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Postcolonial Imaginaries: Alternative Development or Alternatives to Development?

*Tayyab Mahmud**

I. The Development Project.....	27
II. Imprisoned Critiques	28
III. Response to the Other Papers	30
IV. Alternatives to Development.....	32

The real voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new lands but in seeing with new eyes.

Marcel Proust

The substantive concerns, methodological departures, ethical commitments, and implied prescriptions deployed by the authors in this collection of essays prove that the critical project is alive and well in the legal academy, and that critical race theory is no longer imprisoned within American history, constitutional design, or the black-white binary. A common goal among the writers is to explore the site of post-coloniality and uncover intersections of race, development, and the law. Chantal Thomas deploys tools of inquiry fashioned by critical race theory to examine the hegemony of the international economic legal order and Amy Chua focuses on the links between markets and ethnicity. The two papers deploy the categories of race, development, and post-coloniality on a global canvas. In this essay, I would like to bring the three categories closer in response to Chantal Thomas's challenge to apply tools of critique forged by critical race theory to interrogate development.

I submit that the categories of race, development, and post-coloniality are inescapably intertwined. The concept of post-coloniality rests on three

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interrelated propositions: (1) that the colonial and neo-colonial encounter between the West and "the rest" is the central and continuing formative feature of the modern world; (2) that this encounter is a relationship of domination; and (3) that this encounter constitutes both the West and "the rest."

In the second half of the twentieth century, the idea of "development" operated as both a cognitive category and a relation of force, mapping the terrain of this encounter between the West and "the rest." It is the glue that keeps "the rest" attached to the West. It is the latest variant of Europe's 500 year-old project variously referred to, at one time or another, as: saving native souls, the white man's burden, manifest destiny, the civilizing mission, or the historical imperative of progress. Development is not just a theory about economic growth and elimination of poverty, but an ideological and institutional device to consolidate the domination and hegemony of the West over the rest. Post-coloniality, then, may be conceptualized as an effect of, and a condition of subjection to, the development project, with the latter seen as a discursive structure, a disciplinary apparatus, an institutional modality, and a meta-theory of history whose genealogy is firmly rooted in the colonial encounter.

My submission is that development is, above all, a way of thinking. Once consolidated, it determines what can be thought, said, and even imagined. Development defines a perceptual domain, colonizes reality, and produces subjectivities. Development is not only an ideological omni-historical reality, and the hegemonic discourse of post-coloniality; it is the primary instrument of cartography of postcolonial "imaginary."¹ As a full-service enterprise, with confident notions of time and space, of nature and culture, of society and individual, of the good and the truth, development is the primary mechanism through which particular parts of the world and particular subjects are produced and produce themselves, thus precluding other ways of imagining, seeing, and doing. Like imperialism, the development project entails "epistemic violence,"² a violence against the other exercised by hegemonic systems of knowledge and a violence embedded in the constitutive function of such systems. As a result, even its critiques remain imprisoned within the imaginary of development, and can only speak of alternative development. I submit that a radical critique must move beyond the discourse of alternative development and begin to imagine alternatives to development.

1. I use the concept of the "imaginary," developed by Jacques Lacan and Cornelius Castoriadis, as an inclusive notion that refers to culturally-specific images, symbols, metaphors, and representations which help construct various forms of subjectivity. See Jacqueline Rose, *The Imaginary*, in *THE TALKING CURE* (Colin MacCabe ed., 1981); CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS, *THE IMAGINARY INSTITUTION OF SOCIETY* (Kathleen Blamey trans., Polity Press 1987) (1975).

2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Rani of Sirmur*, 1 *EUROPE AND ITS OTHER* 130 (Francis Barker et al. eds., 1985). Spivak defines "epistemic violence" of imperialism as "the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer." Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism*, 12 *CRITICAL INQUIRY* 243, 251 (1985).

I. THE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The discourse of development emerged in the post-World War II era of national liberation struggles as a containment strategy to appropriate and normalize challenges to colonialism and neo-colonialism. Development policies and projects proliferated in an attempt to manage the evident poverty and inequality in postcolonial settings by isolating the causes of these conditions within these settings, thereby rendering invisible the role of colonialism in instituting these very conditions. "National" development was scripted by this new discourse. It did so by positing an underdeveloped, underproductive subject to be named, located, studied, theorized, and ultimately policed through development policies and projects. Once defined, located and policed, this subject was to be the ostensible beneficiary of development projects imparted from above by governments under the direction of international agencies. This teleology of progress not only provided an alibi for colonialism's role in forging the conditions of post-coloniality, but it also furnished the rationale for continued surveillance of postcolonial societies and subjects. Categories of need and care abstracted by this discourse warranted development projects that extended the opportunity for exploitative economic and social relations into every corner of the globe.

Building on the explicit and implicit notions of development offered by the authors in this series, one can configure the development project as the sum of three gestures. First, development demarcates a site of intervention of power by constituting abnormalities in the anatomy of the third world, amenable to specific interventions. Second, through normalization of development within a knowledge/power matrix, a field of control of knowledge is constituted; social issues are removed from the political realm to the preserves of science to facilitate a regime of truths and norms. Third, institutionalization and professionalization of development at all levels is secured, ranging from international organizations and national planning bodies to local development agencies and development NGOs. These institutions—a network of new sites of power—constitute an interlinked global apparatus of development.

The papers preceding fit squarely within this frame of reference. Chantal Thomas, describing development both as discourse and practice, provides a particularly privileged vantage point for exploring the interconnection of practices and symbols of reason, economy, representation, society, and modernity. With this in mind we can conceptualize development as an institutional apparatus that links forms of knowledge about the third world with the deployment of particular forms of power and intervention. Amy Chua helps us see that once third world societies become the targets of new mechanisms of power—embodied in endless programs and strategies—their economies, societies, and cultures are offered up as new objects of knowledge that, in turn, create new possibilities of power.

II. IMPRISONED CRITIQUES

If we have located the genealogy of development, what of its critique? I would argue that the imaginary of development imprisons even its critiques. This is primarily the effect of the meta-theory of history, the foundation of the development project, which holds hegemonic sway even on the critics. This meta-theory, a progeny of the Enlightenment project, is one that posits all human history as a unidirectional and liner movement from primitive to modern.³ Forged in the context of the colonial encounter, this meta-history assigned colonized societies to the prehistory of the West and served to legitimize colonialism. During colonialism, this meta-theory of history was primarily concerned with the alterity the colonized native presented for the colonizer, and explicitly empowered certain cultures while suppressing others. Saturated with assumptions of development, today this meta-history envisions a postcolonial global civilization where all other surviving civilizations define themselves with reference thereto; all surviving cultures have to rewrite their own history and live up to that of the West. Writing almost a century ago, Rabindranath Tagore stated the matter well when he said, "the entire East is attempting to take into itself a history which is not the outcome of its own living."⁴ In this schema, then, post-colonial peoples have a noxious past, a degraded present, and someone else's enviable present as their future.

While the genealogy of the development discourse is rooted in ideologically laden Cold War rhetoric of "stages of growth" and "modernization," development as a discursive phenomenon and as a policy assumes a stubbornly non-ideological character. International development agencies and state bureaucracies become what one commentator has called "anti-politics machines"⁵ because they continually reduce poverty and degradation to failures of technological advancement. In its refusal to interrogate the history of geopolitical power relations that generate conditions of poverty, developmentalism as an ideology becomes an omni-historical reality, in that its structure and function are deemed immutable, present in the same form throughout history. This discourse renders development an immutable fact, a value-neutral process, and an imperative of history prior to, and beyond, political ideologies.

3. The foundational texts of modernity are saturated with this meta-theory of history. One can read, for example, Locke, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Mill, and Weber as proffering varied theories of history situated squarely within this single meta-theory of history. For useful commentaries on the issue see generally ERIC WOLF, *EUROPE AND THE PEOPLE WITHOUT HISTORY* (1982), *POST-STRUCTURALISM AND THE QUESTION OF HISTORY* (Derek Attridge et al. eds., 1987) and ROBERT YOUNG, *WHITE MYTHOLOGIES: WRITING HISTORY AND THE WEST* (1990). For racial differentiations and representations that furnished essential building blocs of enlightenment ideas, see *RACE AND ENLIGHTENMENT* (Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze ed., 1997).

4. RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *NATIONALISM* 64 (South Asia Books 1995) (1917).

5. See JAMES FERGUSON, *THE ANTI-POLITICS MACHINE* (1990).

Dysfunction of the global capitalist economy and the resulting gap between the promise and actuality of the development project, the problem of social welfare versus Darwinism of the market, protection versus comparative advantage, and growth versus environmental protection each open up spaces for critique. To date the critiques have taken two roads. First, there is the series of internal critiques of the project accompanied by proposals for its modification and revitalization. These critiques, for example, the Reports of the Club of Rome⁶ and the Brandt and Palme Commissions,⁷ often use the radical rhetoric of relief for the poor. Their overriding concern, however, is to keep intact the basic foundations of the global economic order and its favorite progeny, the development project. Then there are the structural critiques like that of dependency, unequal exchange, and world-systems theories.⁸ Chantal Thomas argues that these theories have succeeded in exposing claims of universality and justice of the capitalist model of development, and in the process have demystified the concept of development.

However, some problems remain. By virtually externalizing the sources of crises, third world states and ruling elites remain the only relevant actors for any strategy of action that may be suggested by counter-proposals of the alternative structural analysis. The center-periphery models of economic relations do not recognize the supra-territorial flexibility and heterogeneity of globalization—the contemporary phase of the capitalist mode of production. Prescriptions of delinking postcolonial economies from global capitalism do not adequately address the contemporary modes of global capital accumulation.⁹ The conceptual framework of delinking rests on an understanding of the postcolonial state as an autonomous regulator of the flow of commodities, capital, and labor—an understanding not warranted in the context of neo-liberal restructuring of the global capitalist economy. In the final analysis, the structural critique maintains fidelity to modernity's meta-theory of linear history, and hence its implied prescription remains development, even though now qualified as "autonomous."

A favorite modern counter-response to resistance to hegemonic discourses is to split the concepts being challenged or resisted. Development has been similarly split into "conventional" development and "alternative" development. The latter has many aliases: "sustainable development," "eco-development," "indigenous development," "grassroots development," "women

6. See generally DONELLA H. MEADOWS, ET AL., *THE LIMITS TO GROWTH: A REPORT FOR THE CLUB OF ROME'S PROJECT ON THE PREDICAMENT OF MANKIND* (1972).

7. See generally WILLY BRANDT, *NORTH-SOUTH: A PROGRAMME FOR SURVIVAL – REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES* (1980).

8. For overviews of these respective theories, see generally SAMIR AMIN, *ACCUMULATION ON A WORLD SCALE: A CRITIQUE OF THE THEORY OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT* (Brian Pearce trans., 1974); ANDRE GUNDER FRANK, *CAPITALISM AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA* (1967); ARGHIRI EMMANUEL, *UNEQUAL EXCHANGE: A STUDY OF THE IMPERIALISM OF TRADE* (1972); and IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN, *THE CAPITALIST WORLD ECONOMY* (1979).

9. See, e.g., SAMIR AMIN, *DELINKING: TOWARDS A POLYCENTRIC WORLD* (1990).

and development,” “participatory development,” and “kinder and gentler development.” The problem is that these characterizations remain prescriptions for development, prescriptions for a unidirectional journey along the linear inclined plane of history hoping to arrive at a terminus called modernity.

III. RESPONSE TO THE OTHER PAPERS

I will now turn to some specific questions raised by the preceding papers. Professor Chua focuses on the “historical cycle” in which Third World countries have oscillated between marketization and nationalization. She questions whether the current neo-liberal project may encounter a similar cyclical backlash. The Asian financial crisis, where the “economic tigers” became paper tigers almost overnight, adds urgency to her question.

While this historical cycle of oscillation is empirically verifiable, two comments are warranted. One, the oscillation between free market and public regulation is by no means limited to the third world. Such oscillation is fundamental to the functioning of the capitalist mode of production, as a mechanism to contain its structural contradictions and cyclical crises. The very history of capitalism—as opposed to its theory and ideology—is a story of this cyclical oscillation, even though it assumes different forms in diverse settings. The free market unregulated by society or government is a happy fiction. Capitalism has never functioned anywhere without the participation of the state; and it is in this context that sovereignty serves as “a bridge between national capitalism and world capitalism.”¹⁰

The second comment is that in the larger framework of global capitalism, marketization and nationalization in the third world should not be seen as mutually exclusive and antagonistic but rather as complementary strategies furnishing the scaffolding for the project of modernization and development. Just as nationalism in the third world was a derivative discourse of colonialism and a progeny of the colonial encounter with modernity, the policy of economic nationalization remains firmly rooted within the imaginary of development. The promise of development is to bring the benighted subjects of the third world into the epochal history of the modern nation—into full productivity—with the subsequent rights and privileges available to the productive citizens of an international family of nations. It is this vision of development, with its accompanying horizon of political evolution and promise of full productivity, that has continually seduced the postcolonial nationalist elites for over fifty years.

10. Joseph A. Camilleri, *Rethinking Sovereignty in a Shrinking, Fragmented World*, in *CONTENDING SOVEREIGNTIES: REDEFINING POLITICAL COMMUNITY* 13, 38 (R.B.J. Walker & Saul H. Mendlovitz eds., 1990).

Provocative questions are raised by Professor Chua regarding “market-dominant minorities.” Why are these minorities there? Why are they market-dominant? Why does the neo-liberal project reward them disproportionately? Such questions are provocative because they involve intersections of race, class, and ethnicity. Thus, whether one talks about the Chinese in Southeast Asia, Indians in East Africa and the Caribbean, or the Tamils in Sri Lanka, one cannot escape the historical reality that these groups arrived at these places because they formed part of a massive transfer of “unfree” labor, occasioned by the restructuring of the global division of labor and the emergence and consolidation of capitalism as a global mode of production and accumulation. Accompanying these transfers of “unfree” labor pools, constructions of racial and cultural identities formed an essential component of this global management of labor power. Here Chantal Thomas’s concern with cultural discourses of race comes into sharp relief. As she suggests, construction of race in the modern world system must be located in the material and discursive structures of colonialism. Professor Thomas’ typology of cultural division, however, only uses the North-South divide. My own study of indentured labor in the Caribbean, Africa, and the South Pacific demonstrates that equally important were the intra-South divisions and corresponding racial/cultural identity constructions, which were always elastic and contingent to enhance their availability for deployment in the power/resistance matrices of colonial economies.¹¹ This genealogy of the construction of comparative racial identities and racial divisions rooted in the colonial division of labor is crucial to understanding the resulting postcolonial racial/ethnic antagonisms among peoples of color— an area that critical race theory has to start taking seriously.

Amy Chua then asks why specific ethnic minorities are market-dominant. I believe fruitful answers may lie in the classic colonial design of divide and rule. Whether one considers Asia, Africa, the Caribbean or Latin America, colonial powers were very successful in discovering, creating, and accentuating divisions among the colonized. To ward off anxieties of popular resistance, selected minorities were constituted and deployed strategically as grateful and dependable allies. The sites of deployment varied across specific locations: the favorites being the military, the colonial bureaucracy and the trading classes nurtured by public contracts. An important area of further research needs to explore the extent to which many current inter-ethnic conflicts in the third world are rooted in this colonial design of governance.

Finally, Amy Chua asks why market-dominant ethnic minorities benefit disproportionately from marketization. The market is Darwinian: it disproportionately rewards the better positioned. Such advantageous pre-positioning may be the result of race, class, gender, geography or ethnicity. The recent comprehensive study done by Kerry Rittich, for example, showing the blatant gender differential in the effects of neo-liberal restructuring and

11. See Tayyab Mahmud, *Migration, Identity, & the Colonial Encounter*, 76 *OR. L. REV.* 633 (1997).

deregulation, strongly suggests productive lines of inquiry in this context.¹² The effect differential of the “free market” at a broader level also points to two deeply flawed assumptions of the development project as administered by the Bretton Woods system: that economic growth and enhanced world trade will automatically benefit everyone and that economic growth will not be constrained by the limits of the planet.

IV. ALTERNATIVES TO DEVELOPMENT

Professor Enrique Carrasco cautions of a deficit of hope involved in any radical critique of the development narrative.¹³ I believe that loss of hope reigns where we cannot imagine alternatives to hegemonic constructs. Therefore, I would like to raise some issues which should form part of a research agenda to break out of the development imaginary.

To move towards alternatives to development, questions of subjectivity and the agency of transformation must be squarely addressed and the issue of practice taken seriously. This in turn necessitates reexamining the relationship of development discourse and construction of the postcolonial subject. As we continue the turn towards decentering the subject by disrupting liberalism’s notion of a free and autonomous agent’s self-determined movement towards liberation from tradition and oppression, a space for the subject’s critical distance and reflexivity must be retained. We must not reduce the subject to be a mere property and effect of discourse or to equate consciousness with hegemony. We should not posit hegemony as an overarching order that cannot be escaped, creating a discursively constituted subject imprisoned within it. Such a conceptual straight-jacket leads to the impasse of “can the subaltern speak?”¹⁴ Useful here is Antonio Gramsci’s model of a fragmented composite subject that is constituted as an “inventory of traces” of multiple and fragmented hegemonies.¹⁵ Similarly useful is to theorize a desiring subject who avoids full determination by the symbolic order because there is always a surplus of the “real” over any symbolization.¹⁶ We should, therefore, focus on the ongoing tension between specific

12. See Kerry Rittich, *Recharacterizing Restructuring: Gender and Distribution in the Legal Structure of Market Reform* (1998) (unpublished SJD dissertation, Harvard Law School) (on file with author).

13. See *supra*, Enrique R. Carrasco, *Introduction: Global Money, the Good Life, and You Understanding the local Impact of International Financial Institutions*.

14. See generally Gayatri Chakravorty. Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* in *MARXISM AND THE INTERPRETATION OF CULTURE* 271 (Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg eds., 1988) and GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, *Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography*, in *IN OTHER WORLDS: ESSAYS IN CULTURAL POLITICS* 197 (1988).

15. ANTONIO GRAMSCI, *SELECTIONS FROM THE PRISON NOTEBOOKS* 324 (Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith eds. and trans., 1971).

16. See SLAVOJ ZIZEK, *THE SUBLIME OBJECT OF IDEOLOGY* 3 (1989).

structures of domination and “lines of flight”—desires that escape these hegemonic formations and bear the seeds of change.¹⁷ It is along the faultlines between domination and desire that “the individual repeatedly passes from language to language.”¹⁸ In this framework, then, one can theorize the postcolonial subject as a bundle of agencies; as a complex site of conflicting desires and multiple subjective modalities. Beneath the dominant technologies of modernity there survives a “polytheism’ of scattered practices . . . dominated but not erased by the triumphal success of one of their number.”¹⁹ It is in this context that we should turn to a “jurisprudence of reconstruction,”²⁰ and counter-hegemonic “stories from the bottom;”²¹ nothing less than to stage an “insurrection of subjugated knowledges,”²² will suffice as a strategy to “bring hegemonic historiography to crisis.”²³

We have to start with exploring a theory of political action, without which all theorizing about alternatives to development would remain at the level of global normativism, a preserve of the counter-elites in the West and their jet-setting counterparts in the rest. As a first step we need to challenge the legitimization of the intellectual role of small elites in determining the terms of self-definition for their societies. Alternatives to development practiced by popular movements presuppose that a theory for action will emerge from the concrete struggles of the people at specific conjunctures. Only in this process do the activists of popular movements become their own theorists and the theorists find validation of their constructs through direct involvement in such movements.

Imagining alternatives to development summons a more substantive and non-linear understanding of human life and well-being—a bringing together of both material and non-material human needs. Economic processes will have to be designed and evaluated with reference to self-reliance and autonomy of cultures. Alternatives to development will issue from an engaged critique of the pervasive ethos of over-consumption, a consequence of globalized commodification and capital accumulation masquerading as development and progress. We need to explore and actualize life-styles that respect the inner boundaries of the person and the outer-limits of nature.

17. See GILLES DELEUZE & FELIX GUATTARI, *ANTI-OEDIPUS: CAPITALISM AND SCHIZOPHRENIA* (Robert Hurley et al. trans., Univ. of Minnesota Press 1983) (1972).

18. GILLES DELEUZE & FELIX GUATTARI, *A THOUSAND PLATEAUS: CAPITALISM AND SCHIZOPHRENIA* 94 (Brian Massumi trans., 1987).

19. MICHEL DE CERTEAU, *THE PRACTICE OF EVERYDAY LIFE* 48 (Steven Rendall trans., 1984).

20. See Angela P. Harris, *Foreword: The Jurisprudence of Reconstruction*, 82 CAL. L. REV. 741 (1994).

21. See Mari J. Matsuda, *Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparations*, 22 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 323 (1987).

22. THOMAS KEENAN, *FABLES OF RESPONSIBILITY: ABERATIONS AND PREDICAMENTS IN ETHICS AND POLITICS* 140 (1997) (quoting Michel Foucault).

23. SPIVAK, *supra* note 14, at 198 (1987).

What is ultimately at stake is the transformation of the political, economic, and institutional regimes of truth production that have defined the era of development. This, in turn, requires changes in institutions and social relations, openness to various forms of knowledge and cultural manifestations, new styles of participation, and greater community autonomy over the production of norms and discourses. The agenda of radical critique today must be to devise means of liberating postcolonial societies from the imaginary of development and for lessening their dependence on the episteme of modernity. The specific task, then, is the construction of collective imaginaries capable of reorienting social and political action. In this context, it is necessary, on the one hand, to deploy non-reductionist and non-teleological notions of politics and economics, and, on the other hand, to facilitate participatory and democratizing potentials of the new social subjects.

Demarcation of subjectivities not defined by hegemonic discourse of development may well be the first task of social criticism and political activism on the road to imagining alternatives to development. We have to continually create and expand a space at the margins of the present neo-liberal global civilization for a new, plural, political ecology of knowledge. The grammar of modernity has always demanded that the victim must learn and adopt the oppressor's language and worldview before qualifying as a proper dissenter. Consequently the resistance to the conceptual and discursive categories deployed to normalize and homogenize dissent is part of the struggle for survival. At different specific conjunctures this resistance has to adopt myriad forms. It may involve a rejection of modernity's deepest faith, instrumental rationality, and a subversion of modernity's cleverest enterprise and development—the race without a finishing line. Even though postcolonial imaginary is imprisoned by development, Edward Said, who alerted us to the constitutive and dominating power of Orientalism, also reminds us that “in human history there is always something beyond the reach of dominating systems, no matter how deeply they saturate society, and this is obviously what makes change possible.”²⁴ Radical critique of development involves a project that must attempt a restructuring of the traditional perspectives, norms and assumptions that form the basis of Western thought. In order to do so, we must first “change the imaginary in order to be able to act on the real.”²⁵ The post-colonial project of peace, justice, dignity and community rests on decolonization of imagination. As a first step we need to abandon the search for models of alternative development and start imagining alternatives to development.

24. EDWARD SAID, *THE WORLD, THE TEXT AND THE CRITIC* 246-47 (1983).

25. SPIVAK, *French Feminism in an International Frame*, in *IN OTHER WORLDS: ESSAYS IN CULTURAL POLITICS*, *supra* note 14 at 134, 145.