# Dilemmas of Development Discourse: The Crisis of Developmentalism and the Comparative Method

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### ABSTRACT

Developmentalism, or the theory of linear progress, has taken several forms — evolutionism, modernization theory, development thinking — which correlate with different epochs of western hegemony. The comparative method serves as its underpinnings in theoretically incorporating non-western societies into the developmental paradigm. Developmentalism is universalist and ahistorical, teleological and ethnocentric. A discourse of power, it is presented and taken as a *recipe for social change.* The present crisis of developmentalism is both a crisis of development in the south and a crisis of modernism in the west. In the west, developmentalism is being challenged by new social movements and, in theoretical terms, by postmodernism; in the south, alternative development strategies test the limits of the developmental paradigm. Non-western concepts of modernization have also been developed. This discussion concludes with two queries, one concerning the passage from the bi-polar world of the Cold War to polycentrism, and one with respect to the deconstruction of the west as a prerequisite to the deconstruction of development.

**In the holograms of hegemony panoramas of power** subtly fade into theories of history. Evolutionism was an imperial vision, modernization theory bears witness to the American Century, and development thinking translates into contemporary development policies. In the discourses of history produced by western hegemony knowledge and power are intricately interwoven.

In his analysis of what he calls the post-totalitarian system Václav Havel observes, 'The principle involved here is that the centre of power is identical with the centre of truth' (Havel, 1985: 25). This

also applies to the centres of power and leading truths in the western world.

The central thesis of developmentalism is that social change occurs according to a pre-established pattern, the logic and direction of which are known. Privileged knowledge of the direction of change is claimed by those who declare themselves furthest advanced along its course. Developmentalism is the truth from the point of view of the centre of power; it is the theorization (or rather, ideologization) of its own path of development, and the comparative method elaborates this perspective.

## FROM EVOLUTIONISM TO DEVELOPMENT

Herodotus' *Histories* are replete with cross-cultural comparisons phrased in terms of correspondences as well as differences (Hodgen, 1964: 25). From the outset in the western tradition, intercultural comparisons interacted with conceptions of history. Aristotle made comparisons not simply between types but within a presumed order of growth and development of types, that is, according to a comparative-developmental perspective.

> When Aristotle compared his own polity to that of the Cyclopes in Homer, and then adduced 'barbarous' people living even in his time, he was pointing to a presumed line of development from kinship through the community to the *polis*. Contemporary barbaric peoples seemed to Aristotle fit evidence of what the Greeks themselves had once been like (Nisbet, 1969: 193).

This is to be read both in the context of Greek development and relative to the Athenian empire of Aristotle's time. In other words, cross-cultural comparisons had never been culturally neutral. Comparison established boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, identifying the *other* in a mirror of similarity and difference; it defined alterity as part of the discourse of identity.

Accordingly, the comparative-developmental discourse of nineteenth-century evolutionism conformed to a pattern which had classical antecedents. Victorian anthropology, race science and evolutionism formed part of the discourse of the British Empire. The comparative method served as an adjunct to evolutionism, for instance, in the hands of Herbert Spencer, where it consisted of 'the accumulation of customs and ideas gathered from many places and

periods, to substantiate developmental schemes arrived at through speculation' (Mair, 1965: 42).

During the nineteenth century, race science served as the nexus between natural history and social history, between biological and social evolutionism. Race science and evolutionism both explained and justified European supremacy: identifying the Caucasian, Nordic and in particular the Anglo-Saxon race as superior in its endowments, with Europe leading the way in the trajectory of evolution and exhibiting the most advanced stage of human perfectibility. Thus imperial history was translated into natural history.

Nineteenth-century social science was profoundly preoccupied with mapping and conceptualizing Europe's Great Transformation, which was variously associated with industrialization, urbanization and the Enlightenment. The main types of conceptualization to emerge are stages theories, dichotomous theories and critical variable theories. Comte's social dynamics, Marx's 'economic law of motion of modern society', Morgan's reflections on the development of kinship systems, Maine's on the family and property, and Tylor's on culture produced stages theories. They share a depiction of social evolution as a succession of stages: primitivism, savagery, barbarism, civilization.

Dichotomous theories conceptualize social change in terms of a bi-polar process — from status to contract, from mechanical to organic solidarity (Durkheim), *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* (Tönnies). Stages theories may be interpreted as dichotomous theories 'spelled out' or extended. A different type of theory conceptualizes social change in terms of a single critical variable, such as differentiation, increase in complexity or rationalization (Weber).

Basic to the general understanding of social change was the biological metaphor of growth. Change, as Robert Nisbet (1969, Chapter 5) pointed out, was regarded as natural, directional, immanent, continuous, necessary, and proceeding from uniform causes. Social evolution was unilinear, its direction the same for societies the world over. Peoples at earlier stages of evolution were viewed as 'contemporary ancestors', a perspective which has been referred to as 'coevalness denied' (Fabian, 1983). Evolution sorted history, producing an imperial panorama which dehistorized non-western peoples, or rather, which granted them a history only from the perspective of the imperial lighthouse.

From the point of view of the centre, global *space* appeared transformed into a *time* sequence, with Europeans as the only

contemporaries, the sole inhabitants of modernity. Empire, then, was a time machine in which one moved backward or forward along the axis of progress. This eurocentric perspective also served as a manual for imperial management of societies at different evolutionary stages.

Europe defined the world. Like Adam in an earlier script she gave names to phenomena in the genesis of the new world society brought forth in the wake of European expansion and conquest, industrial revolution and advance of the world market. The naming process itself was an extension of the process of conquest.

Also in political studies this had been the standard discursive practice. To a considerable extent political science is a comparative science. From the classical authors onward, from Aristotle to Montesquieu, the comparative method in political studies served as a substitute for experiment. The comparative approach was reformulated by John Stuart Mill with the methodology of concomitant variables. With the onset of evolutionism the comparative method became an adjunct to evolutionist speculation.

Twentieth-century social science, from the 1930s on, rejected race science and social evolutionism. Two western world wars undermined the faith in progress. Cyclical theories of history of a pessimistic cast prevailed, in the imagery of rise, decline and fall, as in the work of Oswald Spengler, Pitrim Sorokin, Vilfredo Pareto, Arnold Toynbee. In anthropology, cultural relativism seemed appropriate amidst the social realities of the interbellum. German critical theory contemplated the 'dialectics of the Enlightenment'.

After the Second World War, evolution resurfaced. On the one hand, there were attempts to reformulate evolution and on the other, it resurfaced in modernization theory and in the (in several respects interchangeable) discourse of development.

What Victorian anthropology was to the British Empire, modernization theory is to United States hegemony — its justification, rationale and agenda. It arose as the theoretical corollary of American globalism in the context of the Cold War and decolonization. Initially it took shape as a substitute for knowledge; the conceptual schemes of modernization served as surrogates for a tradition of enquiry into African and Asian societies which was lacking almost entirely in the United States.

Modernization theory evolved from a marriage of evolutionism and functionalism, with modernization conceptualized either as a critical variable or a dichotomous theory. Examples of the former,

which is not the most common form of modernization theory, are rationalization, or industrialization. The advantages of this conceptualization are that modernization is regarded as an open-ended rather than a goal-directed process and that the defining terms are relatively narrow; on the other hand, 'When defined in relation to a single variable which is already identified by its own unique term, the term "modernization" functions not as a theoretical term but simply as a synonym' (Tipps, 1973: 205).

An additional option is to interpret modernization in terms of a set of critical variables: rationalization *and* industrialization. This may be an open-ended perspective as well but here the problem is one of boundaries: which variables to include. What about adding to the profile of modernity, market relations, urbanization, the nuclear family, individualization, democratization, or for that matter, anomie, alienation, and so forth? Each additional variable would mean defining modernity in terms of another, implied theory, and a combination of variables is but an amalgam of theories.

Most concepts of modernization are of the dichotomous type and follow some version of the tradition-modernity contrast. The modernization scenario laid out in Talcott Parsons's 'pattern variables' is a familiar example: modernization is defined as a movement from particularism to universalism, from ascription to achievement, from functional diffuseness to functional specificity, and from affective roles to affective-neutrality.

In this context the meaning of *modernity* changed again. When the term arose in sixteenth-century European discourse it served to distinguish between moderns and ancients, with the 'Middle Ages' as the middling term (Jones, 1961). By the nineteenth century it had come to mean contemporaneity, and by the twentieth it had acquired a distinctly positive ring and was identified with improvement and efficiency (Williams, 1976). In American discourse, on the other hand, modernity is contrasted to 'tradition' (frequently operationalized as 'resistance to change'). Feudalism, which in European discourse would belong to the middle or transitional stage, the precursor to modernity, from the American point of view appears as part of the general morphology of backwardness.

In the European context modernity was originally a Renaissance concept; in the American context, however, it is an Enlightenment concept. Europe and North America followed different paths of modernization. European societies are layered and composite,

including peasant, feudal, monarchical, urban mercantile and industrial identities; more composite and complex than North American society, where industrialization came upon rural settlements (colonies termed 'plantations' in the seventeenth century) which adopted an Enlightenment political structure. Accordingly, European understandings of modernization tend to be more layered and complex than American views. Modernization theory as such is more specifically an American discourse.

Intrinsic to the tradition-modernity dichotomy is the idea that 'tradition' is a residual and diffuse concept, denoting everything 'unmodern', so that the two terms in the dichotomy are not symmetrical, not of equivalent conceptual status. The same applies to the notion of 'non-western' societies (cf. Huntington, 1976). This exemplifies what Frank refers to: 'This entire approach to economic development and cultural change attributes a history to the developed countries but denies all history to the underdeveloped ones' (Frank, 1969: 40).

In the fine print of modernization theory the evaluation of 'tradition' is usually not so diffuse. Thus, as Edward Said points out, the fictions of modernization theory rhyme well with Orientalism, arguing, for instance with respect to the Islamic world:

> that before the advent of the United States, Islam existed in a kind of timeless childhood, shielded from true development by an archaic set of superstitions, prevented by its strange priests and scribes from moving out of the Middle Ages into the modern world. At this point, Orientalism and modernization theory dovetail nicely (Said, 1981: 28).

Dichotomous conceptualizations of modernization are teleological — the destination is assumed to be known. They are normative, universalizing 'western values', and ethnocentric, with the United States (the American way of life) as the epitome of modernity. Modernization theory differs from evolutionism in that modernization is no longer regarded as immanent and inevitable; change is not always progressive. Outside stimuli, help from more advanced societies, may be necessary. Besides, there may be multiple roads towards the goal of modernity — democratic or totalitarian.

Modernization theory competed with communism in a world split by the Cold War. The open door of 'free enterprise' economics and the neo-mercantilism of centrally planned economies were the two main avenues of modernization. The aim of comparative politics

was to assess which way the 'pre-industrial countries' would go. All the same, modernization was virtually synonymous with *westerniza-tion*. In the words of Edward Shils:

> Modern means being Western without the onus of dependence on the West. . . .
> The image of the Western countries, and the partial incorporation and
> transformation of that image in the Soviet Union, provide the standards or
> models in the light of which the elites of the unmodern new states of Asia and
> Africa seek to reshape their countries (Shils, 1966: 10).

Indeed, politics was by no means of marginal concern in American modernization theory. This understanding of politics was essentially the politics of the American Revolution. Walt Rostow, the author of the classic of modernization theory, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (subtitled *An Anti-Communist Manifesto*), later devoted a study to *Politics and the Stages of Growth*. Even as he equated modernization with economic growth; its motive, Rostow declared, was generally *non-economic*. Indeed, 'The glory of America has been not its relative material wealth but the sense of its transcendent political mission in reconciling liberty and order' (Rostow, 1971: 6). Here a pure Enlightenment argument (liberty, order) mingles with Christian metaphors (glory, transcendence, mission).

Political modernization the American way means a programme of eighteenth-century political rationalism with Jeffersonian icing. This programme can be summed up in the following political princi-ples: the legitimacy of the state is derived not from supernatural but from secular sanctions inherent in the people; the continual widening of citizenship, or incorporation into a consensual moral order, ultimately including all adults; and the growing scope and reach of the power of state agencies. (Eisenstadt, 1966).

Modernization meant the adoption of 'western' political institu-tions. How this worked out in the 'unmodern' countries depended on the character of 'traditional' institutions and the manner of 'westernization'. This was the thrust of comparative politics (for instance Almond, 1964). In reality this programme was not that of 'the west' but only that of the American and French Revolutions, updated in American discourse such that the United States emerges as the culmination of 'the west'.

Generally, definitions of political modernization have been care-ful not to conflate modernization and *democratization*. Political modernization theories, whether following functionalist or market models, define democracy as formal democracy, in effect the

exercise of citizenship rights by the propertied class. It is significant that the key American theories of political modernization make democracy contingent upon economic growth — read: the forma- tion of a propertied class. This is middle-class democracy. It is the theory and practice of the White revolution bitterly resisting the Red revolution, the bourgeois revolution of the rights of the propertied classes resisting the proletarian revolution of the dispossessed, for the latter is regarded not as the fulfillment and completion of the former but as its negation. Accordingly, modernization is essentially social engineering from above and an operation of political contain- ment rather than democratization. American modernization projects such as Community Development and the Green Revolu- tion exemplify this character of White revolution.[1]

Stages theories of political modernization could accommodate any form of authoritarianism as a 'necessary' stage towards trans- cendence — provided they were not communist. Hence the crucial distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian political systems. Modernization theory has been emphatic in distancing itself from Marxism, the main source of bourgeois *Angst*. Time and again modernization has been defined as a way of class compromise and not class struggle. In the European context, this cleavage reproduced the nineteenth-century dispute between right and left Hegelians.

The deepest disputes in western social science have not been between developmentalism and an alternative but between strands of developmentalist thought. Developmentalism thus comes in multiple varieties, liberal and radical, with Marxism as the quintes- sential radical evolutionism. Marx formulated developmentalism in a nutshell in the preface to the first edition of *Capital*: 'The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.' Marxist stages theory (primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism) and the 'iron necessity' with which social changes ensue accord- ing to historical materialist determinism exemplify unilinear evolutionism.

These features of classical Marxism have been abandoned in western Marxism. Gramsci utterly rejected the thesis of objective laws of historical development similar in kind to natural laws, and the belief in a predetermined teleology. Gramsci's historicism and his concern with the 'ethico-political realm' and the spiritual and moral character of hegemony broadened the terrain conceptually

and politically. Still, Gramsci's thought follows the format of radical modernization theory, conceived more broadly and less mechanically. Lenin's interest in Taylorism is paralleled in Gramsci's fondness of Fordism and in his views on futurism and Americanism. Gramsci did not share the reservations regarding technology and the *Kulturkritik* of German critical theory. The concept of 'passive revolution' which Gramsci used to characterize the Risorgimento may also be read as a notion of modernization and, in effect, a concept of White revolution.[2]

In Marxist perspectives, modernization is equivalent to capitalist development and the role of the state is to facilitate this process. In post-colonial society, according to Hamza Alavi (1973), the state mediates the competing interests of the three propertied classes — the metropolitan bourgeoisie, the indigenous bourgeoisie and the landed classes.

With the waning of United States hegemony, the war in Vietnam, the upheavals of 1968 and the end of the postwar boom, and in the context of social theory, the mounting criticism of functionalism and Parsonian sociology, modernization theory lost appeal. In general discourse the keyword became 'development', which was generally short for economic development. Thus from a broad, sociological and ethnocentric concept of modernization the discourse shifted to a narrow, economic and ethnocentric concept.

Underwritten by the international community, encoded in the Development Decades of the United Nations, the discourse of development appears more neutral than previous formulations of social change. Development is primarily economic development and as such measurable. As such it is basic to the discourse of international bodies such as the IMF, World Bank, development banks and combines of donor countries. Development thinking reflects a mixture of discourses, primarily neoclassical economics with affinities to modernization theory and evolutionism. If modernization theory is steeped in eighteenth-century political rationalism, development is steeped in nineteenth-century economic rationalism, wavering between neoliberal and neomercantilist perspectives, between the self-regulating market and state intervention. The categories used in the UN system of highly developed, developed, less developed and least developed countries, structurally resemble the stages of evolutionism; they replicate similar underlying developmental assumptions in a 'modern', 'affectively neutral' language. The description of centre and periphery — derived from

nineteenth-century political geography — replicates the centrist logic of the diffusionist school of evolutionism.

'Development' tends to be short for the western development model. The perspective remains linear, teleological, ethnocentric. On the other hand, development thinking is nowhere nearly as 'optimistic' as previous developmentalist perspectives and the nineteenth-century faith in perfectibility and progress. The faith in progress applied principally to the metropolitan, imperial world. Now the horizon of development is clouded by neo-Malthusian notions — overpopulation, 'basket cases', lost continents, triage, lifeboat ethics.

The state in development discourse is attributed a role as conductor and conduit of development, the executive agency of development policy. Initially boundless optimism prevailed — following a concept of state capitalism, the state was the prime mover of development. Increasingly this has turned into scepticism about the capacities of Third World states for social engineering. In the West this is paralleled in generalized doubts concerning state capacities and the makeability of society (Migdal, 1988). At present the notion of the state as obstacle prevails (cf. Doornbos, 1989). Market-led development corresponds to the latest neo-liberal creed. The twentieth-century see-saw between liberalism and state intervention parallels the zigzags of nineteenth-century discourse and practice in economic theory and policy.

Dependency theory criticized development thinking for being ahistorical, for concealing historical relationships and denying the relationship between development and underdevelopment, in other words, the role of imperialist exploitation in European modernization, as if modernization occurred independently of the stream of world history. Summed up in the words of Frank: 'If the now under-developed were really to follow the stages of growth of the now developed ones, they would have to find still other peoples to exploit into underdevelopment, as the now developed countries did before them' (Frank, 1969: 46).

Dependency theory accounts for the limited capacities of Third World states with the concept of the *dependent state*. The role of the state in this perspective is to facilitate world market access into society: 'The state in the periphery has the function again to remove economically as far as possible the political border between the world market and the national economic area that this same state brings into existence' (Tilman Evers quoted in Frank, 1981: 234).

Thus, in effect, the interests of the metropolitan bourgeoisie are viewed as being preponderant over indigenous interests.

Dependency theory and other critiques of development thinking generated reflections and strategies of 'alternative development'. Whether we are talking about development alternatives or alternatives *to* development is one of the questions that present themselves (for example Kothari, 1988; Apter, 1987).

What these pairs of perspectives — modernization theory and Marxism, development thinking and dependency theory — have in common is economism, centrism and teleology: economism because economic growth is the centrepiece of social change, teleology in that the common assumption is goal-oriented development, centrism because development (or underdevelopment, according to the dependency view) is led from where it is furthest advanced — the metropolitan world. As such they are variations on a theme. This testifies to the strength and complexity of developmentalism as a paradigm. Part of this strength is that developmentalism is a layered, composite discourse which combines several discourses: liberal and radical, secular and religious.

## DEVELOPMENT AS REDEMPTION

What sets western universalism apart from other, non-western universalisms, according to Rajni Kothari (1988: 192), is its secular character. Generally developmentalism is cast, according to its self-definition and the way it is perceived, as a rationalization process, the advance of enlightenment. As such it carries the appeal of secular utopianism. However, this secularism is not simply to be taken for granted. Indeed developmentalism is also regarded as a secularized version of the Christian perspective: 'throughout its history the idea (of progress) has been closely linked with, has depended upon, religion or upon intellectual constructs derived from religion' (Nisbet, 1980: 352).

Developmentalism conforms to a Christian format and logic in viewing history as a salvific process. Thus it merges Christian and Enlightenment discourses, such that the momentum of faith corresponds with the logic of reason — reason and rationalization operating toward the fulfilment of the expectations of faith. Providence recast as Progress. Predestination reformulated as determinism. The basic scenario of the scripture, Paradise-Fall-

Redemption, comes replicated in evolutionary schemes. Primeval simplicity and innocence (the good savage or the pastoral past), followed by the fall from grace (corruption, decay, capitalism, urbanism — varying according to the discourse), which is in turn to be followed by a redeeming change (modernity, technology, or revolution). This transmutation and secularization of scriptural utopianism had begun to take place in the seventeenth and eight- eenth centuries, while some of the first steps were taken in the context of the Reformation. A recent explicit fusion of scientific and Christian futurisms, of biology and faith, is the work of Teilhard de Chardin (1955).

As European states emancipated from clerical authority while taking over the Church bureaucracy, likewise in social philosophy the emancipation from the dogmas of faith took place, on the one hand, through emulation of biblical scenarios and promises, and on the other, their substitution and transcendence by different methods and symbols, as in Robespierre's altar of Reason and Comte's Civili- zation in the role of the Supreme Being. Developmentalism arose from a rejection of religious explanations and clerical claims while following parallel cognitive patterns.

In the age of empire the place of Eden and the Hebrews was taken up by India, for the English and the Germans, and by Egypt, for the French. Sanskrit was regarded as the *fons et origo* of every- thing, then Egypt appeared as the source of all civilization (Said, 1985: 137). The horizon broadened but the lens was unchanged.

Enlightenment discourse followed the same star as Judaeo- Christianity; while the *manner* of redemption was different. David Livingstone passionately believed that what was missing in the African interior was the light of the gospel. In his footsteps, Henry Morton Stanley called out in the heart of the Congo jungle that there should be light — except that he meant electricity.

Hence the western ambivalence vis-a-vis non-western cultures — primitivism betokens purity, reminiscent of paradise, development brings corruption and decay, while redemption lays only in the completion of development, the full achievement of modernity. The latter, also for western societies, might be achieved only through *further* technological development. Hence the missionary zeal fre- quently associated with modernization and development, compar- able to earlier missionary passions of conversion, improvement and reform. Developmentalism and its master plan is not merely a matter of reason and logic, it is also, at heart, the performance of

a religious duty, the quest of a utopian rendezvous, the pursuit of a messianic course. That this passion has been secularized does make a difference; on the other hand, the attitude toward reason, science tends to be as totalizing as in the previous overtly religious outlook.

This convergence of discourses is one explanation of the inner strength of the developmentalist paradigm but not the only one. There are yet other reasons why it is actually difficult to think outside of this conceptual frame, some of which may be found in the context of language. Spatial metaphors are deeply embedded both in everyday English language and in the language of social theory. An enquiry into the semantics of social theory by Anne Salmond (1982) shows, first, that *knowledge is a landscape*, i.e. *knowledge has spatial existence*; secondly, *intellectual activity is a journey*. Related notions, that *knowledge is territory* and *argument is war*, are the basis of the accusation of intellectual 'imperialism' in theoretical texts. *Understanding is seeing* and *explanations are light sources* are related to the notion of intellectual activity as a journey. *Theoretical systems are buildings* is a metaphor related to structuralist discourse. Spatial distinctions of *high* and *low*, and of *levels*, further structure discourse. Notions of intellectual *advancement* and the *progress* of science follow likewise.

Thus the general conception of knowledge and social theory itself tends to be structured in terms of spatial or organic metaphors and of (linear) *motion in space*. Knowledge itself 'develops' and 'grows'. Developmentalism 'grows' out of these semantics of space/time.

## CRISIS

The crisis of developmentalism as a paradigm manifests itself as a crisis of modernism in the west and a crisis of development in the south. The awareness of ecological limits to growth is a significant part of the crisis of modernism. New social movements in the West enunciate the end of linear progress (Melucci, 1988: 254). Modernity is viewed increasingly as a theory and practice which is more exclusive than inclusive. The charmed circle of achievement and success, which is glamorized in media and advertisements, exacts a high toll and excludes and marginalizes many. There are other writings on the wall. The United States, the postwar epitome of modernity, is now the world's largest debtor nation. It claims the

largest underclass of any western country and a growing number of homeless people. In terms of infrastructure and economic investment it is itself in need of rebuilding.

Japan, the new leading nation in the annals of developmentalism, boasts high productivity but serves no example function the way previous centres of developmentalism did. It does not serve as a cultural role model; instead it largely follows western footsteps. For historical reasons it does not play an imperial, hegemonic role.

In the South, the crisis of development takes multiple forms. Failures of development policies correlate with a profound impasse in development thinking. The rhetorical character of developmentalism stands exposed in several ways. Development discourse in its ahistorical and apolitical character is incapable of coming to terms with the realities of world power and global interests, as is evidenced in the question of Third World debt. The metropolitan logic in development thinking is enshrined in the conditionalities of the IMF. The resistance to development in the South is also an affirmation of autonomy and an expression of cultural resistance to western ethnocentrism.

The critique of development is associated with a critique of science. As Maurice Bazin observes: 'Third World peoples were first made to believe in God, now they have to believe in science . . . first comes Salvation, then Progress; first through spiritual confessors, then through presidents' science advisers' (Bazin, 1987). Shiv Visvanathan (1988: 285) remarks: 'What we are witnessing today is a civil rights movement against development-as-terrorism, based on the recognition that the modern state committed to science has become the prime anti-ecological force in the world.' The critique of science also has a western tradition (for example, Aronowitz, 1989).

Universalizing from western experiences developmentalism created an ahistorical model of change which, on the one hand, created a 'Third World' which was but an historical construct, and on the other, constructed 'the West', which had no basis in historical reality either. The actual modernization paths of western countries differed among themselves (e.g. early, late industrializers) *and* differed from the idealogy of 'development'. Different countries applied different combinations of mercantilism and free trade, varying according to periods and contexts. Thus, *ethnocentrism* to characterize the bias of developmentalism would not even be a correct term. The divergence among western countries is much larger than the ideology of modernity and development suggests. A

concept such as democracy does not carry the same meaning even among western countries.

Development is also a neocolonial discourse — 'Where colonialism left off, development took over' (Kothari, 1988: 143). As such its premises began to come apart even as its policies were still being formulated. The comparative-developmental paradigm could not withstand the momentum of decolonization. The assumption that the western concepts of the nation, state, civil society and representative government are universal increasingly proved invalid, as political developments in Africa and Asia showed. The crisis of orientalism, diagnosed by Anouar Abdel-Malek (1963) and documented by Edward Said (1985), is a case in point. Universalism is an adjunct of hegemony and as hegemony shrinks so does truth.

## OPTIONS

The comparative method in social science has followed the tracks laid by developmentalism and, accordingly, the crisis of developmentalism is also a crisis of the comparative method. In comparative politics this has given rise, according to Bertrand Badie, to a threefold crisis of universalism, of explanation, and of the relationship between history and comparative political analysis (Badie, 1989). Firstly, there has been a crisis of universalism because, since the end of the 1970s, the transcultural nature of concepts derived from western discourse is increasingly in doubt. Secondly, there has been crisis of explanation because the assumption of a unitary, transcultural logic is not tenable: comparative analysis, therefore, cannot be causal; it can only be interpretative. Thus, the prioritization of economic development in development and modernization thinking assumes that economic factors are equally important everywhere and that the relationship between economics and politics is perceived similarly everywhere.

Accordingly, the present direction in political studies tends to be away from grand theory and a general model of history towards more modest aims. Badie, in a drastic departure from developmentalism and the comparative method, advocates the reconstruction of *political science as a cultural science*. This means the return of anthropology to political science. Semiotics would be accorded an important place in political studies, in order to compare different meaning systems of social actors; linguistics, to examine the social

history of political vocabularies; and history, to problematize the historical autonomy of the unit of analysis. This approach, according to Badie, cannot be of the same theoretical status as the classical comparative approach. The limitation of the cultural analysis approach is that it can produce description and interpretation but not explanation. To address this, in part, recourse is sought to a Weberian sociology of action which would be interpretative and address action in terms of its meaning to the actors themselves.

Another shift in the direction toward cultural specificity is the plea for the *indigenization of sociological theory*. This follows from the critique of universalism and seeks to be a remedy to intellectual dependency and imperialism in social science.[3]

Partha Chatterjee also has a sceptical attitude towards the future of Third World nationalism: 'A historical discourse, unfortunately, can only struggle with its own terms. Its evolution will be determined by history itself' (Chatterjee, 1986: 162). Here also the assumption is the absence of a general model of history, the absence of a universal discourse.

The general current in comparative studies, however, particularly in historical studies, continues to follow different methodological options. Theda Skocpol defends the approach of *comparative historical analysis*, a method for examining large historical questions by comparing different societies. Causal associations are tested by comparing positive cases (in terms of the hypothesis tested) and positive and negative cases, which are otherwise similar in relevant respects. This approach would be 'generalisable across cases and historically sensitive' and 'an ideal strategy for mediating between theory and history'. This method is followed in Barrington Moore's work and in her own comparative study of social revolutions (Skocpol, 1979: 35–40; Skocpol, 1984; Moore, 1969).

A similar intermediary position of methodological caution and theoretical aspiration is found in the work of Charles Tilly (1984). In rejecting grand theory this is a partial criticism of universalism but, on the other hand, it does not exclude the possibility of universal explanatory hypotheses.

It matters whether one's comparisons tend to be mainly within a single zone of world society (as in the case of Tilly's work, which is concerned with European politics) or whether they are specifically concerned with comparisons, not merely across cultures but across cultural zones, notably North–South (as in the case of Badie and the advocates of indigenization of social science).

This array of options raises a number of questions. While the crisis of developmentalism and the comparative method is beyond repair, a complete U-turn toward 'methodological individualism' and cultural specificity may be an overreaction. There are limiting conditions to cultural specificity to the extent that societies the world over are exposed to and part of a 'globalizing' momentum — the inroads made by the world market, the role of industrial and postindustrial technologies, the homogenizing influence of the interstate system, the galaxy of international bodies and conventions, the influence of cross-cultural media communications and the increase in human mobility (migration and tourism). When globalizing tendencies are advancing and barriers are being broken down, is that a time for a retreat into theoretical provincialism?

In world system theory, globalism itself is made the single overarching dynamic. The argument of globalism is taken to the point where nation-states are not units of development; only the world system develops. Here the problem of comparative analysis does not and cannot arise: as a single system without an exit the world would by definition be governed by a single logic. Thematizing the economic logic of world market extension, world system theory treats culture as an epiphenomenon (Robertson and Lechner, 1985). What is *not* acknowledged in world system theory, however, is that economism itself is a cultural precept.

Thus, neither universalism nor relativism, neither globalism nor provincialism provide adequate answers. This relates to a number of further questions. When we discard evolutionism, should we also discard evolution? When we reject developmentalism, should we also drop development? The discourse of western hegemony belongs to the past and is epistemologically and politically untenable. Yet, the other extreme, relativism, would leave us without a common human discourse. If five hundred years of western expansion and hegemony have also, even if in adverse and perverse ways, contributed to the unification of the world and humanity, relativism would make it impossible for us to harvest whatever fruits there are to this globalizing momentum. If universalism in contemporary social theory is a veil of western ethnocentrism, does it mean there are no universals at all? Does it mean that everything resolves into cultural specifics and perspectives without the possibility of a common human discourse? Or rather, does it mean that the question of what is universal is to be posed anew, not in eurocentric but in polycentric ways?

## FROM BIPOLARITY TO POLYCENTRISM

It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of social, economic and cultural hegemony within which it presently operates (Foucault, 1980: 133).

You do not stand in one place to watch a masquerade. An Igbo saying (Clifford, 1988: 189).

I come back to the observation of Václav Havel quoted at the beginning: the identity of the centre of power and the centre of truth. In terms of the balance of power, the world of colonialism was a world of multipolar competition among the western powers, that is, a multipolar competition among countries that were part of the same civilizational framework. This began to change when Japan joined the circle of powers in the early 1900s and again with the onset of the Bolshevik revolution. With Yalta and the Cold War the world of bipolar competition took shape, with two centres of power and two centres of truth. Both discourses are developmentalist in outlook, although they subscribe to different varieties of modernism — 'forging ahead' (or 'muddling through') and 'catching up'.

At present we are in the transition from the bipolar world of superpower rivalry, of capitalism and communism, to a world of multipolar competition again; except this time the centres of power, or potential centres of power, belong to multiple civilizational frameworks. These centres of power need not be identified here — some can readily be imagined. In some spheres of international affairs, geopolitics and the world economy, polycentrism is operative already. Trilateralism may be regarded as a stage of polycentrism. The transition we are in now concerns its further unfolding, also in political discourse and culture.

This relates to what we might term, with Manoranjan Mohanty (1989), in analogy with the terms of trade, the question of the 'changing terms of discourse'. Previously, the main counter-discourse to western hegemony was Marxism, another western and developmentalist discourse from the same civilizational family. Now cross-civilizational questions may become more important.

Indian thinkers have been leading the way in the critique of modernity (for example, Desai, 1971). Another line of approach has been to separate modernization from westernization. There are

examples of this in the Arab world (see for instance Abdel-Malek, 1983). Alternative conceptualizations of modernization have been formulated also in Japan (Kishimoto 1963). This line of reasoning is being followed at present in China as well (see Li Lulu, 1989). A related approach is a dialogue of paradigms of rationality among different cultures (Park, 1985; Kang, 1985).

With bipolarity, ideological, military, political and economic cleavages accumulated to create a distinct demarcation. Polycentrism cannot be expected to unfold in this fashion. This also accounts for the peculiar and uncertain character of the period we are in. The emerging centres of power are shaped both culturally and ideologically by the global influence of western hegemony. Nationalism does not have an ideological autonomy comparable to communism.

The transition from bipolarity to polycentrism affects the terms of discourse in contradictory ways. On the one hand, the field of debate is opened wide, the focal points are no longer confined to the bipolar confrontation between capitalism and Marxism. The transition is taking place in the wider context of globalization; it is a question of cultural multipolarization in conjunction with globalization. Thus, would perhaps *both* tendencies be meaningful and complementary — globalism *and* localism, increase in scale *and* segmentation?

### THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE WEST

The rapid developments of the recent past — in particular the opening of Eastern Europe — have already stimulated an attempt to revive modernization theory, in the form of 'neo-modernization analysis' (Tiryakian, 1990). It is difficult to read this other than as an expression of western triumphalism. Samir Amin in a recent analysis of eurocentrism restates the familiar terms of the fin de siècle dilemma: 'socialist universalism or Eurocentric capitalist barbarism' (Amin, 1989: 152). Both perspectives remain well within the developmentalist paradigm. At another pole of the debate, Rajni Kothari (1988: 216) perceives a rather different dilemma:

> If 'development' itself has become a problem, and has sowed the seeds of discontent and ethnic conflict, a corrective to development can only come from other worldviews, other visions.

In the West, as mentioned before, the paradigm of modernity is being increasingly contested. It appears hazardous in view of ecological limits to growth and limits to well-being. It is questioned by new social movements which challenge the notion of a universal historical master plan (e.g. Melucci, 1989: 188-9). The Enlightenment promise and programme appear questionable in view of tragedies of the twentieth century: the Shoah, Hiroshima and Gulag. Modernism and its simple positivism no longer hold up epistemologically to contemporary standards of the critique of knowledge. Out of the implosion of linear, futurist discourses postmodernism has emerged. Initially a movement in art, architecture and literature, postmodernism stresses ambiguity, indeterminacy, irreverence and deconstruction. It indicates historical and semantic instability. As a social philosophy it may be regarded as the cultural expression of the postindustrial or information society.

The debate between modernism and postmodernism has been conducted mainly within a western framework (see Nederveen Pieterse, 1990: Chapter 3), even though it is quite germane to the development debate. The relevance of postmodernism to the South is now beginning to be explored. However, to the extent that the South is regarded as still being in the throes of modernization, as either preindustrial or industrializing, postmodernist perspectives tend to be dismissive of the South. Thus postmodernism instead of exploding developmentalism merely recapitulates it (as it is implicitly premised upon a sequence of preindustrial, industrial, postindustrial stages) upon a different plane.

Postmodernism is a western deconstruction of western modernism, and to address the problem of developmentalism more is required. What matters most and comes across least in many analyses of development discourse is the complexity and 'holism' of western developmentalism. Developmentalism is not merely a policy of economic and social change, or a philosophy of history. It reflects the *ethos* of western culture and is intimately intertwined with western history and culture. Ultimately the problem of developmentalism cannot be settled in terms of political economy, nor in terms of social philosophy, the critique of ideas or the dissembly of discourse; it requires a profound historical and cultural review of the western project. This task we might term the deconstruction of the West (using a fashionable term but also extending its use, for deconstruction refers to the analysis of texts).

The deconstruction of the West is about returning the West to

world history. This follows from the logic of decolonization. It also follows from the crisis of the western development model, not least in the West itself. This may yield a basis for reopening the debate on rationality and values. Here I will only indicate briefly what directions the deconstruction of the West might take.

The deconstruction of the West can be taken as a historical as well as a conceptual project. Taken as a historical project the key question is: to what extent is what we call 'western civilization' actually a universal human heritage, which comes to us, for historical and geographical reasons, in the guise of a western synthesis? In this context certain forms of being 'anti-western' are as irrelevant as, for instance, being anti-algebra, which in the first place is not western but Arabic in origin, and in the second place does not make sense. In a conceptual sense this translates into the question of what, in 'western' contributions, is particularist and what is universal, what is culture-specific and what is general or generalizable.

Recently Martin Bernal (1987) published the first volume of *Black Athena: Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization. The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985*. This work and the research programme indicated in its title is part of what needs to be done. The 'separate history' of the West goes back a long way, but, more significantly, it has also been retrospectively invented, and continues to be invented. In fabricating their past to suit their imperial frames, western elites have obfuscated western history and, in the process, world history.

The analysis of western discourses is important, but a wider cultural confrontation is also required: the analysis of cognitive patterns underlying discourse, of western iconography and art, of western popular culture. Here we approach the point of reversal: the erstwhile model examined as a problem. Part of the project of the deconstruction of the West is an *anthropology in reverse*: the analysis of the West in terms formerly reserved for history's backwaters. The analysis of western fetishism, not as a fad but as an act of therapy.

This is where the significance emerges of Gandhi and other non-western critics of the West who cared enough and carried cultural weight enough to vocalize their critiques.

These enquiries pave the way for a more specific project: the deconstruction of 'development'. This again can be taken in several modes. It can be taken in the sense of the deconstruction of development *discourse*. This approach has been adopted in this essay in a

historical–interpretative fashion. It may be taken also in a stricter sense, of deconstructing development *policies* and take the form of the disaggregation of policy formulations, for example between those that are (a) inevitable, (b) necessary, (c) desirable or acceptable under certain specified conditions, and (d) nonsensical and reflecting western biases and ethnocentrism. Accordingly, the deconstruction of development is the prerequisite for its reconstruction. This cannot be a single reconstruction but should be, given varying itineraries and circumstances in different countries, i.e. polycentric reconstructions.

It is obvious that carrying out this agenda would require filling in many blank spots and that this does not simply settle but also raises a number of problems. But it is also a matter of changing the terms of the debate. The predominance of developmentalism structures the debate in terms of either 'westernization' and modernization theory, or 'anti-development' positions, while other registers are kept beyond earshot. The deconstruction of the west is a poser. It is a way to reopen the discussion which has so far been conducted in the terms of a universalist logic. The middle way between universalism and relativism is pluralism.

## NOTES

1. Henry Kissinger (1970) among others elaborated the concept of the White Revolution.

2. E.g., 'a process of modernization presided over by the established élites, who used the "revolutionary" changes to maintain their supremacy' (Femia, 1981: 48).

3. A set of articles devoted to universalism and indigenization appears in *International Sociology* introduced by Akinsoy Akiwowo (1988). Cf. Ake (1979).

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