

Development Ireland

Contemporary Issues

Edited by
Peter Shirlow

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Development Discourses: Conservative, Radical and Beyond

RONNIE MUNCK AND HONOR FAGAN

Development holds a central place in many debates but it is seldom deconstructed. It is a discourse made up of a web of key concepts which are simply taken for granted, in both its conservative and radical guises. Development is an amoeba-like concept – denoting everything and nothing – which creates a common ground for right and left to battle on. Thus, if there is a perceived impasse in development theory, this should be seen as due to the stultifying unity of the discursive field and not its regrettable fragmentation (Schuurman, 1993). We argue in this chapter that the crisis of development theory – and by implication the crisis of development perspectives in Ireland – is linked to the limitations of the modernist discourse. As we do not seek an abstract critique of existing radical debates, but a genuine transcending, we shall proceed first to catalogue the considerable achievements of this work – as exemplified in this book – in questioning the findings of conservative or ‘mainstream’ thinking on the development prospects of Ireland. In the course of this analysis we hope to move beyond the language of critique to a language of transformation, necessary in our view for any radical democratic vision and creation of a new Ireland.

Economic Fallacies

Virtually all the contributors to this volume would agree on the poverty of ‘mainstream’, conventional or conservative remedies for the crisis of development in Ireland today. Prionnsias Breathnach refers in this regard to the ‘tunnel vision’ characteristic of Irish economists’ and their reliance on British or US ‘metropolitan’ models of development. For the once dominant, then defunct, now reborn modernisation or developmentalist model, there is an inexorable drive towards modernity that all

nation states will equally participate in. It is not hard to show that Ireland has been largely excluded from this 'best of all possible worlds', as Rousseau would have it. For most contributors to this volume this is due to Ireland's condition of ill-defined 'peripherality'. But if this is not to be simply tautology – Ireland is excluded from the development process because it is peripheral, and Ireland is peripheral because it is excluded from the development process – more definition is needed. Douglas Hamilton refers to geographic peripherality and economic peripherality in his contribution. Considerable emphasis is laid on the role of multinational or transnational companies in constraining the development prospects of Ireland. The implicit alternative in both contributions is some form of national or 'autonomous' development model which would look 'inward' to Ireland rather than 'outward' to the world economy.

It is only recently that Mjoset (1992) has brought home to Ireland some of the advances in international development theory and research, although O'Malley's (1989) earlier work in the 'Sussex school' tradition of 'structural dependency' should also be mentioned. It is significant that Breathnach's opening contribution bases its analysis squarely on Mjoset's idea of a 'vicious circle' or underdevelopment. This refers to a process, familiar to Third World economists, in which there is a mutual negative interaction between features such as population decline, a sluggish home market, a weak national system of innovation and the threat of marginalisation from the mainstream of world economic life. Mjoset is incorrect, however, in associating 'peripheral development' with growth without development, insofar as the Latin American dependency school always recognised the possibility of dependent development and was not stagnationist. The main point, however, is well taken and it is significant that Mjoset's work should be seen as so novel in Ireland when it is only essentially an 'application' of Third World development perspectives to the Irish case. It certainly establishes fairly conclusively the weakness of the development model in Ireland, both in the past and today. O'Hearn's (1993) recent contribution to a study of global competition, Europe and Irish peripherality, should also be mentioned as part of the radical critique of complacent mainstream views in this regard.

If the radical critique of the 'mainstream' highlights dependency and the vicious circle of underdevelopment, it also, justifiably, focuses on the human costs of this seemingly impersonal process. Paul Sweeney's contribution to this volume has no problem in

clearly identifying the key fundamental problem of development in Ireland as the inter-related problems of mass unemployment and emigration. There is the well-founded saying that the Southern economy is working well, pity about the people! The conservative advice that people should not 'price themselves out of jobs' is now being applied with a vengeance. In the South and the North alike, workers have consistently been told that if their wages were reduced and productivity was increased, more jobs would result. Yet while real unit labour costs have fallen consistently, the dole queues have lengthened and emigration regains its traditional role in the Irish socio-economic system. It is perhaps well to remind the Irish economists, who advocate economic policies regardless of their social impact, that their international development colleagues are increasingly being called upon to justify and apply ethical principles to the policies they advocate. As Amartya Sen, one of the foremost contemporary development economists, puts it: 'While the tendency to avoid facing foundational questions is quite common, it is more a reflection of escapism than a demonstration of uncanny wisdom' (1989, p. 772).

Virtuous Governance

If the economic fallacies of the mainstream are plain to see, we should also ask questions about the political system which allows this state of affairs to persist. In the South, for example, the *Culliton Report* (1992) put forward a quite coherent and, in its own way, radical set of proposals to overcome the development crisis. Yet, from the political arena we have witnessed a bold new departure in terms of economic policy. In the North, as Clulow and Teague (1993) argue, every level and component of the governance structure is faulty and, therefore, a serious impediment to improved economic performance. Virtuous governance can be seen as a narrow economic concept – a sort of enabling political structure – or as a broader commitment to democracy, in all spheres of social life. It is at this point that we are reminded that economics is really (or should be) about political economy. The recent history of international economics in which neo-liberal economic strategies could be advocated almost regardless of their social and political consequences has not been superseded. In Ireland it is still, however, considered 'subversive' to advocate alternative economic strategies which in any way question or undermine existing political and institutional arrangements.

One of the main manifestations of the 'democratic deficit' with regards to development in Ireland remains, we would argue, the question of partition. Even the mainstream economists reporting to the New Ireland Forum in 1984 recognised the substantial economic benefits of a reunited Ireland in terms of economies of scale and scope. In terms of the vicious circle of underdevelopment analysed above we can, conversely, envisage a virtuous circle of development (synergy) as part of a dynamic process of Irish reunification within Europe. However, it should be mentioned that much of the current debate on a reunited Ireland has been within an economic framework, without acknowledging fully the wider political environment in which economic affairs operate. From a radical democratic perspective we need to stress the social, political and cultural divisions introduced by partition which are all, in their different ways, barriers to the harmonious development of Ireland. It is this broader democratic debate which can take us away from McGimpsey's (1993) sterile discussion on the 'economic impossibility of a united Ireland', as one recent paper put it. Equally, it should make us question the naive belief of some northern economic spokespersons – such as George Quigley – that an 'island economy' may be profitably developed in Ireland without in any way compromising existing constitutional arrangements.

It is indicative of the parochialism of much of the development debate in Ireland that there is little reference to the long-standing international discussion on the relationship between development and democracy (Sklair, 1988). Some twenty years ago this debate centred around the developmental preconditions for achieving democratic governance. More recently there has been a turn towards examining the political preconditions – such as democratic governance – for achieving genuine self-sustaining development. Yet in both trends we note normative, coercive and ultimately untenable views of democracy and development, sustaining a master narrative based on the idea of a homogeneous, universal history. Democracy has been, for too long, an abstract Western ideal inextricably bound up with a particular notion of (capitalist) development. We should instead recognise the proliferation of meanings lying behind the terms 'development' and 'democracy'. That both are floating signifiers should be both self-evident and a necessary condition in creating the terrain for an open debate on the preferred political outcome. Given the discursive centrality of both terms, these signifiers are bound to be ambiguous, and the site of important social and political practices. If the 'identity'

of development and democracy is ambiguous and lacks fixity, we should not, from a radical democratic perspective, take any mainstream definitions for granted.

Radical Options

Having established the limitations of the conservative development discourse, in its economic and political aspects, the radical alternative needs to present its own options. Breathnach refers to Samir Amin's (1990) notion of 'autocratic development', Hamilton stresses the need for greater autonomy, and Walsh calls for a more radical National Development Plan. Thus the radical alternative can be said to be inward looking and state oriented. Indeed, one of the problems with the radical dependency theory since its origins was its failure to articulate clearly what non-dependent development might mean, beyond vague gestures about the need to 'delink' from the world economy. The logical corollary of autarky – basically closing economic frontiers and striving for self-sufficiency – is not only reactionary but clearly not economically viable in today's world. Any revival of 1930s de Valera-type economics in Ireland today would be, quite literally, a reactionary and chauvinist pipedream. It is only when we restrict ourselves to the self-limiting world of binary oppositions that we could oppose an outward-oriented and exploitative economic model with a simple inward-oriented model. Instead, we should perhaps be exploring – without preconceptions – which combination of viable economic measures could best meet the main social and economic needs and aspirations of the Irish people.

In development discourses as a whole we find that the state is traditionally attributed a master role as conductor and conduit of development. More recently we have witnessed a new orthodoxy in which the state is perceived and presented as the main obstacle to development (Colcough and Manor, 1993). Again, as in the democracy and development debate, we see the debilitating presence of binary opposites. It is simply not enough for radicals today to portray increased state intervention as the path to true development. Whatever the limitations of the neo-liberal recipes and the uncritical celebration of the market, we cannot ignore the well-founded criticism of state capitalism and the associated strategies of social engineering. The new liberalism and state capitalism alike share an economism which sees economic growth as the centrepiece of social change and a teleology which assumes

a goal-oriented development process. It might be useful for the Irish democratic development debate to look at current radical South African alternative economic discourse. With regard to the role of the state, the recent Macro Economic Research Group report *Making Democracy Work* (1993) contains an apparently 'conservative' call for 'a slim state, disciplined by mechanisms which provide incentives for efficiency and for monitoring of performance' (1993, p. 3). Only a blinkered and dogmatic view of social change could dismiss this realistic appraisal out of hand.

Paul Sweeney's contribution to this volume is geared specifically to providing a trade union response to the development crisis in Ireland. While sympathetic to any rejection of knee-jerk reactions towards capitalist proposals, we remain sceptical of the extent to which some Irish trade unionists have accepted policies such as HRM which are central to the neo-Fordist enterprise. It is not an effective counter-discourse to hegemonic economic thinking just to demand that the profits of technological change be shared more equitably. Other trade unionists have argued that a progressive economic alternative 'demands not only more resources, reorganisation of the development effort, more popular participation and public accountability, but also a conceptual rethinking of economic priorities' (Freeman et al., 1987). The last point can be related to the ever more pressing concern with the environment and the extent to which 'malestream' economic development conspires against the interests of women (Moser, 1989). An alternative economic strategy in Ireland will not materialise, in our mind, without a considerable increase in popular participation. To be more specific, a democratic economic policy in Ireland can only emerge in the context of a peace settlement leading to the creation of an all-Ireland democracy, where participation might increase in all spheres of social life, including economic policy making.

Radical Fallacies

It is now generally recognised that radical development theory has been in some sort of impasse over the last few years. This is not, however, self-evident from the contributions to this volume which assume a coherent and viable alternative to the current conservative development nostrums. It may be useful to examine this question in terms of what has been seen as one of the central manifestations of the modernist discourse, namely logocentrism. The

concept refers to a tendency to impose hierarchy on uncritically accepted dichotomies between, for example, men and women, modern and traditional, or North and South. The first term is seen as a sovereign subject, an invariable presence needing no explanation, whereas the second is seen simply as derivative and defined solely in relation to the first. As Manzo (1991) points out, the concept of logocentrism is important to this discussion because, 'it demonstrates how even the most radically critical discourse easily slips into the form, the logic, and even the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest, for it can never completely step outside a heritage from which it must borrow its tools ...' (1991, p. 8). So pervasive is the logocentric mode within development studies, that any challenge to the dominant assumption of economic growth can hardly be entertained.

It is somewhat overgeneralised but arguable to state that the radical dependency model is, in fact, just a form of economic nationalism. The dependency approach took for granted that 'development' meant what had happened in Britain or the US. In Derrida's terms these experiences belonged to the realm of logos, or pure and invariable presence in need of no explanation. Dependency theorists, just as the developmentalists they criticised, took for granted that development meant national development and growth. The image of the Western nation state took on a universalising role, quite divorced from the complexity and diversity of world history. Modernisation theory was based on an assumption about the smooth diffusion of European economic, political, social and cultural norms to the 'periphery'. We would argue that, while the radical dependency critique challenged the harmonious view of the world implicit in this diffusionist model, it shared its underlying assumption of history in terms of progress and linear temporality. To some extent, the radical critique of conservative development discourse, such as that contained in this book, tends simply to reverse the hierarchies they deal with (people versus profit, autonomous versus dependent growth, etc.) and does not move on to question their own ability to subvert logocentric reasoning.

Two contributions to this volume do begin to take us beyond the traditional dichotomies, namely those by Anderson and Goodman on Ireland's position within the European Community, and Cebulla and Smyth's analysis of post-Fordism in Belfast. The former argues that a 'Europe of the regions' will not replace the centrality of the nation state and the national conflict in Ireland. We would agree with their conclusion that: 'While regionalism

is not displacing nationalism, its growth, and EC integration more generally, is perhaps the most important new factor affecting the national conflict.' Countering knee-jerk radical nationalist views in Ireland on the EC, one of us had similarly argued elsewhere that:

National economic and political balances of power will in future increasingly be established within the wider framework of the EC. It is becoming less and less appropriate to rely exclusively on national mechanism to secure a democratic future. (Munck, 1993, p. 134)

As to the question of post-Fordism, as developed by Cebulla and Smyth, but also deployed by other contributors, it is, of course, one of the main themes of the post-Marxist or postmodernist theorists. Against cataclysmic views of the capitalist crisis, this school argues that we are entering a new era characterised by flexible working practices, a smaller role for trade unions, a reduction in state intervention, and a new individualism in social relations. The only word of caution here would be to point to the dangers of technological determinism inherent in this analysis, especially if applied unthinkingly to Ireland (Bonefeld and Holloway, 1991).

Gender Agendas

If there is one major flaw in most of the radical development discourse it is the conceptual and empirical blindness to the role and agency of women in the development process. Yet the control of women is central to all national development histories. The dynamics of gender are also central to post-colonial and nationalist discourses, nowhere more obviously than in Ireland. Gender is also crucially involved with questions of labour and of the state. The construction of women in patriarchal discourses is, at the same time, a construction of paid and unpaid labourers. Women are also central to state formation, as Kandiyoti argues, insofar as: 'Women bear the burden of being "mothers of the nation" ... as well as being those who reproduce the boundaries of ethnic/national groups, who transmit the culture and who are the privileged signifiers of national difference' (1993, p. 377). The regulation of gender should now be seen as central to the articulation of national identity and the national development process. The economic, social and political failings of most post-colonial regimes with regards to women force us to call into question the

secular pretensions of nationalist movements and projects. In conclusion, a development discourse which does not focus on gender power and its relation to other forms of power is destined to become a 'malestream' discourse.

It is ironic that while feminism contributed to the impasse in development studies by constantly highlighting the 'invisibility of women' in development discourses, it also opens up ways forward. The theory and practice of feminism can help us break out of the deadlock in radical development theory in various ways. In her critical overview of the relationship between feminism and development theory, Kandiyoti (1993) highlights how recent debates have taken us beyond the 'Women in Development' school associated with the assumptions of the modernisation perspective. While the liberal 'Women in Development' school can be credited with bringing women into the development debate, it operated with an economic reductionist view which defined women as a coherent category in advance of their entry into the development process. The radical feminist development writers laid more stress on the complexity and diversity of the process whereby women were integrated into capitalist development. Nevertheless, they shared with their liberal counterparts a structuralist emphasis and a tendency towards universalising assumptions. Recent work has also tended to move away from the earlier views of women as helpless victims, buffeted by the forces of patriarchy, religion and tradition. Instead women are seen as prime agents within and around development projects, with their own diverse, and often contradictory, agendas.

Gender studies has, until recently, shared some of the problems associated with the use of meta-theories as deployed by conservative and radical development theories alike. The subsequent turn towards postmodernism, psychoanalysis and cultural studies led gender studies to a growing theoretical fragmentation and diversification. This would appear to be happening now within international development studies, where the problem has been, hitherto, the deeply held common assumptions of both conservative and radical variants. Poststructuralist feminism has helped move us beyond the binary oppositions based on sexual difference; men exploit, women are exploited. As Mohanty argues: 'Such simplistic formulations are historically reductive, they are also ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions' (1993, p. 207). By analogy we should question the binary divisions deployed in radical development theories between centre and periphery, inward and outward looking development, dependent and autonomous, even development and underdevelopment. In

terms of theoretical and practical challenges to the dominant development discourse, it is, arguably, women's movements which have been the most visible and challenging internationally. Parajuli puts the case that 'They may potentially offer an alternative framework not only for relations between men and women, but also for relations between humans and their environment, knowledge and power, the state and civil society' (1991, p. 177). That this challenge is still more of an aspiration than a reality should not prevent us from recognising its importance.

Transformation Time

Central to the poststructuralist debate is the notion of deconstruction. We have sought to question the assumptions of the Enlightenment discourse which saw progress as leading to harmonious development and the general emancipation of humankind. Deconstruction has led us to dismantling the structures and hidden assumptions of conservative and radical development discourses alike. The 'gender agenda' was the point of rupture we focused on in this deconstructive enterprise. It is necessary to follow through this critique to stress the need for self-sustaining growth which, arguably, also helps point the way out of the impasse in radical development theory. In the mid-1990s it is becoming increasingly clear that a new post-Fordist social compromise to replace the long-lasting Fordist one seems unlikely to materialise. Europe is certainly not the dynamic and democratic home envisaged by Jacques Delors in 1992. Lipietz (1992) has argued persuasively that an alternative development model is urgently needed, based on the values of solidarity, the autonomy of individuals and ecological responsibility. The emergence of new social movements articulating just such values has led to a sustained critique of the dominant development discourses and the productivist bias of mainstream and radical alternatives alike. Recognising that knowledge is a contested terrain, these movements, with their incipient but already noticeable effects in Ireland, are increasingly showing how developmentalist knowledge can be antithetical to people's interests.

Another point to pursue, following Tucker, is that: 'In development studies culture has tended to have been regarded as something of an epiphenomenon, secondary in importance to the all important economic and political domains' (1992, p. 2). For some time now, the work of Foucault has been taking

development studies internationally beyond the narrow confines of economism. Foucault's insights into the (re)production of discourses and the relationship between knowledge and power, suggest interesting new ways to (re)interpret development theory and practice from a truly radical perspective. A Foucauldian perspective on development would begin by looking at the historical conditions, current deployment and techniques associated with the development discourse (Escobar, 1984). From this perspective, we can see how counter-discourses (such as radical development theory) have operated mainly within the same discursive space as the dominant strategy. This explains the ease with which the dominant development discourse has incorporated and neutralised so many 'radical' concepts such as human-centred, integrated or endogenous development. This does not mean that we should necessarily abandon the concept of development, but it does point towards the need to go beyond development as a unitary field of theory and practice. Following Said, Tucker argues that: 'Rethinking development in order to redress the problems posed [above] calls for a plurality of discourses, a plurality of audiences and a plurality of terrains' (1992, p. 24). We can but concur.

Finally, if it really is 'transformation time', as radicals making the new South Africa put it, we should probably ask again what development actually means. Even the solidly mainstream journal *World Development* now carries articles on 'the meaning of development' (Ingam, 1993). So the time seems ripe. Development discourse, so central to the Enlightenment, contains a metaphor of making visible what is already present. So, much as a photographic print is developed, we can reveal in the developing country what we already know to be there from the developed countries. That this interpretation is both evolutionary and reductionist should be clear by now. But this does not mean that we must necessarily accept the verdict of critics, such as Gustavo Esteva (1992), that 'development' has evaporated and that, after some decades, it is clear that this field of knowledge is a mined, unexplorable land. Though understandable, this desire seems somewhat premature and a rejection of Foucault's view of power as all-pervasive but eminently contestable. In Ireland there is actually a body of knowledge on the social and cultural, as well as the economic, aspects of development represented, for example, by the iconoclastic work of Lee (1989). One recent study, by Paul Keating and Derry Desmond, has in fact made a useful contribution to our understanding of the relationship between culture and

capitalism in contemporary Ireland (Keating and Desmond, 1993). Also, recent work by Peadar Kirby points, if only in outline, to moves beyond the assimilationist and simple nationalist readings of Irish development (Kirby, 1993). A (re)construction of a radical democratic development discourse thus seems more appropriate to us than a premature evacuation of this terrain.

Conclusion

We should point out in conclusion that we are not seeking to advance a new 'postmodernist' orthodoxy in this field, but simply to recognise that the impasse in radical development studies is but one moment of a wider crisis of representation in the social sciences. Nor do we advocate a slide into some variant of post-modernist nihilism and uncritical celebration of difference. We do want to take the debate on development in Ireland out of the clutches of the crude bipolar structural opposition between 'centre' against 'periphery', which makes the latter a poor, tardy and stunted deviation from the normative centre (Richardson, 1993). If we look instead to the heterogeneity, plurality and contradictory nature of present-day Ireland we shall see instead many possibilities for transformation. A counter-hegemonic movement which is simply a mirror image of that which it seeks to transform will never succeed in this bid. Though this statement has obvious political implications – particularly regarding the nationalist discourse – which we cannot articulate here, it does bid us to question the apparently unquestionable truths underlying development discourses in Ireland.