This part of the volume juxtaposes past and present, and draws its materials from a rejection of the all-consuming hegemonic paradigm of *Westernity*. Molefi Asante (Chapter 5) engages with this term while Moustafa Bayoumi (Chapter 1) reminds readers of the struggles for Algerian independence as played out in Paris in 1961. Hume Johnson (Chapter 2) analyzes this refusal through her examination of the creative strategies of struggle carried out by women street vendors in Jamaica, and Ara Wilson (Chapter 3) shows how the contested sexual geography and varied layers of the economy of Bangkok form a significant part of Thai women’s daily political and cultural practices. Finally, Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Krista Bywater (Chapter 4) show how the challenges to the privatization of water in India lead to a refusal that gives succor to social justice movements around the world. Each chapter, in its own way, thus traces pathways toward alternatives to current regimes of development.

In Part II, we look at the emergent discourses of development. Discourses—the ways in which we talk about the world—play an important role in shaping that world, for better or for worse. Our use of

discourse also connotes the lived experiences of people, how identities are constructed, particularly political ones, how cultural meanings are transmitted and interpreted, and how individuals, groups, communities, and nations relate to each other in ways that inevitably include cultural processes. Four areas that have assumed increasing visibility in this contestation between visions of development are the struggles over political discourses of liberation, science, sexuality, and the ways that economies are gendered. The contributors to Part II take up these ideas. María Josefa Saldaña-Portillo (Chapter 6) reflects on anticolonial liberation narratives from across the Third World, and Debashish Munshi and Priya Kurian (Chapter 7) inform us of the ways in which genetic bioengineering and immigration play out in complementary tension in New Zealand. John Foran (Chapter 10) presents a theory of the new languages of revolution through the conceptual lens of political cultures of opposition. Magdalena Villarreal (Chapter 9) analyzes the impact of the rural development policies of the Mexican state and capital on women, while Ming-Yan Lai (Chapter 8) narrates the many stories of Filipino/a overseas workers in Hong Kong. Collectively, these chapters suggest the force of culture in development and social change and link discourse to social structures in a variety of ways.

The final part of the book, Part III, explores the idea that development is, in many senses, made up of a number of fictions. The failure of the half century of development since the end of World War II to deliver much in the way of a better life for the 80 percent of the planet's population that make up the Third World—the *majority* world—is one way to think about how the grandiose and desirable goals of development have become fictions. Another way to see the fictions of development is to comprehend that the very idea of development is a construction, or rather, a series of constructions, in people's minds, be they planners, government officials, international lenders, or members of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society. A yet deeper layer to fictions of development lies in cultural production, particularly novels and myths, which, ironically, are sometimes able to tell the stories of development more realistically, and certainly more vividly, than scholarly production. Tera Maxwell (Chapter 13) discusses the ways in which Filipina discursive reappropriations of a mythic past counter contemporary modernist arguments, while Kennedy et al. (Chapter 12) discuss Paule Marshall's unsurpassed classic set on a fictional island in the Caribbean, *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*. Films, both documentary and features, constitute another set of fictions around development with lessons about how development might be imagined differently. Lena Khor (Chapter 11) looks at the Mama Benz phenomenon in West Africa, while Françoise Lionnet (Chapter 14) moves us to the southwestern Indian Ocean and explores the insights afforded by thematizing development as a fiction.



It is our hope that a central focus on how culture shapes development, the wide interdisciplinarity we present, the broad and diversely situated regions of the world that are brought into contact with it, the themes we have organized the volume around, the connections between scholarship and social change, and the juxtapositions of the past with the present and future will constitute unique and significant contributions of this volume. The tracing of development as an ever-new possibility that lies at the intersection of feminist, cultural, and Third World studies promises glimpses of a new world on the horizons of the new century. We urgently need such glimpses.

As we send this book to press in November 2008, Barack Obama has just been elected President of the United States. In scenes reminiscent of the first democratic election in South Africa in 1994, queue upon queue of voters, many black, were determined to cast their (sometimes first) vote to indicate their desire for a new future in the U.S. Hope and optimism are peeking from the edges of development. But it is a hope tempered by the ravages of unbridled capitalist mechanisms of development manifest in global crises ranging from the collapse of money markets and an economic recession in the West to the human catastrophes in places as far flung as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, and Afghanistan caused by rampant exploitation of natural resources under the guise of “conflicts” and wars. We welcome any change, large or small, that offers a chance for women and men in the Third and First Worlds to move forward together to create a world free of inequality and injustice. *¡Sí se puede!*

## NOTES

1. *Adivasi* literally means “original dwellers” and is a widely accepted term in India to refer to indigenous or tribal peoples.
2. See, for example, the review of WID (Women in Development), WAD (Women and Development), and GAD (Gender and Development) approaches in Bhavnani, Foran, and Kurian (2003b), and a discussion of the marginalization of environmental issues in mainstream development in Kurian (2000).





Part I

# Refusing Representations of Development



# 1    October 17, 1961

*Moustafa Bayoumi*

The failures of development are self-evident everywhere you look. Global justice remains elusive and basic needs such as water and health care are increasingly privatized out of the reach of far too many people. Across the planet, warfare is ascendant, corruption rules, and poverty expands. Clearly the time is long past to examine the idea of Third World development and its relationship to European imperialism. New paradigms are urgently called for, formations of thinking that can mine the truth of how various peoples across the global south (and in the pockets of the global south found in the industrialized north) actually live. In this chapter, I propose that Third World Cultural Studies (TWCS) contains the possibility to break from modernization theory's colonial past (and present) due to its sensitivities to the historic and lived experiences of subject populations and to the varieties of colonial violence. An engaged TWCS, moreover, seeks to historicize our contemporary condition and to recover lost and hidden histories that remain obscured by the dominant representations of our era. A historical sensibility is essential to the success of TWCS. Amnesia is characteristic of power, which forever seeks to forget all that is inconvenient for its execution, but there can be no justice without memory. To that end, I explore in this chapter the concept of TWCS by turning to one incident, a forgotten moment more than forty years ago when colonial violence invaded the city of Paris.

It was one of those crisp October mornings in Paris, the kind that bring people out in overcoats and hats onto the river bridges. On this day, while the water lapped gently beneath them, several hundred people assembled on the Saint-Michel bridge in the fourth arrondissement, steps away from the Préfecture de Police and the Palais de Justice. They were as still as night, observing a minute of silence in mourning for a group of Algerian dead. Among the crowd this morning was the mayor of Paris and several other elected officials, though the president of the republic was notable by his absence only. Meanwhile, on the other side of the bridge, their access blocked by the police, protesters had amassed noisily and were holding up a sign marked in bold block letters that read "Shame to the FLN collaborators." This group of the extreme right, stranded on the left bank,

bellowed familiar slogans like “Proud to be French!” and “Algérie Française!” (*Agence France-Press*, October 17, 2001), their belligerent voices easily transported over the diamond waters of the Seine. But there was no violence this time, and the brief ceremony seemed over before it all began. The feelings it embodied, however, felt like they had never ceased.

The day in question was October 17, 1961, a date that had long been forgotten by many in Paris, but the ceremony just described took place forty years later to the day. This time, in 2001, the police protected the protestors, who in turn were not Algerians but French. Forty years earlier, the scene looked quite different. A massive and peaceful demonstration had been planned for that night by the Fédération de France of the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale). Twelve days earlier, on October 5, 1961, the prefect of police, Maurice Papon, now infamous for sending 1,560 Jews off to concentration camps during the Vichy years, had decreed an ethnic-specific curfew on the Algerian population alone: all Algerians, or “Muslim French of Algeria” as they were called, were to be off the streets between the hours of 8:30 p.m. and 5:30 a.m. Cafés were to close at 7 p.m. and, as a police circular stated, “it is highly recommended to the Muslim French to circulate separately, small groups being likely to appear suspect with the rounds and patrols of the police” (Le Cour Grandmaison 2001, 204).

The Algerian war, begun in 1954, had come home to roost in important ways. So much so that Michel Debré, then prime minister, had written in 1958 that the FLN’s capital was Paris (Einaudi 1991, 25). The same year General Raoul Salan stated, “The Mediterranean runs through France as the Seine runs through Paris” (quoted in Vidal-Naquet 1963, 107). (Salan, it should be remembered, became a founding member of the far right OAS—the Secret Army Organization—and was a leader in the failed putsch to assassinate President de Gaulle.) In fact, Debré and Salan’s chronology is slightly off. Thousands of Algerians had been in the French capital as laborers since the beginning of the century, but as the war went on, the center of its conflict increasingly enveloped Paris. Police violence against Algerians in Paris, however, predates the Algerian war. In 1953, police opened fire on a group of peaceful demonstrators from the PPA (Parti Populaire Algérien, a precursor to the MNA, the Mouvement Nationale Algérien) during a demonstration on Bastille Day, killing seven and wounding thirty (Stora 2001, 60). But with the liberation war, the levels of violence escalated dramatically. By the late 1950s, the “café wars” had broken out between two rival national liberation groups, the MNA and the FLN, and this bloody fratricidal conflict between the two groups claimed almost 5,000 lives and 10,000 (overwhelmingly Algerian) wounded, a large number in Paris and its suburbs (Einaudi 1991, 20–21).

By 1960, the FLN emerged victorious, only to face off with a new enemy, a police department heavily populated with former Algerian administrators and deeply infiltrated with OAS sympathizers. Papon himself, who was