

## **Intersections between Global and Local Factors: Anthropological Perspectives**

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### **Introduction**

After the World War II, development as a slogan had become the major global concern to improve the lives of the 'backward' people of the 'Third World' countries. The locus and focus of such western dominated development was placed mostly on the economic growth through industrialization, urbanization, and transfer of modern technology. With some success in world wide economic growth, the discourse and practice of such economic-centered, market-oriented development is yet to fulfill the overall betterment of the millions of third world population. In this article, I have used the word 'Global' as a broader force. By 'global' I meant the political, economic and ideological domain with its predominant link with the West. The dominant western 'discourse of development'<sup>1</sup> with its core element of economic and technological interventions to the third world countries thus acts upon as a global force. By examining some ethnographic works, I argued that the interactions between global and local factors are critical. Thus, the practices of mainstream development discourse create multiple discourses of development at local levels. In this paper, first I will present the dominant discourse of development and how it has been criticized by some school of thoughts. Secondly, by providing three influential ethnographic works, I will try to argue that how these works explore the critical interaction of global and local factors. And, finally, I will argue that development as a part of western discourse of modernity and power needs to be understood as a contested terrain where negotiations

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between global and local forces create multiple discourses of development at both global and local levels.

### **Mainstream Development: A Critical Overview**

Many authors have explained the underdevelopment of the 'third world' countries from a variety of external factors. The two major theoretical paradigms of such explanations are dependency and World system theory. These two schools of thought elaborately explained the processes and mechanisms by which 'third world' development is constrained. In this section, I mainly focused on global social theories such as dependency and World-system theories, which provide us with a framework of analysis of mainstream development practices. These theories argue how capitalistic center and market-oriented development strategies are fundamentally problematic, thereby creating global inequality among different social groups and class in terms of access to the land, resource, and wealth and so on at local levels.

Dependency theory was the first major third world challenge to Euro-centered academic discourse. It provided a much-needed counter point to modernization theory (Tucker;1999). A.G. Frank (1993) a key theorist of underdevelopment provided constructive debate in the arena of Development. We can get some important insights regarding global-local dichotomy from his theories of underdevelopment. Frank argues that the process of so-called development creates the underdevelopment of the third world countries. He expressed his concern about the nature of worldwide capitalist expansion. He understood the world economy through the concepts of center and periphery. The peripheral economies of third world countries have unequal relationships with the centers in the West. The unequal economic relations between center and periphery are hegemonic in nature. And, peripheral economies have to maintain their unequal economic relationships for their growth and sustainability. Thus, peripheries cannot get out of these unequal relationships and participate in their own subjugations by the centers.

Dos Santos (1998) a prominent scholar of dependency school identified dependency 'as a situation in which the economy of



certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected' (Dos Santos 1998:252). He argued that the internal situations of third world economy should be seen through the concept of dependency in which third world economy is a part of the world economy. He identified three basic forms of dependency; colonial, financial-industrial and the multinational. However, Dos Santos is particularly interested in the process and mechanism of multinational corporations operating in the third world countries and how these powerful giants are hindering the development of the third world countries. To explain these processes and mechanisms he emphasizes on identifying the types of economic relations that exist in both at the dominant centers and inside the peripheral countries. In the situation of dependence, the peripheral economy of third world countries have to incorporate with the international economies which are generated and dominated by the capitalist expansion. In this situation the production is mainly for the export which is usually determined by the hegemonic centers (Dos Santos 1998:254). This system is dependent since it reproduces a productive system which is limited by the international economy or world economy and thus ensures the development of certain economic sector to trade under unequal conditions of the third world economy.

Valenzuela (1998) evaluated the merits of two theoretical perspectives; dependency and modernization. He argued that dependency perspective has the superiority as it is firmly grounded with the historical reality. He provides some supporting elements for the validity of dependency theory however he also mentioned many unexplored avenues for better understanding of dependency theory/approach. He questioned the assumption of dependency school about the 'external constraints' or clusters of external variables on peripheral countries. He argued that the dependency for any given country is a complex set of association and external dimensions are determinative in varying degrees. The internal variables such as internal class and power relations also determine the pattern of external linkage.

Wallerstein (1998), a key figure in 'world system' school of thought, argues that all states form a part of a capitalist world economy in which the existence of differences in wealth is not an anomaly but rather a natural outcome of the fundamental processes driving that economy (Wallerstein 1998: 277). He also argues that modern world comprise of a single capitalist world economy which emerged historically since the sixteenth century and continues till today. From a world system perspective there can be no separate, single, parallel national state history. All are rather a part of the whole reflecting that whole. The dialectic perspective in world system suggests us to develop a world history in the same broader historical trajectory. World system perspective views dependency theory as sub-set of world system. This perspective tells us that the gap between the rich and the poor will ultimately disappear when the capitalist world system itself will disappear. While the dependency theory views history as an unfolding relationship between nations and their colonies or the 'developed' Versus 'developing' the world system theory displaced the zone of analysis in global space. Dependency theory creates the dichotomy of center and periphery whereas world system theory creates a more complex and less polarized vision of space and time with the notion of semi-periphery in between center and periphery. This perspective talks about the relations of power among hegemonic centers. He distinguishes himself from Frank and Grills in that way-

"They speak of a "world system". I speak of "world-systems" I use a hyphen, they do not. I use the plural; they do not. They use the singular word because, for them, there is and has only been one world system through all of historical time and space For me there have been many world-systems." (Wallerstein 1993:292).

#### **Limitations of Dependency and World System Theories**

These theories argue that development through increased integration of local economy into the international economies is a myth. These theories view development as a dependency creating mechanism and a tool for new imperialism and western domination. A large volume of literature shows clear evidence for these connections and are concerned with the negative environmental consequences of such



development practice in the Third World. To my view, central arguments of these theories go back to the Marxist analysis of capitalism, which is considered as the highest form of exploitation. The Marxist analysis also explains how capitalism becomes insensitive to other human and environmental issues.

However, these theories were limited in that they restricted their attention almost exclusively to the economic and to a lesser extent, the political mechanisms of domination and control. It challenges the ethnocentrism of a political economy derived exclusively from the experience of Europe and the United States and then generalized to the rest of the world. It provided a trenchant critique to the crusading imperialism of the modernization theorists and provided an alternative vision, which accorded more closely with the experience of Third World countries. But dependency failed to address the cultural dimension of domination. This was a crucial omission as cultural analysis is central to any understanding of the relations of power and to any strategy of resistance or dependency reversal (Tucker; 1999). However, these studies suffer from the sin of totalizing and universalizing the effects of global forces at local levels. And these theories also do not pay sufficient attention to the dynamic nature of the critical interplay between global and local factors.

#### **Mainstream Development as Western Discourse and Power**

One of the most powerful thinkers of twentieth century, Foucault in his book *The Order of Things* (1972) explained that how 'fields' of knowledge are produced at certain historical moments by certain conventions. Even the most scientific knowledge such as economics, history and even the natural sciences are classified and constructed at certain time of history to fulfill certain political, historical and social needs. Hence, the production of knowledge is not objective. It is value and power laden. Thus, knowledge produce discourse and the vice versa which can shape and reshape social actions and relations. Considering development as a form of western discourse invites our understanding of the practices of development- its institutions, knowledge and its interaction with the social reality.

Escobar (1995) in his thought provoking book *Encountering Development- the Making and Unmaking of the third world* provides us with a critical framework to analyze the discourses of western modernity and power and how 'development', as a part of that discourse, has created a new reality and subjectivity of the Third World. He argues that the economics, as a central building block of modernity and development, needs to be reassessed. In many ways, I feel that Escobar's work substantially addresses the various issues of global and local interactions. Firstly, Escobar's view of development, as a discourse of western modernity and power, is highly important to understand any study of culture and cultural change both at local and global levels. The complex interactions between global and local factors are important to rethink about the dominant discourse of development. Also, how local people continuously reassess their local forms of values, concepts, identity and power to keep pace with the global forces. Development as global force and practice also creates the global inequality, and thus, Escobar's analysis helps us to understand the link of this global inequality with the western discourse of power and practice. Since global and local are not distinct categories, they constantly reshape and reinforce each other within the dynamic discourse of power. Thus, Escobar's work invites us to explore this critical interplay of multiple discourses of power at global and local levels. Escobar argues that the reality at the local level is constructed, and hence, local reality actually does not reflect the truth. To reveal the actual truth, we need to understand how "truth" has been shaped by the global power structure. Escobar mentions that "discourse is not the expression of thought; it is practice, with conditions, rules and historical transformations" (Escobar 1995: 216). I think that it is important to understand how development as a discourse has been practiced at local level and how the dynamic complex relationships between global and local factors help us to theorize development and underdevelopment.

In a similar fashion, Ferguson in his seminal book *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1990), explored the connections of western centered development discourses with the western power and hegemony. By providing examples from the development projects in Lesotho, he



argued that the deconstructing the mainstream development practices can provide important insights to reveal the connections between development and the reproduction of social inequality and social control. He did not suggest any idea how to improve the development projects rather he argued that how the development reports in Lesotho were produced as a set of knowledge to portrait Lesotho in certain way. In contrast to viewing development as a technical problem, Ferguson argues to include the social relations and conditions as central in the development discourse.

People as an active agents of social and cultural change, in the following section, with references to some ethnographic works, I will try to demonstrate the dynamic interactions between global and local factors.

### **Some Ethnographic Examples**

The relationships between global and local factors have become critical in recent times. Ethnographic works by some prominent anthropologists such as Hutchinson (1996), Mintz (1960) and Gardner (1995) have explored these critical interactions between global and local factors. By highlighting these ethnographic examples, I will try to demonstrate the critical interplay between global and local factors.

Hutchinson (1996), in her historical ethnography on contemporary Nuer people, explores how broader 'global' forces of social, political and economic changes influence the fundamental aspects of Nuer social life. By providing a dynamic historical framework of analysis, Hutchinson argues that Nuer people renegotiated, contested, and reassessed these global forces with their local forms of power, values, concepts, practice, sociality and historicity. The process of these complex interactions between global and local 'on the ground' is important in analyzing and theorizing the concepts like society and culture. She examines how contemporary Nuer people experienced, reinterpreted and intervened in the global forces of broader economic transformations (such as market structure), civil war, colonial and post colonial rules, and Christian and Islamic proselytism in their immediate social life. She argues that the on-going renegotiation,

reassessment and reinterpretations of these broader forces with the local contexts occurred actively and collectively. Thus, it created the social and moral dilemmas among different social groups of contemporary Nuer society.

Hutchinson shows many of such dilemmas among contemporary Nuer men and women. One of such dilemmas is about their perception of selfhood and sociality. By examining the key media of interpersonal bonding; *blood*, *cattle* and *sharing of food* of Nuer social life in the light of their new experience of *money*, *guns* and *paper*, Hutchinson argues that money did not develop into a generalized medium of exchange among Nuer. Nuer people developed a 'hybrid'<sup>ii</sup> category of exchange system where cattle and money were able to move freely between market and non-market spheres. The 'cattle of money' and the 'money of work' do not work in the same way as it did for the 'cattle of girl' in maintaining the transgenerational bonds of dependence among kinsmen in the Nuer society. The global forces of 'monetization' and commodification, which are believed to follow some universal logic, did not happen in the Nuer society. In a similar way, government efforts to introduce the fixed bloodwealth to decline the frequency of homicide did not have a concrete effect on Nuer life since the Nuer continues to redefine this pressure with their perceptions of shared bridewealth claim. In a similar way, she also argues that how introduction of guns among the Nuer people continues to reinforce the socially identified sense of self and personhood among the Nuer. Hutchinson also mentions how the incest as a means of maintaining the balance of power has been challenged after the introduction of chiefs, courts, guns, markets and so on among Nuer. The spread of Christianity among the Nuer also challenged the sacred status of cattle in the society. Cattle as a symbol of blood and sources of food have also been decreased after the introduction of meat markets, imported pharmaceuticals and hospitality practices. Churches act as a source of social, spiritual and moral guidance, thus marginalizing the activities of divinity and Nuer perception of illness, infertility and death.



Mintz (1960), in his book "Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican life History," systematically describes an autobiography of a man of Puerto Rican village and how he has personally experienced the vast important economic, political and ideological changes as he grows older. Mintz shows how the people of the village of Puerto Rico or even the whole country have changed their perceptions, values, ideology, worldview in respect to rapid economic, political and ideological changes over the last fifty years. He argues that how the broader forces of transformations have created the conditions for his informant Taso and others to respond and live with the culture around them. Life in Puerto Rico began to change rapidly after United States occupation of Puerto Rico in early years of the last century. Changes in life were visible at economic, political and ideological levels. At the level of economic change, the people of the village have experienced the spread of the corporation, the capitalization of the previously unutilized land, the industrialization of the traditional fields, the proletarianization of the workers, the standardization of the wages and hours and the elimination of the artisan and upper classes. This vast economic change also significantly changed the ideological, religious, political, medical, educational and other non-economic aspects of life. With the promise of the political democracy, access to education and health care service, this economic change made the villagers vulnerable to and dependent on the market mechanism. As a result, people lost their indigenous forms of security, interpersonal relationship and structure of power relations. Mintz provides a critical analysis in relation to the religious rebirth of his informant Taso. He argues that westernization does not necessarily guarantee the secularized ideology. In the case of Taso, he argues that the new way of life has made Taso for a vigorous kind of ideological dedication where the revivalist Church can only be an answer. Mintz relates the influence of the revivalist church on the people in the changing new social, economic and ideological context. Thus, the special aspects of church, such as importance of personal relationship which masks the difference between economic classes and the group identify, prompted individuals to join the church to gain coherence to the life. The new intensified sense of self-accompanied by aloneness also

provided the sense of guilt among the individuals. Thus, revivalist church became a solution of many problems of life. Mintz argues that when people become subjected to change they ultimately change their view of their world as well as self. The ideological and material impact of US on the village thus brought changes to people's attitude, values and new religious beliefs.

Gardner (1995) in her work explores the effects of overseas migrations on the social and ideological sphere of local society in Bangladesh. With specific reference to Talukpur village in Sylhet in Bangladesh, she argues that people's perception, where they belong, is increasingly getting complex and no longer conventionally bounded or determined by the space (Gardner 1995: 7). She also argues that emigrants' identity is continuously being shaped, reshaped and negotiated by the local and global symbols. She goes on to argue that anthropologist's task is to interpret those meanings at global and local levels. In the case of Bangladesh, she argues that the local forms of resistance to the hegemonic forces are expressed in many different directions. For example, the religious revivalism not only resists the secularized Western hegemony, but also maintains and legitimizes the hegemonic functions of the power among women in unequal economic class at the local level. She argues migration as a complex process, and thus, people's negotiations with the oppositional forces should be central to any analysis on any migration community.

To sum up, the above-presented examples demonstrate the fact that people at the local level are not passive receiver of the global forces. Development as a global force has been negotiated by the people at local level. In any cultural and social transformations, people use their own agency to accommodate or exclude global factors. As individuals are not homogenous, different individual take different ways of negotiation to the global forces. Thus, development creates multiple discourses at the local levels.

### **Conclusion**

The mechanism of underdevelopment of third world countries has been explored by many schools of thoughts. However, in this paper,



I focused on two schools of thoughts namely dependency and world system theories that provide a framework of analysis for the causes and process of underdevelopment of third world countries. I have mentioned some important works in this regard. Nevertheless, these works also have their limitations as well. Universalizing and totalizing the mechanisms of global inequality are considered as main objections to these two theories. In this article, I have tried to provide a quick reexamination of the dominant practices of development and their limitations. Contemporary scholarships that explore the connections between global and local forces have provided new insights to demonstrate the dynamics of global and local factors. Escobar (1995), an opponent of the dominant practices of development, connects the western discourse of development with the western discourse of modernity and power. Thus, he argued for 'alternatives to development' where different worldview of development from the people at local levels can act against the dominant discourse of development. Likewise, I have chosen three such ethnographic works to argue that global and local interactions invite the discussion of the issues of power and the discourse of western modernity. Thus, development, as a part of that discourse, should also incorporate the analysis of the dynamic discourses of reality 'on the ground'. By providing ethnographic examples from Africa, Latin America and South Asia, it is evident that local people react to the various development initiatives differently. Thus, the subordination of their social, economic and cultural life is always being negotiated with the multiple discourses at global and local levels.

#### Notes

- i. Discourse of Development- for details please see Escobar (1995).
- ii. Hybrid- For details on the issues of hybridity please see Bhaba (1994), and Gardner (1995).

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