Don’t Compromise Your Desire for Development!

A Lacanian/Deleuzian Rethinking of the Anti-Politics Machine

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Introduction

Critiquing the development industry has become an industry in itself. Some acknowledging the poor results and widespread failures of development interventions argue that still much work lies ahead to acquire better knowledge and instruments for intervention. On the other side, critical political economists argue that the development project only operates according to the underlying rationale of opening up markets for capitalist expansion. Others argue that it is not so much the capitalist logic behind it, but rather the institutionalisation of development that brings about the failures of development projects and programs. In this article, I go along with the critics of the development industry in their conclusions concerning the disastrous effects of many development interventions. I also coincide with the view that the solution is not to be found in terms of ‘better knowledge’ or forms of ‘enlightened’ managerialism. However, rather than rejecting the notion of development altogether, I contend that ‘engaging with development’ provides theorists with the chance of relating with Third World people’s dreams and desires within a Marxist anti-capitalist political tradition. In other words, people’s desires for development must be taken seriously and its promises should not be
forsaken. I explain the political and ethical implications of the rejection of the notion of development and argue that through the abandonment of the idea of development the very ‘object’ of development is lost. To elaborate this position, I propose a Lacanian/Deleuzian reading of Ferguson’s notion of the development apparatus as a desiring machine, thus taking distance from Foucault’s ideas of governmentality.

The Betrayal of the Promise of Development

It must be a strange experience for students of development well versed in the latest discussions about ‘post’- or ‘alternative’ development, to be confronted with the thoughts of Andean villagers in the Peruvian highlands. There, when engaging people in discussions about the meanings and costs of development the position is quite clear; what is needed is big and small infrastructure, highways and feeder roads, irrigation systems, dams, schools, town-halls, etc., what in local parlance are called ‘las obras’ (the small works) they (meaning the state and NGO’s) should bring to us. In fact, when asking the Andean villagers how they would define development their answer is surprisingly straightforward: ‘an extensionist who comes to our field and tells us the kind of fertilisers we should apply in order to increase our yields’.

We should not discard these ideas as the naive thoughts of people unaware of the risks development interventions entail. Neither should we see it as a lack of knowledge of the possible dangers and environmental hazards of infrastructural works and agricultural innovations. These people are quite conscious about the momentous consequences, and dangers, of development projects/programmes for their everyday lives. What they mean to say, though, is that they hold politicians and the state accountable for their unfulfilled promises, the roads that were never built; the schools that never arrived; the jobs that never opened up. In other words, the material progress that was promised but only arrives in their dreams. Obviously, development entails not only material (infra)-structures but also a moral relationship with distant authorities. As one of them put it, ‘the government has taught us that we should desire such obras, and we do hold them accountable for not providing them’.

How, then, should we account for this unfailing belief in development, given the notorious inability of governmental and non-governmental institutions to keep their promises? Or in more theoretical terms, what is the relationship between the virtual world of dreams and expectations
about development and the crude reality of actual development - or its absence? In order to answer this question I argue that we must analyse the ways in which development operates as a desiring machine. First, I analyse the way in which four major current theoretical approaches to development look at this relationship between the desire for development and its actuality. This is followed by a discussion of what I call strategies for denying or disavowing the promise of development.

In the literature we find manifold explanations for the shortfall of development and the disjuncture between goals and expectations and real outcomes. Those who follow a modernisation perspective take a benevolent/magnanimous position towards the project of development arguing that for all its shortcomings and disappointing results academics and practitioners should keep united in their search for better strategies of intervention. In this view there is simply no alternative for alleviating the fate of the poor. The very existence of a body of international agencies working on the promotion of new forms of expertise is viewed as a heroic (if Quichotesque) modernist endeavour (Robertson 1984), or as the expression of the culture of modernity as manifested in the believing in planning and its symbolic paraphernalia (Hoben 1995). In this view it is important to acknowledge that there is no alternative to development, that development in spite of its failures is the only game in town. Here we see a predilection for the identification of the kinds of social values that are compatible with development as manifested in the current popularity of notions such as social capital, civil-society development, participation, etc. This is the position of institutions such as the World Bank that are ready to engage in thoroughgoing forms of self-criticism and to re-invent themselves by embracing new approaches and methodologies so as to salvage the idea of development.

Radical political economists, on the other hand, see donor funded development projects as vehicles for the penetration of capitalist relations of production, through the imposition of structures that enhance market dependence through commoditisation processes (e.g. Bernstein 1979, 2001; Galli 1981; de Janvry 1992). They argue that the rationales put forward by liberal academics for development interventions - in the sense of programs aiming at the opening up of local economies to larger markets - is nothing but the process whereby non-capitalist modes of production are subordinated to global economic forces thus making their autonomous reproduction unfeasible. Commoditisation leads to the destruction of traditional livelihoods, and their subsumption to the logic of capital for the sake of global forms of capitalist accumulation. Planned development without
thoroughgoing forms of socio-economic transformation cannot but operate as a handmaiden for facilitating such processes of capitalist penetration. In this view development interventions are not good or bad in themselves but must be analysed in terms of their role in wider processes of social change, the question being what kinds of interests they stand for: that of transnational corporations, national capitalists, an emerging rural bourgeoisie, or that of popular social classes, such as the peasantry, urban working classes, the landless, etc. Development in this way is an arena of political negotiations between different social classes, leading to different types of political economy.

Since the late 1980’s modernisation theory and radical political economy have been joined by two other perspectives which are equally incompatible: the post-structuralist critique of development, also denominated ‘post-development’, and reflexive modernization theory. Both perspectives have in common a critical stance towards modernity, the first by taking a dismissive attitude toward it, and the second by arguing that the project of modernity rather than exhausted should be completed through a ‘second modernization’.

The post-structuralist perspective of ‘post-development’ (Escobar 1995; Sachs 1992) criticises development by demonstrating its dependence on patriarchal, positivist and ethnocentric principles that derive from the modernist project of the enlightenment. Modernity according to post-structuralist thinkers is predicated on the idea that objects and subjects of knowledge are constituted through the will to power as materialised through practices of classification, and representation (mappings of territory, classifications of nature, of sexuality, etc.). Putting it in a somewhat charged way, in this view development is seen as a constellation of power-knowledge geared at controlling Third World populations through forms of governmentality in which what is at stake is nothing less than the disciplining of bodies through the imposition of epistemic structures that condition the ways in which ‘the Other’ (in this case Third World people) relate to their own bodies and to nature.

Finally, the reflexive modernisation perspective argues that modernity has adopted a reflexive character, thus rejecting what it labels as the utopianism/ vanguardism of past notions of progress (Beck 1994; Giddens 1994)). Reflexive modernisation is a social theory that purports to engage in wider social debates about the future of society while breaking with notions of development as an emancipatory collective project aiming at making an end to poverty and injustice at a planetary level. The argument here is that in an era of post-scarcity social struggles revolve around the acknowledgement of all sorts of risks brought about by modernity (thus by development). What modern citizens therefore have in common is not a collective social project but an awareness of shared
vulnerability to low-probability high consequences types of risk. Reflexivity then is about the percepions, fears and expectations that the consequences of modernity produce in individuals. Modernity from having been a promise becomes a risky challenge to be managed accordingly. This is basically a European social-democratic perspective purporting to design a ‘third way’ between dogmatic socialism and savage neo-liberalism, which is gaining currency among policy-makers in leftist Third world governments such as Brazil (Petras and Veltmeyer 2004). This line of thought, I argue later, is a good example of what I denominated the betrayal of the promise of development.

From my point of view these different approaches fall short for two reasons. First, there is the common assumption that development is instigated from outside, whether through the introduction of new values, or new production and consumption structures, or new ways of relating to nature, the social and the body. Underlying these positions is thus a transcendentalist notion of development as either a vehicular framework of (civic) values, a commodity structure or a foreign constellation of power-knowledge, all supposedly to be targeted on an object (non-developed societies), and constitutive of new subjects (responsible citizens, the bourgeoisie/ proletariat, the Third World). This leads me to the second line of criticism. These theoretical perspectives, do not pay attention to the fact that development generates the kinds of desires that it necessitates to perpetuate itself, that it is an autonomous, self-propelling apparatus that produces its own motivational drives. Paradoxically, the idea of development relies on the production of desires, which it cannot fulfil. In other words, there is a certain ‘excess’ in the concept of development that is central to its functioning. Development thus points to a utopian element that is always-already out of place. Development therefore functions as its own critique.

It is this excessive constitutive ‘lack’ in development that this article sets out to interrogate. My argument is that we have to scrutinise this gap between the desire for development and its banalisation in practice in order to understand the modus operandi of the development apparatus. In order to answer this question Lacanian psychoanalytical theory may be useful. Thus in Lacanian terms is

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1 Lacan’s own work is notorious for its difficulty. When talking about Lacanian theory I refer especially to the work of what has been called the Slovenian Lacanian school comprising among others authors such as Slavoj Žižek, Zupancic, Renate Salecl and Mladen Dollar. In contradistinction to therapeutic psychoanalytic Lacanian approaches this school has set out to reinstate the Marxist critical tradition through a sustained engagement with Hegelian philosophy,
could be stated that the desire for development fills in a certain lack in its actualisation, it always points towards something else for ‘desire is always the desire of the ‘Other’, the latter standing for the development apparatus as the site where the question of desire originally originates (Zupancic 2000). Desire then is the faculty to produce dreams and utopias (the non-places of development) that are both evoked and betrayed by actual development, yet which renders it so desirable. In Lacanian terms desire is triggered by ’small objects of the other’ (in Lacanese petits objets a) which operate as objects of desire. Examples of these small objects are the works or obritas Andean people refer to when talking about the promises of development. Translated in political terms we could speculate that these dreams or utopias are the expression of a collective subconscious set in motion by the disjunction between the desire and the actuality of development.

It is my aim in this article to analyse development as a desiring machine by exploring the radical, constitutive disjunction between the ‘virtual’ world of the development machine (the fantastic images and promises by which the apparatus legitimates and reproduces itself) and the ‘actual’ workings of development interventions (the ‘petty’ politics and the manufacturing of discourse). The argument then is that development as a desiring machine operates through the generation, spurring and triggering of desires, and by disciplining them. It is this double movement of the generation and banalisation of hope that constitutes the dialectics of desire (see Nuijten 2003 on the concept of hope-generation). The critical point to be made is that the mundane world of actual development intervention cannot subsist without its virtual supplement: the fantastic images and promises that are evoked by a diversity of small objects that operate as objects causes of desire.

It is important to point out that this line of analysis entails a particular conceptualisation of power and the subject. In this view, power functions through the generation/propelling and disciplining/banalisation of the desire for development rather than through Foucauldian processes of governmentality. It is the dialectics of desire and its role in linking the virtual apparatus (the fantastic images meanings, aspirations and expectations that propel the actual politics of development) and its actuality (the meaningless re-invention of repetitive models and discourses) that is central in the analysis (see also de Vries 2002). It should also be noted that contra Foucault this approach does not dispense with the notion of the subject as an accidental and de-centred product of power-knowledge processes. Rather than seeing the subject as a gullible actor entrapped by its intentions I argue that the deconstruction and political theory. Especially Slavoj Žižek has become influential through his didactic use of popular culture. Presently, he defines himself as a dialectical materialist.
subject of development is an answer to the recurrent question ‘what is it to be undeveloped’ and that the hallmark of subjectivity is precisely this ‘void’ of ‘non-being’.

Summing up, rather than rejecting it I take development as the point of departure for the reason that it evokes precisely that which is lacking in it, thus rendering possible the imagination of utopia.

**The return of the disavowed object and the radicalisation of development theory**

Ironically, the concept of reflexive modernisation has led to a counter position within development studies in the work of Mark Duffield (2001; 2002). He shows in a very explicit way how the anxieties caused by the disavowal of the object produce all sorts of images of the Third World as a phantasmic obscene space, representing everything that the West is not. The questions posed in theories of reflexive modernisation can then be posed as ‘how does reflexivity look like in societies that have never made a transition from a first to a second modernisation, that exhibit a ‘lack’ rather than an excess of development, societies that experience both all disadvantages of development (environmental degradation, all sorts of risks ranging from the emergence of new types of wars to AIDS, to draughts, etc.), without enjoying their erstwhile advantages (material well-being, health services, stable bureaucracies, the existence of a public sphere, etc.). Take note that according to conventional modernisation theory such societies lack modern class structures and even more a progressive middle class, as residual classes such as the peasantry have been always majoritarian. These are purportedly post-colonial societies whose nation-states have followed different trajectories from Western industrialised countries and that suffer from endemic wars and humanitarian disasters. Societies, in short, that in the media and in policy documents are represented as the ‘other’ of modernity.

Mark Duffield (2001) deftly shows how present representations of the Third World as spaces of excess and abjection inter-relate with a new political economy in the South that, rather than examples of failure, should be seen as creative responses to neo-liberal structural adjustment policies. His line of reasoning is as follows. According to much contemporary thinking, Third World societies with ‘failed states’ have fallen into a perverse cycle of poverty, war and social regression, thus having regressed into marginal or borderland regions that reflect the failure of modernity in much of the South. But, says Duffield, such representations of failure and images of regression provide the justification and legitimacy for new kinds of intervention, a new will to govern the unstable areas of the global
margins. Likewise, mainstream thinking about ‘failed states’ makes a neat distinction between metropolitan areas and the borderlands, the latter exhibiting traits such as barbarity, excess and irrationality in contrast to the civility, restraint and rationality of the former. These representations, Duffield stresses, are imaginary, or ideological in the sense that they operate as legitimizations of this new will to govern. For, ‘[t]he borderlands are ... imagined spaces of breakdown, excess and wont that exist in and through a reforming urge to govern, that is to reorder the relationship between people and things, including ourselves to achieve desired outcomes’ (2002:1053).

Following Castells (1996) and Cox (1995) Duffield argues that these processes engender new forms of reflexivity in the South. Thus the outcome of the present logic of capitalist development that excludes large areas of the world gives way to a different kind of non-liberal reflexive modernity in the South, which compels these societies to uncouple from liberal forms of regulation. Conflict in his view rather than an impediment for development has become the source, or material infrastructure, of new development opportunities provided by globalisation. Only, development follows a different logic from that of metropolitan areas. Whilst, metropolitan areas constitute integrated spaces of trade and investment propelled by globalisation within a liberal capitalist logic, the latter thrive in the shadows of such a logic exhibiting a non-liberal logic of overlapping networks of illegal trade and war².

Development within this reformed policy discourse has been able to transform itself and overcome criticisms directed to its ‘lack’ of success conducing to a radicalisation of the concept. As Duffield puts it, ‘Aid can be seen as part of an emerging and essentially liberal system of global governance’ ... ‘embodied in public-private networks of aid practice that bring together donor governments, UN agencies, NGO’s, private companies, etc. (2002: 1050). It should be clear that this new form of governance directed to the re-construction of entire societies in the South is in essence an extremely authoritarian kind of project, as manifested in large-scale interventions to build ‘social capital’ and

² As he puts it, invoking the example of Africa, ‘the impact of structural adjustment served to accelerate the dismantling of non-viable patronage networks based on public bureaucracies. As an alternative, the metropolitan-encouraged process of privatization has provided the opportunity for many African rulers to develop transborder networks as a new basis for political power (Reno, 1998, cited by Duffield). At the same time, while the downsizing of the public sector and standing armies has increased the ranks of the unemployed, it has also provided the necessary personnel for the expanding shadow economy of extra-legal trade’ (p. 1056).
create civil societies. Here we see the return of the repressed object of development in the guise of neo-colonial programmes of civilisation and containment of ‘barbaric’ southern populations.

So far, it has been argued that narrative and reflexive approaches to development thinking lead to the loss/disavowal of its object. Development thus becomes part of a wider apparatus of rule aimed at managing risks or governing distant and unruly populations. The crucial point, however, is that the development apparatus has become part of such an illiberal system of global governance constituted through networks of complicity between international agencies, warlords, international agencies, drug and weapon mafias, etc. Yet, while the discourse of development has been radicalised and its field of governmentality has expanded, Third World people’s desire for development persists. Hence, the gulf between the images and representations of the Third World as a dangerous space that has to be contained and the expectations of modernity as experienced by people in the south has never in history been so large.

In the remainder of this paper I aim to turn the table against such despotic views of the Third World as objects of governmentality and focus on the role that the dreams and expectations of development play in keeping alive the promise of development. This, I argue, necessitates that we conceptualise the development apparatus as a desiring machine rather than as an apparatus of governmentality.

The Development Machine and its Instrument Effects

James Ferguson paradoxically has played a major role in the debunking and the recuperation of the idea of development, first through his introduction of Foucauldian and Deleuzian notions of discourse and desire (Ferguson 1994) and then by criticising post-development thinkers for downplaying the significance of the promises of modernity for the subjects of development (Ferguson 1999). As I build further and take distance from his theoretical position, I pay special attention to his work.

Continuing failure of rural development projects brought Ferguson at the beginning of the 1990s to a discursive-governmental analysis of development. In his now classical study on the anti-politics machine James Ferguson sets out to analyse the workings of what he coins the development apparatus – the set of institutions, agencies and ideologies that structure development thinking and practice – as a machine-like kind of entity that reproduces itself by virtue of the unintended, unplanned, yet systematic side effects it brings about. He takes as a case study one large rural development project in
Lesotho funded by the World Bank and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) that sadly but quite unsurprisingly ends up on the dustbin of failed projects in Africa. The reality of project failure, Ferguson argues, does not lead to a critical re-evaluation of the principles and conceptualisations that underpin the identification, planning and implementation of rural development activities. On the contrary, in a perverse way the same cures are prescribed for the same diagnosis and new, more ambitious projects, with more sophisticated planning techniques are initiated (Rondinelli 1993). As Ferguson puts it, ‘again and again development projects … are launched, and again and again they fail; but no matter how many times this happens there always seems to be someone ready to try again with yet another project’ (ibid).

Ferguson’s argument is that development interventions hardly bring about any social and economic transformations in the lives of people in the Third World. In most cases production structures are not transformed, technologies are not transferred and after the whirlwind of development propaganda and the massive presence of experts and bureaucrats local people in the end just continue to live their lives as if nothing important has happened.

It is his argument that development interventions are everything but inconsequential or innocent since there is a clear pattern in the outcomes of these interventions: there are unintended consequences that occur in a systematic way, behind the backs of the actors involved. In other words there is a hidden intentionality in programmes and projects that cannot be explained by, or reduced to, the intentions, desires or calculations of the actors involved. In putting this argument forward Ferguson is not denying that good intentions exist or that interests play no role in development projects/programmes, but these should not be taken as the explanatory variables in trying to understand how institutions reproduce themselves.

Another consequence which Ferguson analyses is the way in which development interventions transform the essentially politically nature of development into a sanitised object of (expert) knowledge complemented by an arsenal of toolkits - as in the case of ‘participatory appraisals’. The apparatus of development, thus, produces a reified world of (discursive) practices dissociated from the actual struggles and aspirations of the subjects involved, yet exhibiting an intelligibility of its own. It is Ferguson’s crucial insight that this co-existence between these two different realms, that of the actual life-ways, dreams and aspirations of local populations and the virtual realm of development rhetoric, routines and procedures, is something to be analysed in its own terms, and not to be reduced to some
external logic of capital, or to the institutionalisation of some liberal desire to construct a humane world.

It is not that the development apparatus has no impacts or effects on the ‘real world’ of the subjects of development (i.e. on people’s livelihoods). On the contrary, as Ferguson shows the effects are highly disappointing if sometimes not outright disastrous. The point, however, is that these effects ‘don’t matter’ for the functioning of the development industry. Rather than deterring the expansion of the apparatus, failure operates as the motor for its reproduction. At the same time failure produces instrument-effects, such as depoliticisation and bureaucratic penetration, that are instrumental for the preservation of certain forms of governmentality and domination. It is this co-incidence of instrument-effects and the re-invention of ‘new technologies’ of intervention that makes the development apparatus so effective as an instrument of domination.

Ferguson arrives to this view of the development apparatus through a deftly use of post-structuralist ideas deriving from Foucault and Deleuze. From Foucault he takes the notion of governmentality as power that operates through the manufacturing and deployment of technologies of control so as to convert development into an object of power-knowledge. From Deleuze he takes the idea of the desiring machine (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). However, he does not elaborate much on this notion and therefore his analysis remains largely a Foucauldian one.

Before elaborating on this notion of the ‘desiring machine’ let us reflect on how Ferguson’s argument has been misread. For instance, Gardner and Lewis criticise Ferguson for the over-determined character of the Foucauldian concepts of governmentality and discourse which in their view leads to a tautological way of thinking. In their view the development world is much more

Deleuze’s notion of the desiring machine can be seen as a critical engagement with the works of Freud and Marx, harnessed by the use of Nietzschean concepts. Desire, as a form of will to power, is seen as a distinctly social and political process, and is therefore external to the consciousness of individuals. The machine is any point at which desire leaves or enters a structure (a body, a mode of production, etc.). Capitalism operates as such a kind of desiring machine, one which works through decoding and deterritorialization, but also nomadic movements of subaltern populations and warfare can be seen as desiring machines. My understanding of the desiring machine has been developed in analogy to Deleuze’s and Guattari’s ideas. A good introduction to Deleuze’s work is Rajchman (2000).
diverse than assumed by authors such as Escobar and Ferguson. In their view development ‘involves multiple and ever changing realities and narratives’ and ‘to construct it as bounded and internally homogeneous is theoretically contradictory’ (2000:18). But, in my view, this is a travesty of Ferguson’s argument, as his notion of a development apparatus does not deny the fact of multiplicity or heterogeneity. The issue rather is why this multiplicity of desires, expectations, technological packages, planning instruments and methodologies leads to the pervasiveness of failure as a social fact, and how failure is again used as an entry point for new rounds of development thinking and practice. The only valid criticisms thus would be to deny that development projects and programmes do fall immensely short in regard to their goals and to give empirical proof for such a statement. This is something that these authors fail to do.

In a similar way, Mosse criticises Foucauldian perspectives on development for ‘not doing justice to the complexity of policy-making and its relationship to project practice or to the creativity and skill involved in negotiating development’ (Mosse 2003: 641). And in criticizing Ferguson’s supposed teleological functionalism and his unwillingness to take into account the predicaments of policy-makers he contends that rather than analyzing how events and practices are generated, it is more urgent to gain an understanding of how control over the interpretation of events is exercised, for ‘authoritative interpretations have to be made and sustained socially’. But is Mosse himself not simplifying the complexity of policy-making in development by emphasising the role of actors who are very skilled in controlling and imposing certain interpretations over others? What about other actors such as indigenous populations and critical activists, who do play a crucial role in the social life of planned interventions, not by letting themselves be enrolled by planners and politicians (Mosse’s Latourian argument), but by actively subverting the hegemony of the development apparatus? By now there is a huge literature about resistance against World Bank involvement in big dams construction, and if these works show something it is that global networks of activists have been highly effective in re-shaping global policy agendas by resisting and unmasking the hidden agendas of development interventions (Randeria 2003, Scott 1999).

Mosse’s analysis of the policy process heavily draws on Latour’s views when arguing that their success ‘arises from their ‘ability to continue recruiting support and to impose … coherence on those who argue about them or oppose them’ (646). Yet, is this not a way of denying the fact that development interventions reinforce old and produce new kinds of political contradictions, that indeed this disavowal of political antagonism may be the defining feature of development discourse. As
Chantal Mouffe (2005:2) argues, an ‘anti-political vision which refuses to acknowledge the antagonistic dimension constitutive of ‘the political’ … reveals a complete lack of understanding of what is at stake in democratic politics and of the dynamics of constitution of political identities and, as we will see, it contributes to exacerbating the antagonistic potential existing in society’.

In my view, Ferguson’s notion of hegemony is much more sophisticated as he explicitly detaches the notion of discourse from that of the conscious intentions of individuals, while linking discourse to the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, i.e. the social and discursive technologies by which certain issues can be problematised, rendered visible and certain courses of action legitimised and made accountable. In other words the study of ‘how certain interpretations are made and sustained socially’.

Developing Ferguson’s position a step further

Although I follow Ferguson’s position to a certain extent, I take distance from his emphasis on governmentality and instead give more weight to the ideological and imaginary effects of the ‘anti-politics machine’. Focusing more on desire than on discourse leads to a different view of the workings of the development apparatus, one which centres on the disjuncture between the virtual side of development and the actuality of practice and the dialectical role of desire in bridging this disjuncture.

Following Deleuze the development apparatus can be visualized as a social body constituted by the assembling of heterogeneous desires. Such an assembled and assembling body of desires is a ‘body without organs’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987); it does not presuppose the existence of functional differentiation within an organism, in which several organs are hierarchically positioned vis-à-vis each other to the benefit of the whole. We can then visualise the development apparatus as a body without organs, for Deleuze and Guattari deny any notion of society that emphasises its centralisation, cohesion, or complexity (Bull 2004).

It is important to point out that this description of the development apparatus as a desiring machine is very much opposed to the ways in which we commonly think about institutions, or the way the development institutions present themselves. Rather than a rational, legal-bureaucratic, and a hierarchical order the development apparatus functions as a crazy, expansive machine, driven by its capacity to incorporate, refigure and re-invent all sorts of desires for development. It cannot be stressed enough that the logic of this machine is not that of organic functional differentiation but that it
operates through the construction of a smooth institutional space in which buzzwords, forms of expertise and methodologies can be replicated over and over.

Ferguson discerns two kinds of instrument-effects of development interventions; de-politicisation and bureaucratic-institutional penetration. I would like to add a third instrument effect: the shaping and disciplining of the desire for development, or the desire to be modern. Already in the 70’s Albert Hirschmann (1961) pointed out that the very desire for development was in itself the driving force in the unfolding of the process. Putting it in Lacanian/ Deleuzian terms the virtual world of development generates forms of excess enjoyment (passions, dreams and imaginations), that retroactively produce the rationalisations/ justifications that the planning process itself lacks.4

This idea of the ‘lack’ resonates very well with the eternal lamentations about the ‘impossibility of planning’, the fact that the planning process is always limited, that the blueprint always falls short of ‘reality’, and that something else, outside of it has to be added in order to supplement it (participatory planning, etc.).5 What is crucial is that the desiring machine functions through the constitution of this lack (of knowledge, social capital, resources, etc.), which as a void gives body to all sorts of fads, theories and rationalisations. The desire for development, thus, persists through failure, that is by sliding from one object to the other and thus masking its constitutive impossibility. Accordingly, the

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4Rather than holding to the crude materialist notion that development (in terms of material infrastructure, organisational forms, etc.) would create the ideational framework that would lead to a self-propelling process, Hirschman argued that there was a certain mythical/ utopian element in the idea of development itself. In other words the practice of development needs a ‘virtual’ supplement that is provided in the desires generated by the idea of development. Later, in his book on ‘The Passions and the Interests’ (1977) Hirschman argues that economic thinking moved from the idea of passions as the motives for action to that of interests. Yet, is the vocabulary of interests not a way to construct an economic actor who is continuously busy reflecting on his/ her passions and desires in rational ways? Is this not a typical example of reflective determination in which desires are recognized/ assumed as such through discourses of rationality.

5Paradoxically planning remains as central as ever, if only because projects have to be projectized in order to make them amenable to be evaluated and monitored. Thus we see that apparently technical demands for financial accountability are not discordant with the virtual side of development as a desiring machine.
metonymic desire for development both masks its impossibility and reveals a utopian dream that goes against the historical project of capitalist modernisation.

The challenge at hand then is how to make sense of this impossible/utopian dimension of the notion of development. Next, I argue that the promise of development is constitutive of a subject who stands for this impossible, utopian side. It should be noted that this approach differs widely from Foucauldian notions of the subject as constituted by the interplay between power and resistance.

The creation of the development subject through interventions failures

According to a Lacanian approach the subject, rather than a subject of governmentality - i.e. the subject of the truth effects of power-knowledge - is a desiring subject. The name for the subject of development in Lacanian terms is the consciousness of a lack in the Other. Accordingly, development governmentality always-already misses its target. The elusiveness of the subject resides not in the fact that the development apparatus cannot fashion him/her according to its image (this is the Foucauldian image of the ‘resisting subject’) but in the fact that the subject of development as a subject of desire does take the dreams and fantasies of governmentality seriously. The development subject, in this view, rather than a product of, is a response to the lack in the development apparatus. While the promise of development becomes real through its failure, it is the failure to satisfy the desire for development that produces a subject that always-already eludes the grasp of power. Is this not a nice example of Hegel’s ‘cunning of reason’, of how a bureaucratic rationality works through the irrationality of hope, in which an object of knowledge (development) is constituted through a succession of failures to resolve the problems it supposedly reflects?

As we all know applied development theory today consists of an array of methodologies of which perhaps rapid rural appraisals and stake holder analysis are the most prominent. Taking the latter as an example, is the proverbial stake that the actors are supposed to carry and by which they can mark their interests and demand their right to be heard, not a good example of a signifier that permits the subject to recognise herself, as an actor implicated in a complex network of relations? The point is that actors come to define themselves as interested beings competing and negotiating with other stakeholders for the sake of development. In other words what they share is their common desire for development. We obtain then the image of an individual who becomes a subject by virtue of holding a stake. The subject of development can decide to hold another stake, they even can trade stakes, in fact, its subjectivity is
predicated on the fact that its identity is defined in terms of his status as a holder of a place within a closed economy of stakes. In other words we encounter a subject that functions solely as the placeholder of the ever-changing discourse of development by which actors come to recognise themselves as subjects of the crazy development machine/structure. It is this distance, or gap, between the stake as a signifier of development and the individual holding the stake that produces the subject of the signifier development. As argued, the subject of development is a desiring subject, a subject that engages with the ‘lack in the ‘Other’ (i.e. development), with the latter’s inability to belief in its own promises. The subject rather than a contingent side effect of the workings of the development apparatus (the Foucauldian definition of the subject) is that which the apparatus cannot gentrify, that which eludes the grasp of power-knowledge. I argue later that this conceptualisation of the subject has important ethical implications, but first let us compare the political implications of this Lacanian notion of the subject of development as ‘the subject of a lack’ with the Foucauldian post-development position.

Escobar (1995) has brilliantly applied Foucault’s ideas to development when arguing that development has been rendered possible through the ‘invention of poverty’. The representation of the ‘other’ as poor, indigent, and thus in need of aid is part of the constitution of a network of power relations that both reproduces images of otherness as pathology and of the ‘other’ as a subject to be reconstructed through the knowledge of development. Accordingly, disciplinary power is harnessed by techniques of classification and categorisation (e.g. the use of indicators and economic modelling techniques), or bio-power, that provide the rationalities of government (or governmentality) through which the conditions that impede development can be identified and analysed. In other words governmentality is about the problematisation of the social as a realm that lends itself for the application of new technologies of government aiming at instilling the idea of development as both the problem and solution of the predicament of post-colonial subjects.

It cannot be emphasised enough that in this view ‘problematisation’ through the production of rationalities of government (governmentality) is both the process by which regimes of legitimisation are constructed and by which the social becomes the object of the gaze of the development apparatus. At the same time the aims and objectives of development operate as pretexts for the workings of governmentality. In this way the social is constructed as a space for intervention through which development subjects are fashioned as the targets of the technologies of development. The political
programme of post-structuralists therefore is that of fracturing that gaze so as to render possible the dissemination of knowledges, outside the unified gaze of ‘development’.

But, is this a political programme that corresponds with the desires and dreams of the subjects of development? Let’s go back to the example of Andean villagers, who rather than ‘development alternatives’ or ‘alternatives for development’ would opt for the ‘real’ thing since, as they themselves put it, they have learnt to desire development. Is such a post-structuralist programme not again a disavowal of the promises of development, and of the utopian fantasies it generates? Is there not a danger that such a programme ends up colluding in the banalization of such promises? As argued this ‘real’ of development, is evoked by those small objects (what Andeans call _obritas_) that evoke something in development that is more than itself. In my view the challenge for a leftist critique of development is that of engaging with this constitutive lack in development.

Of course, post-structuralist critiques of development would argue that individuals and communities can imagine themselves in other ways and devise strategies for combating/undermining the hegemony of development. Such strategies are usually presented/formulated in terms of alternative modernities. But one could argue that this is just another way of disavowing the very fact that the subject constituted by development is a split entity, a void concealed through the ongoing promises of modernity. In other words, Foucauldian post-structuralist theory fails to interrogate the very lack in development itself, its inability to engage with the dreams and fantasies it triggers.

Which leads us to the classic Marxist position. The issue is not that of developing forms of social justice in response to capital’s drive for profits, etc. but that of surpassing/overcoming the very bourgeois notion of social justice, etc. The issue is not that of providing development subjects with new languages for imagining (alternative) modernities, etc. but that of interrogating how different stakeholders deal with the very void behind the stakes, i.e. their degradation to being a simple development category by development discourse (Pigg 1992). The issue, then, is not that of hiding the void by imagining new subject positions (thus a proliferation of development categories and identities), but that of exposing this void as a constitutive lack in the development apparatus as much as possible.

Following Slavoj Žižek (Žižek and Daly 2003) it can be argued that the subject of development stands for the truth of our current historical situation. By this he means that the truth of contemporary forms of capitalist globalisation is the increasing exclusion and marginalisation of the majority of the world population, and the only way to understand the workings of capitalist
globalisation is by identifying with this excluded abject position. As he puts it, ‘the abject position stands for the lie of the existing universality’ as represented by universal narratives of progress and human rights. In fact, the abject position of the subject of development embodies what is false in the existing universality by not having any positive content (p. 160). In contradistinction to this spurious universality he posits the concrete universality of the abject position. In my view this concrete universality stands for the faculty of the subject of development to desire.

**Conclusion: The ethics of the Real or don’t compromise your desire**

This article has argued that the current withdrawal from the notion of development signifies for the subjects a betrayal of its promise. The disavowal of development as a struggle for a new kind of society has its price as the repressed object of development returns in the guise of all sorts of spectral apparitions: the images of famined populations in drought areas, of violent youth in the rainforests taking Rambo as their example, of massacres and mutilated bodies, of genocide and ethnic cleansing and of ‘irrational’ fundamentalist movements. In this context development was re-discovered in an utterly opportunistic way as a project of deep social transformation by the international community aimed to make an end to the irrationalities of the South.

This raises important ethical questions. Lacan’s Ethics of the Real as developed by Žižek (1993; 95-99; see also Glyn and Daly 2004), Zupancic (2000) and Badiou (2002) is of great relevance here. This ethics is encapsulated by the Lacanian maxim ‘don’t compromise your desire’ which aims at maintaining an open space for the faculty of desire. Not to compromise your desire does not mean to adopt a puritan stance meaning that the subject should renege his/her dreams, for desire stands for a ‘pure’ faculty and not for a set of needs that can be satisfied. Neither does this maxim stand for the contrary, meaning the denial/negation of reality by escaping in a world of dreams and illusions. If it is true that the development apparatus sustains its hegemony through the generation and banalisation of hope, then not compromising your desire means refusing to accept the banalisation of development by the anti-politics machine. This is an ethics of sustaining the capacity to desire, to keep searching for what ‘is’ in development more than itself, for demanding that what development offers but cannot deliver. It is an ethics that demands the realisation of the impossible through a real act, an ethics that believes in the existence of miracles.
This ethics, it must be said, differs very much from an ethics that enjoins us to empathise with the abject subject, an ethics of ‘solidarity with those who suffer’. This, Žižek suggests is the position of a spurious universality, one which fails to look at global change from the viewpoint of the abject position of the subject of development. As Žižek (Žižek and Daly 2004: 139-167) argues there is always an element of hypocrisy with such an ethics, in the sense that it presupposes the existence of an outsider (the West, NGOs, human rights organisations, etc.) who have the capacity/ rights to determine who the victims are. This notion of ethics is based on the existence of a certain gaze - that of Western human rights - conducive to a logic of victimisation in which subjects are constituted by virtue of their capacity to identify themselves, present themselves, as victims. In other word, it presumes that there is a Big Other (which for our purposes is the development apparatus) that can and should ascertain this status as a victim. Such a logic of victimisation is correlative with a passive subject, a subject who is satisfied with the right to narrate his/ her suffering.

In opposition to this depoliticised ethics of human rights Žižek (see also Badiou 2002) argues that an ethics of the Real is an ethics that does not assume that there is any guarantee for its existence in an external ‘humanitarian gaze’, or in the norms of victimisation of a big Other. This entails a radical politicisation of ethics; an ethics of the Real is an ethics of taking risks/ decisions, of not compromising a fundamental desire, which for our purposes would signify not compromising on the desire for development. Or as Žižek (Žižek and Daly 2004:167) puts it, ‘[t]he truly traumatic thing is that miracles - not in the religious sense but in the sense of free acts - do happen, but it’s very difficult to come to terms with them’. Perhaps we should search for such miracles in the capacity of ‘abject subjects’ - the excluded who bear all the costs of capitalist globalization while benefiting from none of its benefits - to dream about a different world, and to act upon such dreams. Perhaps the Zapatista uprising of 1 January 1994 in Mexico, occurring on the same day that the North American Free Trade Association Treaty was installed, was just such an example of a miraculous, yet traumatic, event that came to symbolize the spurious universality of the global neo-liberal project.
Bibliography


