

**RESPONDING TO POVERTY AND INJUSTICE IN THE  
LIGHT OF THE POST-DEVELOPMENT DEBATE:  
INSIGHTS FROM A SENEGALESE NON-  
GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION**

**by**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis intervenes in one of the most prominent recent debates in development theory – that between post-development theorists and their critics – and brings to it insights drawn from the experiences of a Senegalese non-governmental organisation, Enda Graf Sahel. I begin by providing a critical discussion of the post-development debate and then detail the question which guides this investigation, namely: how can we, the relatively privileged, respond meaningfully to poverty and injustice in the light of the post-development debate? I present three possible responses to my research question. Firstly, I argue that the relatively privileged have a role to play in rethinking the concepts of ‘poverty’ and ‘injustice’. Secondly, I discuss the kinds of support that we may provide to popular organisations; and finally, I describe ways in which those of us who are relatively privileged may change aspects of our own lives and settings in solidarity with the struggles of the poor and oppressed. Throughout, I draw extensively both on the post-development debate and on the experiences and insights of Enda Graf Sahel to show how we can move past a simple defence or rejection of post-development theory in order to meaningfully respond to poverty and injustice.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Like a towering lighthouse guiding sailors towards the coast, ‘development’ stood as the idea which oriented nations in their journey through post-war history ... Four decades later, governments and citizens alike still have their eyes fixed on this light flashing just as far away as ever: every effort and every sacrifice is justified in reaching this goal, but the light keeps on receding into the dark ... it is time to dismantle this mental structure (Sachs, 1992, p.1, emphasis in the original).

[An] important reason for rethinking development (in) practice is that important strands of mainstream poststructuralist, postmodern and postcolonial work would have us disengage from practicing development at all ... [but] unless we are to leave [poor] people and societies to their own devices, to abrogate any responsibility for both distant and not so distant others, we need to remain concerned with development in practice as much as with development theory (Simon, 1997, p.184).

[W]e [the Enda Graf Sahel staff] asked ourselves if we ourselves had not in some way contributed to the impoverishment of some people through our practices, through the promotion of values and ways of seeing things which encouraged impoverishment, domination and exclusion and which strengthened this culture of ‘development’. This interrogation was a key moment in our journey (Ndione et al., 1994, p.17).

These three quotes capture the core concerns of the discussion to follow. The first is from the introduction to Sachs’ edited *Development Dictionary* and tells of the author’s disillusionment with development and his conviction that it is time to declare an end to development. The second is from an article critical of post-development theory in which the author expresses concern that by dismissing development without providing an adequate alternative, post-development theory and related recent post-modern and post-colonial work fails to respond adequately to the suffering of the poor. The final quote is from one of the publications of a Senegalese non-governmental organisation, Enda Graf Sahel, and speaks of a moment of crisis experienced by the Enda Graf Sahel staff members which led them to question the assumptions that had thus far guided their work and to explore new ways of working with poor communities. Together, the quotes highlight the shortcomings of current development theory and practice, but also the importance – and difficulty – of responding meaningfully to the problems development initiatives seek to

address. This is the concern guiding this investigation: how do we take on board post-development theorists' critique of development theory and practice in a way that does not involve abdicating responsibility for addressing problems of poverty and injustice?

My initial interest in post-development theory was stimulated by a reading of Nederveen Pieterse's (2000) article 'After post-development', which rejects post-development theory, and declares it misleading and politically problematic. While Nederveen Pieterse's reasons for rejecting post-development theory seemed plausible, the passages he quoted from post-development texts struck a chord with my own nascent disillusionment with some aspects of development theory and practice. Further exploration of the post-development literature and critiques of this literature deepened my interest, notably the fact that both contributors to this literature and their critics seem to be motivated by a concern for poor and marginalised people, even though much disagreement persists over what such people require and what their situation demands of those who live lives of relative privilege. This engagement with the literature also led me to the work of Enda Graf Sahel, whose ideas and experiences seem helpful, both in understanding the reasons for the emergence of debates around post-development and in exploring some of their implications for development practice. This thesis reflects my continuing interest in these debates and conviction that they raise issues of academic, practical and other import.

## **1.1    Aim and Objectives**

This thesis has one overall aim and two specific objectives. *The aim is to address the following question: 'How can we, the relatively privileged, respond to poverty and injustice in the light of the post-development debate?'* Mainstream development literature and practice suggests that development, or some or other particular type of development, can bring about a more just world and an end to poverty. Post-development theorists argue that development, in all its different characterisations, has not and cannot address poverty and injustice and that some new and radically different response is needed. Critics of post-development theory insist that we must not allow disillusionment with development to prevent us from responding ethically and effectively to the suffering of the poor and oppressed. Taking into consideration the debate between advocates and critics of post-development theory, how can an adequate response to poverty and injustice be imagined and realised and, more specifically, what role can and should the relatively privileged play in this response?

In order to address my main research question I need to explore a number of subsidiary questions, which constitute specific objectives: What is post-development theory? Who are the main post-development theorists? What are the main criticisms levied at post-development thinking and who are the theory's key critics? What is at the heart of disagreements between post-development theorists and their critics? *The first specific objective is thus the provision of a detailed description and general analysis of the post-development debate.* This is undertaken early on, allowing the rest of the thesis to focus on addressing its main overall aim, which is done by drawing on the ideas of Enda Graf Sahel.

*The second specific objective of the thesis is thus to critically engage with Enda Graf Sahel's continually evolving approach to working with poor communities.* Here, I explore the ideas and experiences of Enda Graf Sahel staff members, and use the insights deriving from these in the development and illustration of my arguments.

A preliminary clarification of terms is needed. Firstly, what do I mean by the post-development *debate*? I use the word 'debate' very loosely here, referring not to a formal, structured debate between two clearly distinct sets of thinkers, but rather to the general discussion which arose in response to issues highlighted in post-development theory. References to the 'post-development debate' refer then in a general way to discussions around post-development theory and the critical responses it has elicited. Secondly, why do I repeatedly speak about the need to respond to the problems of poverty and injustice but not inequality? Development efforts have typically involved responding to poverty, broadly defined, and have often also had responding to inequality or some other perceived injustice as a goal. In Chapter 5 I explain why I have chosen to collapse the problems of inequality and injustice into one and to speak about injustice rather than inequality. For the moment, it should be noted that when I speak of responding to poverty and injustice, I take that to mean responding to poverty, inequality *and* injustice, and I take these three issues to be key preoccupations of most of those involved in the post-development debate. Thirdly, the term 'we, the privileged', which I use frequently, needs clarification – who is and is not included here is clarified in Chapter 3, where I also expand at length on exactly what my research question entails and how it arises.

## **1.2 Context of the Study**

The last few decades have witnessed the persistence, perhaps even deepening, of the problems which development initiatives purport to address – poverty, inequality and injustice. Statistics suggest that the percentage of the world population living in poverty has decreased only slightly over the last 15 years or so while the absolute number of poor people has remained more or less constant (see African Development Bank et al., 2000). Over the same time period global inequality has been increasing steadily (see Bata and Bergesen, 2002; United Nations, 2006). While these problems persist, certainty about how to address them has become increasingly elusive. The post-Cold War ascendancy of neo-liberal economic thinking has seen significant policy shifts, although these have not resulted in the successful resolution of these problems. Indeed, some argue that neo-liberal policies have exacerbated poverty and inequality.<sup>1</sup>

From the outset neo-liberalism was opposed by many, particularly those who consider themselves to be on the political left. However, the post-Cold War era has witnessed increasing uncertainty about what it means to be ‘on the left’ and what alternatives there are to the capitalist economic order being entrenched by neo-liberalism.<sup>2</sup> Distinctions between the political left and right are difficult to pin down, but a concern with inequality – and with related issues such as poverty, injustice and oppression – has always been key

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<sup>1</sup> For example, many critics of the neo-liberal Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) adopted during the 1980s and 1990s in many African countries argue that these policies failed to improve the situation of African countries and may even have worsened the problems they were supposed to solve (see Ihonvbere, 2000; Olukoshi, 1996). Neo-liberalism and African responses to it are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> There have been many different discussions about this uncertainty, some of which take the form of a very general analysis of the future of the left, while others examine the situation of particular left groups or of the left in a particular country. See for example Anderson (1998; 2000), Blackburn (1991), Derber (1995), Rorty (1997) and Thompson (1997).

to left politics. Indeed, Norberto Bobbio's (1996) much-debated defence of the continued usefulness of the left/right distinction points to a concern with (in)equality as being the key feature of the politics of the left. Those who consider themselves to be on the left today remain concerned with inequality, and thus also with the apparent increase in inequality during the era of ascendant neo-liberalism. Other than this, however, there is little else to unite the left. Other features typical of traditional left politics, such as a commitment to social and historical progress, faith in the possibility of directed social change and a belief in the importance of state regulation of the economy, have come under widespread attack and it is no longer evident that being politically left of centre means accepting these commitments and beliefs. Advocates of some kind of 'third way' politics (see Giddens, 1998; 2000) maintain at least a loose commitment to some 'left' ideals such as progress and equality, but do not advocate as much regulation of economic structures as is typically favoured on the left. Other leftists seem disillusioned with the state as a whole and favour some kind of anarchism or localism (see Derber, 1995, p.11). Post-modern disenchantment with modernity has led to the questioning of the ideal of progress such that some who today consider themselves to be leftists doubt the possibility of directed, intentional, progressive social change. Thus, other than a commitment to greater equality, it is not clear what being on the left today really entails.

This uncertainty forms a backdrop to the post-development debate which is to some extent a debate between those who adopt a more traditional leftist position, committed to equality and also to progress and the developmental state, and, on the other hand, those on a more amorphous new left, whose commitment to equality does not entail a commitment to progress and the developmental state, but rather leads them to favour strategies of

localisation and of building on the work of so-called ‘new social movements’ and grassroots organisations.

Another feature of the contemporary political and economic context which is relevant to this study is the increased number and influence of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Statistics suggest that the number of NGOs has been increasing steadily since the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> With a diminishing of the role and influence of the state, NGOs have increasingly stepped in to provide services that were previously provided by the state, and many donors today choose to channel development aid to NGOs rather than to states (see Edwards and Hulme, 1996, pp.2-3). This increase in NGO influence is part of what some call a broader ‘associational revolution’ (Salamon, 1993) (cited in Edwards and Hulme, 1996, p.2) with there also being an increase in the number of grassroots and community-based organisations and new social movements.

Divisions on the left are reflected in the differing responses to the increased prominence of NGOs. Many NGOs and grassroots organisations have been involved in activism against neo-liberalism, leading some on the left to be optimistic that alternatives to the current neo-liberal economic order may emerge from the activities and ideas of such organisations. Prominent activist-intellectuals like Klein (2000; 2002) and Hardt and Negri (2001; 2005) exemplify this optimism. However, there is also much suspicion of NGOs on the part of some on the left. NGOs are criticised for being reformist in so far as they encourage people to demand reforms from ‘the system’ rather than advocating militant confrontation of ‘the system’ as a whole (Harman, 2004). Concern has also been expressed about the

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<sup>3</sup> See for example figures quoted by Edwards and Hulme (1996, p.1; 1997, p.4) and McGann and Johnstone (2005).

accountability and representativeness of NGOs, which are neither elected by, nor ultimately responsible to, their constituencies (see McGann and Johnstone, 2005; Edwards and Hulme, 1996, pp.8-14). The growth in the size and influence of Enda Graf Sahel has occurred within this context, as has the choice of post-development theorists who celebrate the work of grassroots and community-based organisations instead of looking to the state to resolve the problems of poverty and injustice.

### **1.3 Justification for the Study**

Given the context outlined above – the persistence of poverty and injustice, the uncertainty about how to respond to these problems and the ambivalence about the increasing influence of NGOs – a study which examines debates about how to respond to poverty and injustice, and relates these debates to the activities of a long-standing and fairly influential NGO, appears timely.

Debates about development are, at their core, about how to respond to poverty and injustice. The post-development debate is no exception. This debate has, as I suggest above, been conducted in the context of uncertainty about how to respond in a progressive way to the problems that have typically been the preoccupation of those on the left. The debate thus has implications not only for development theory and practice, but more broadly for attempts to define alternatives to the current neo-liberal economic order. Also, while the post-development debate was at its most vibrant during the 1990s, it has now

abated somewhat,<sup>4</sup> allowing for a careful analysis of its main elements and some of its implications. This study provides such an analysis.

Enda Graf Sahel is particularly attractive as a case study for someone interested in the potentials and problems of post-development theory. Not only has Emmanuel Ndione, the NGO's coordinator, been a participant in post-development debates, but the NGO itself has attracted the interest of some advocates of post-development theory.<sup>5</sup> Together, this makes its activities relevant for a study of possible ways to respond to poverty and injustice in the light of the post-development debate. Many of the concerns expressed by Enda Graf Sahel in some of its literature echo the concerns of post-development theorists; moreover, its continuing attempts to change its approach to intervention practice have been partly motivated by a desire to respond to these concerns. While, as I will explain later, I do not think it accurate to describe Enda Graf Sahel as an NGO which explicitly adopts a post-development approach, I do think that its approach reflects many of the possibilities, problems and ambiguities of the post-development position. It is thus an appropriate subject of study given my research aims. Also, while I would describe Enda Graf Sahel as an NGO rather than as a community-based organisation or a new social movement, because it works in tandem with community-based organisations and shares some features

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<sup>4</sup> Most of the texts I use in analysing this debate were published in the 1990s. While post-development theory has also been a topic of discussion during the last five or so years (see for example Brigg, 2002; Nanda, 2002; Rapley, 2004; Simon, 2006; Ziai, 2004; Ziai, 2007), I think it correct to say that the debate has now died down somewhat. As I will indicate in Chapter 2, some of the key post-development theorists are now working on related issues rather than continuing to focus particularly on rejecting development.

<sup>5</sup> Ndione participated in a post-development conference entitled *Défaire le développement, refaire le monde* ('Undo development, remake the world'), held in Paris in 2002 and an extract from an Enda Graf Sahel publication appears in Rahnema with Bawtree's (1997) *Post-Development Reader* (see Ndione et al., 1997). Some Francophone post-development writers, such as Latouche (1993; 2004a; 2004b) and Rist (1997), have had some contact with the NGO and have mentioned it in their writing.

with some new social movements (for example its decentralised structure), a study of Enda Graf Sahel can also add to understanding of changes in other types of associations.

The use of Enda Graf Sahel is valuable in another way; it allows me to make an Afrocentric contribution to a debate which has not been particularly preoccupied with Africa. While a fairly large proportion of theorising on development focuses on the African continent, the post-development debate has tended to draw more on the development experiences of Latin America and Asia. The key post-development writers come from Europe (Latouche, Rist, Sachs and Verhelst), Latin America (Escobar and Esteva), Asia (Banuri, Nandy, Prakash, Shiva and Yapa) and the Middle East (Rahnema).<sup>6</sup> Even though some authors, notably Latouche, have made reference to African examples in their discussions, it seems fair to say that African experiences have been under-represented in post-development theory and in the broader post-development debate. A discussion of post-development theory which draws explicitly on African examples is thus helpful in bringing a different context and set of experiences to the debate.

#### **1.4 Limitations of the Study**

I should acknowledge at the outset several limitations of this study. To begin with, while the study overviews and engages with the general debate between post-development theorists and their critics, it does not deal comprehensively with all of the issues raised by this debate. For example, although the post-development debate includes discussion of,

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<sup>6</sup> As with most academics, several of these authors have lived in different parts of the world. I refer here to their origins rather than their current place of residence. A comprehensive list of all the key post-development writers and their key publications is provided in Chapter 2.

*inter alia*, the (un)desirability of the developed way of life, the value of cultural diversity, the political possibilities and problems of post-modernism and the (in)adequacy of attempts to make development sustainable, none of these issues feature prominently in the discussion which follows. Rather, I focus on addressing the question of how the relatively privileged may be involved in struggles against poverty and injustice in the light of the post-development debate. This question is, I believe, an important and broadly relevant one. It enables me to move past simply defending or rejecting post-development theory, and allows me to take on board some of the insights of *both* post-development theorists and their critics in thinking of possible ways in which poverty and injustice can be confronted today. However, focusing on this important issue does, unfortunately, mean that other possible questions arising from the post-development debate cannot be adequately addressed.

A second limitation relates to the lack of an explicit statement of what role I believe the state should play in responding to poverty and injustice. The study is, as indicated above, conducted in the context of the increased acceptance of neo-liberal economic tenets and the related diminishing of the role of the state in development. This diminished role of the state does not receive significant attention here. My study asks what we, the relatively privileged, ought to do in response to poverty and injustice, but leaves a related question – what should *states* do in response to poverty and injustice – unanswered. While my arguments may imply some possible responses to this question, which I believe to be an important one, it is not one I comprehensively address here. As I indicate at the end of the discussion, much research is needed before this question could be properly addressed and

so I do not think it appropriate to address it on the grounds of the research undertaken here.<sup>7</sup>

A final limitation is that the study provides only some provisional and tentative answers to a very difficult and multi-faceted question. While I discuss in detail only one of the issues raised in the post-development debate, this issue is still large and complex enough to make it difficult to answer comprehensively. While there are many other responses that could be provided to my research question, I hope that the suggestions I make, partial and hesitant though they may be, go some way in answering one of the several difficult questions related to the post-development debate.

What these limitations mean is that this study will be most useful as a complement to other studies which address some of the questions I have not been able to answer here. Fortunately, such research is already underway.<sup>8</sup>

## **1.5 Research Approach and Methods**

The research question under exploration here is addressed through a critical reading of the arguments presented in the post-development literature and the critical responses they have elicited. However, because I seek to answer my research question with reference to the experiences and insights of Enda Graf Sahel (EGS), I also spent some time with this NGO

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<sup>7</sup> For examples of research on this topic, see Mkandawire (2001) and Olukoshi (2002). I return briefly to this issue in Chapter 2 in a discussion of neo-liberalism and again in Chapter 8 in a discussion of further avenues of research relating to my own research questions.

<sup>8</sup> In the final chapter, I identify further avenues for research related to my discussion and refer to some of the research which I believe is being done on questions related to, but not directly addressed by, my own study.

in a bid to understand how its responses to poverty and injustice have evolved. Broadly, this period of fieldwork consisted of four months of participant observation as part of an internship at EGS. I took part in a range of EGS activities, conducted formal interviews and held informal discussions with people employed by EGS or who are in some way affiliated with EGS. The aim was to better understand the 'EGS approach', itself the subject of discussion in some sections of the post-development literature and in documentation prepared by, or in collaboration with, EGS personnel.

Nonetheless, I was beset by doubts about the most appropriate way to conduct research while in the field and, on my return, found it difficult to decide exactly how to report on my experiences. Indeed, some of my early attempts to describe these experiences sounded inadequate and, on occasion, even dishonest. And this despite the fact that, prior to this, concern with how to conduct and report on fieldwork had led me to literature addressing research methodology and fieldwork, much of it written by feminist geographers (see in particular Desmond, 2004; England, 1994; Katz, 1994; Madge, 1993; 1997; McDowell, 1992; 1997; and Rose, 1997). It is thus worth providing an overview of this literature, before discussing my research approach and methodology in relation to some of the points I will highlight in this overview.

Over the last few decades there has been a general shift away from positivist approaches to social science with positivist methodologies coming under widespread criticism. According to positivist research methodologies, the researcher is – or ought to be – 'a disembodied, rational, sexually indifferent subject – a mind unlocated in space, time or constitutive relationships with others' (Grosz, 1986) (cited in McDowell, 1992, p.405).

From this detached and neutral position, the researcher seeks out data (which may entail going out into ‘the field’) and then collates and processes this data in an organised and systematic way (Cook, 2005). The research process, we are led to believe, is a ‘seamless act of formulating aims, collecting and analysing data and presenting findings’ (Leyshon, 2002, p.179). This depiction of the research process has come to be questioned by many who reject the ideals of detachment and neutrality on the part of the researcher and the belief that there are clear boundaries between field and not field and between researcher and subject (see Desmond, 2004; England, 1994; Gold, 2002; Katz, 1994; Madge, 1993; 1997; Nast, 1994). Such thinkers insist that researchers cannot and ought not to be detached from their subject of study and that their own position and its influence on the research process ought to be made visible rather than concealed. Who we are inevitably affects the research process and it is better to reveal and reflect upon such effects rather than to hanker after some kind of neutral god-like position. As England (1994, p.84) puts it, researchers do not ‘parachute into the field with empty heads and a few pencils or a tape-recorder in our pockets ready to record “facts”’, but rather researchers bring with them a history, and fieldwork research entails, not the unproblematic unearthing of facts and recording of data, but rather ‘a process of personal interactions, of complex relationships and of partial knowledges and flawed understandings’ (McDowell, 1997, p.390).

We should then recognise and make visible our ‘positionality’ – we should reveal what we bring to the research and the possible implications that our position may have. Rather than trying to do what Haraway (1991, p.191) calls the ‘god-trick’ whereby we seek to present a neutral view from nowhere, we should assume a ‘situated perspective’ which

acknowledges that our research is being conducted by a particular person located in a particular place at a particular time (Haraway, 1991, p.188-196). In this way we will be forced to recognise that our knowledge is not 'objective, pure and innocent' but rather 'contingent, partial and historically located' (Desmond, 2004, p.268).

Not only should we acknowledge our positionality, argue such writers, but we should also be reflexive, critically examining our position and the possible effects of our position on our research. According to England (1994, p.82, emphasis in original), reflexivity is 'self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as researcher' and is important as it allows the researcher to be more open and flexible when doing research. However, while reflexivity is important, Rose (1997) warns that we ought to guard against believing that by being reflexive we can achieve the kind of objectivity hankered after by positivist social scientists. Rose is concerned that some of the arguments in favour of reflexivity suggest that if researchers reflect on their position and make it transparent to their audiences, their knowledge will then be accurate and complete. She points out that researchers cannot be fully aware of their position and the effects of the knowledge they produce (Rose, 1997; see also Gold, 2002, p.224). So, while we should be reflexive, we should also acknowledge that no matter how much we reflect upon and make visible our position and its possible effects on the knowledge we produce, such knowledge will always be partial and tentative and never completely under our control.

Acknowledging and reflecting upon our own position and how it affects the research process is not, Chacko (2004, p.55) and England (1994, p.82) insist, self-indulgent navel-gazing. Rather, it is necessary in order to bring about a better understanding of the research

on the part of both the researcher and those reading the research findings. Cook (2005) argues that making our position visible in our research may help produce:

... more modest, embodied, partial, locatable and convincing arguments and, in the process, make it possible for researchers (and their audiences) to see and make all kinds of, often unexpected, politically progressive connections.

Thus, the inclusion of some acknowledgement and reflection on positionality in our writing is aimed at making our research better, not just at indulgently ‘telling our story’ as a sort of prologue to the discussion of our findings.

Another issue raised in the literature on positionality and reflexivity in research is the question of the ethics of doing fieldwork research. Madge (1993, 1997), for example, writes about the ethical problems confronting Western researchers doing research in the Third World given the existing power dynamics between the First and Third Worlds. England (1994, p.82) writes about how research subjects have sometimes been treated as ‘mines of information’ rather than people, and Stanley and Wise (1993, p.168) call some kinds of research ‘obscene’ in so far as those being researched are treated as ‘mere objects, there for the researcher to do research “on”’ rather than as human beings like ourselves. Thus, one aspect of reflexivity has to be critical reflection on the power relations which affect and influence our research and on the implications that our research has on those about whom we do research.

Writers arguing in favour of reflexivity and positionality admit that integrating these insights into our research is ‘dangerous’ (Rose, 1997, p.317) and ‘frightening’ (Stanley and Wise, 1993, p.177). By making our position obvious and by acknowledging the ‘messiness’ of the research process, we open ourselves up to attack and to the accusation

that we have failed as researchers. As Stanley and Wise (1993, pp.152-153) point out, a common reaction to the realisation that research is not as 'hygienic' as we may have been led to believe, is to doubt our ability as researchers and to disguise this inability by writing up our research in a way that edits ourselves and the 'messiness' of the research process out.

So, in summary, these recent writings on positionality and reflexivity suggest that while we cannot fully know the effects of our own position on the knowledge we produce, rather than trying to create distance between ourselves and our 'research subjects' and trying to present ourselves as neutral, detached observers, we ought, as far as we can, to acknowledge and make visible what we bring to the research process and what power relations and ethical issues affect it. Also, we ought to present the research process as the complex, difficult business we know it to be, regardless of the risks that doing so entails.

In the light of the arguments summarised above, what can be said about my own research approach and methodology? To begin with it seems necessary to comment on the motivations that led me to conduct this research in the first place. Why, out of all possible topics, did I choose to write about this one? In the initial stages of my PhD research, I was sometimes surprised to discover that not everyone found the debate between post-development theorists and their critics intriguing. This caused me to reflect on why I was so drawn to the topic. While I am not completely sure why it is that this debate so captured my imagination, I suspect that a concern at the heart of the debate – the question of how the privileged should respond to the suffering of the poor and oppressed – touched a nerve in me as a young, privileged, white South African in the post-apartheid era. Some of my

youthful naivety about the possibility of all South Africans, black and white, rich and poor, working together to achieve a ‘better life for all’ in the ‘rainbow nation’,<sup>9</sup> had worn off, and I was left uncertain about what the ethical implications of being white and privileged in South Africa were and how to respond to them. Also, while my Christian upbringing had instilled in me a sense that I had an obligation to engage with questions of poverty and injustice, I had grown cynical with the standard charitable responses often provided in Christian – and development – circles in response to the suffering of the poor.

The debate between the post-development theorists and their critics centres on similar concerns to mine, although it does not relate directly to South Africa and to my particular context. I suspect that I was intrigued by this debate because of the way in which it tapped into these concerns while *not* dealing with them directly. The post-development debate was sufficiently similar to my concerns to make it compelling, but also sufficiently detached to make it ‘safer’ than questions relating directly to my own context.

Thus, I found myself interested in the debate between the so-called post-development theorists and their critics. My concern that the research be in some way relevant to Africa – ‘my’ continent – led me to the Senegalese-based NGO Enda Graf Sahel, which seemed to be an example of an organisation trying to implement some of the ideas of post-development theorists in an African setting. Initially I aimed to understand the approach of this NGO through trying to get hold of their publications and other documents; but it became clear that spending time with the NGO would provide me with a much better understanding of its experiences and current functioning. Because I speak French, and had

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<sup>9</sup> ‘A better life for all’ is a prominent African National Congress election slogan and the term ‘rainbow nation’ is often used to positively describe South Africa’s racial diversity.

sufficient funding to do fieldwork, there seemed every good reason to include fieldwork as part of my studies, and so I set out to spend some time 'in the field' in Senegal, mainly in Dakar, the location of the coordinating office of Enda Graf Sahel.

My position at Enda Graf Sahel (EGS) was officially that of *stagiaire* (intern) as had been negotiated with the EGS coordinator, Emmanuel Ndione, over the telephone prior to my arrival. I was aware that the larger NGO of which EGS forms a part, Enda Tiers Monde, often took on such interns but I was not sure what this internship would entail. I had applied for such a position on the advice of a Senegalese friend who had assured me that no Senegalese organisation would turn down the offer of an unpaid intern and that this was a good way to get access to the NGO. On my arrival in Dakar, I discovered that Dakar is a popular destination for French Masters students who are often required to complete an internship as part of their degree. Many of them find their way to one or another of the Enda Tiers Monde sub-organisations and, indeed, several passed through EGS during my time there. These interns usually do research related to very particular, practically-orientated topics and have their internships arranged by their professors who typically have some already-established link to the person who is appointed as the intern's supervisor. My case was different as I had no established link with the organisation at all and had contacted them simply by telephoning the number given for the organisation on the internet.

The way in which the organisation responded to the appearance of this completely unknown, unconnected and Anglophone person in Dakar taught me a lot about the

functioning of Enda Graf Sahel. While I will discuss these insights later on,<sup>10</sup> let me briefly outline here how my internship at EGS progressed. On my arrival Ndione had almost forgotten all about me despite my having confirmed the details of my internship by telephone a few weeks before. I was directed to the person charged with over-seeing interns but she informed me that she would be away for the month to follow and so I would have to figure out what I wanted to do there without her help. On her return, she resigned from the organisation and, while she was still present for most of my time there, she was often preoccupied with disputes relating to her departure and thus not able to provide much guidance. Ndione allocated me some shared office space and introduced me to several people involved in EGS, some of whom were based in the neighbourhood rather than in the main building of the coordinating office. It became clear that nothing in particular was expected of me and that I would have to work out for myself how to fit into EGS.

This was, I admit, bewildering and difficult, especially at first. I had hoped to be assigned some or other task and then to have been able to use my position within the organisation to establish links with various people and to set up lengthy interviews with important EGS personalities. I found that EGS functioned very loosely and that involvement in EGS activities was only possible through the establishment of links to various networks within EGS. As I got to know people, they invited me along to EGS activities, many of which took place away from the coordinating office. As such I got drawn into some sub-networks within EGS but remained excluded from others. The only way to get to know anything about the organisation was to gradually be drawn into these networks and my own characteristics affected which networks I was drawn into. For example, my ability to speak

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<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 6.

English led to me being asked to give English lessons at an EGS-affiliated artisan apprentice-training centre, CEPAS,<sup>11</sup> and thereby becoming involved in the networks connected to CEPAS. My gender saw me being invited to meetings of the women's network, VAF,<sup>12</sup> from which I would probably have been excluded had I been male. My halting French meant that I was sometimes excluded from activities organised by people who were perhaps too impatient to take the time to get to know this seemingly inarticulate Anglophone. The shared office space I had been allocated meant I got to spend more time with some people than with others. Thus, as pointed out by many of the writers mentioned earlier, who I am affected my research and resulted, inevitably, in my having a particular and partial picture of EGS. Had I been male and Francophone, for example, I may have been drawn into other networks which may have given me a somewhat different picture of the organisation. If the writers summarised above are correct, the partiality of my view ought not to be lamented or hidden, however, but accepted as inevitable. To search for a complete and neutral picture of the entire EGS network would be pointless and so I acknowledge here that what I provide in this discussion is one possible picture emerging from time spent with EGS.

During my four months in Senegal I reflected at length on the purpose and meaning of my research. Many of the ethical issues discussed in some of the texts mentioned above were not particularly relevant to me because, unlike many researchers conducting fieldwork in Africa, I was not researching a vulnerable and marginalised group over which I had some

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<sup>11</sup> CEPAS stands for the *Centre d'Échange et de Perfectionnement des Artisans du Sénégal* (Centre for the Exchange and Improvement of Senegalese Artisans). This title is a little misleading as the name is usually used to refer to a small carpentry and metalwork workshop and apprentice-training centre in Grand Yoff, Dakar, and sometimes to the larger, but still fairly small, Dakar-based network of artisan workshops and training centres of which the Grand Yoff centre forms part.

<sup>12</sup> VAF stands for the *Valorisation des Activités des Femmes* (Valorisation of Women's Activities) which is a network of women's groups affiliated to Enda Graf Sahel.

power. Rather, the ‘subjects’ of my research (the EGS staff members) are relatively privileged and powerful and I, as an intern in the organisation in which they worked, was relatively powerless. Nevertheless, significant ethical issues did arise. Firstly, I was led to question the relevance of my research question. Many of those with whom I discussed my research seemed puzzled by my choice of topic and did not seem convinced of the ‘usefulness’ of my research. While no one said anything directly, I began to wonder if research focusing on the broad, fairly theoretical question of how to respond to poverty and injustice was really valuable at all. Ought I not, rather, to have done research on something more specific and practically relevant to the people of Dakar? Although these concerns did not lead me to abandon my research question, they did push me to think more carefully about why I believe such ‘theoretical’ research has some value. Some of these reflections helped shape Chapter 7 of this thesis.

A related ethical question was the issue of how useful my general presence in Senegal was. I often felt that while I was learning much from being in Dakar and being based with EGS, I had little to offer in return. Other than the English lessons I provided – the usefulness of which I am not at all convinced – I had little to offer the organisation and its affiliates. At the end of my time in Senegal I provided EGS with two documents outlining my research findings thus far but, while they expressed much gratitude for my having done this, I think it likely that the documents remain unread or at least not widely read. The organisation’s members are preoccupied with day-to-day activities and, although continual self-reflection is a noteworthy feature of the organisation, I do not think that they felt that my own contributions were likely to be especially helpful in such endeavours. Furthermore, while I did not, as far as I can tell, abuse my position as intern, I heard about several instances of

such abuse, and wondered to what extent the general practice of doing fieldwork research in Senegal was beneficial to the Senegalese. Some research interns at EGS (and at Enda TM, of which EGS forms part) show little respect for the property and time of staff members. Others tap into problematic tourist-local relations in Senegal, becoming involved in sexual relationships which border on prostitution or making promises which they have no intention of keeping. Even though I sought to avoid such practices, I was concerned that my presence in Dakar was part of a kind of research-tourism which may ultimately harm people in Dakar. My sense that my fieldwork, while undoubtedly beneficial for me, held little obvious or immediate benefit for those among and about whom I did my research, has made me wonder about how better to arrange future fieldwork research. I do not have clear answers in this regard, but this is something that I will spend much time thinking about before embarking on further fieldwork research. These concerns also had an effect on the research process. Interviews with senior EGS staff members were often very difficult to secure and my own doubts about the validity of my research sometimes made me reluctant to insist on an interview with someone who was clearly busy and not keen to talk to me; and where I did interview such people, I did not try to prolong the interview if the interviewee cut it short. I found myself favouring interviewing at length those eager to speak to me, who were often more junior staff members or people on the periphery of EGS. Such interviewees no doubt gave me a slightly different picture of EGS than the one I would have received had I been more insistent and assertive in my relations with more prominent EGS staff members.

My time spent doing fieldwork thus certainly helped me to better respond to my research question and contributed generally to my academic and personal development. However, it also involved several difficult and complex challenges which affected the way in which my research progressed and which will affect the way in which I conduct future research. The arguments in this thesis have been influenced in all sorts of subtle ways by this period in Senegal and by providing the discussion above I hope that these subtle influences may be more evident to the reader than they would have been had I only provided a brief and ‘hygienic’ account of my research approach and methodology.

Before concluding this section I need to address a few practical issues regarding my fieldwork. The first issue relates to my choice of only a single case study. Using only one case study may open me up to the risk of reaching conclusions which flow from the particular experiences of this case study, but cannot be generalised; nevertheless, I decided not to include further case studies. EGS was attractive to me because it was a long-standing African NGO whose staff had actively engaged in the post-development debate and I was not, and am still not, aware of any other African NGO with this kind of engagement. Furthermore, I wanted to be able to include in this discussion both a lengthy and comprehensive study of post-development theory and a broad and detailed discussion of EGS. This would have been difficult had I had multiple case studies. Thus, while other case studies may have added some different and perhaps equally interesting findings, I chose to focus only on Enda Graf Sahel to enable me to fully expand upon their experiences and insights and to link these to a comprehensive discussion of the post-development debate.

A second issue relates to the use of language in my thesis. Most EGS activities take place either in French, which I speak, or Wolof, which I do not speak. In preparation for

conducting fieldwork I spent some time improving my French and learning some basic Wolof phrases under the guidance of a Senegalese student based in Birmingham.<sup>13</sup> On arrival in Senegal, I experienced the usual difficulties of a foreign-language speaker, but was able to communicate with relative ease with most EGS staff members and affiliates. Where I attended activities conducted mainly in Wolof, I was dependent on French speaking co-attendees to interpret the gist of what was said. I usually had no difficulty finding someone willing to assist me in this way. Almost all of the formal interviews took place in French, although on two occasions the interviewees spoke English and on one occasion I interviewed two women together, one of whom did not speak French fluently but whose contributions were interpreted where necessary by the other. Where possible, interviews were recorded and transcribed, but many were conducted in very noisy or impromptu settings, making such recording difficult. Where I quote from interviews or from EGS publications, such quotations are my own translations from the French.

I should also briefly address the question of the intended audience for this research. This study is written for an audience of people somewhat similar to me – similar, at least, in so far as they live lives of relative privilege and power and recognise that this privilege and power brings with it ethical problems and obligations. Whatever audience this text, or bits and pieces of it,<sup>14</sup> may reach, it is likely to be an audience of relatively privileged people: of those who are literate, have a fairly sophisticated grasp of English and have access to books, journals and academic conferences. Furthermore, the topic of the research makes it unlikely to be read by those who are not concerned with questions of justice or who do not consider their position of privilege to be in any way problematic. Thus, I write for a small, but perhaps disproportionately influential audience – an audience of privileged, educated

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<sup>13</sup> I would like to thank Abdoulaye Niane for his help in this respect.

<sup>14</sup> As this is a PhD thesis, the most important audience is to be my examiners, but sections of the thesis have already been presented to other audiences and I hope that publications and presentations for yet other audiences will arise from it.

people troubled, at least to some degree, by their own privileged position and by the contrast between their comfort and the suffering of many others. The role that such people can play in the struggles of the poor and oppressed is not self-evident, making it necessary to reflect carefully on what possibilities and problems emerge when we who are relatively privileged seek to participate in such struggles. If what follows makes any helpful contribution in this respect, then this research project will have been worthwhile.

## **1.6    Notes on Terminology**

One of the key features of post-development theory is its questioning of the term ‘development’ and of a whole range of terminology used in development discourse.<sup>15</sup> Given this feature of post-development theory it is especially important for me to pay close attention to terminology. My research question has special relevance for the parts of the world that have typically been labelled ‘developing’, ‘underdeveloped’, the ‘South’ or the ‘Third World’. However, there are some difficulties in deciding how to refer to these parts of the world, given that there has recently been much criticism of this kind of labelling. As will be discussed later on in the thesis, post-development theorists question the legitimacy of labelling some parts of the world ‘developed’ and others ‘underdeveloped’. Other writers question the legitimacy and usefulness of the term ‘Third World’.<sup>16</sup> While the term the ‘South’ has received less critical attention, many of the critics of the terms ‘underdeveloped’, ‘developing’ and the ‘Third World’ do not just think that the particular words used to refer to these parts of the world are inappropriate and thus that the term the

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<sup>15</sup> See for example Sachs’ (1992) edited *The Development Dictionary* which provides a critique of a number of key terms in development discourse such as ‘equality’ and ‘progress’.

<sup>16</sup> For critical discussions of the concept of the ‘Third World’ see Bayart (1991), Berger (1994; 2004), Cammack et al. (1993), Dirlik (2004) and Randall (2004). A recent edition of *Third World Quarterly* (volume 25, no 1, 2004) was dedicated entirely to a discussion of the contemporary (ir)relevance of the term ‘Third World’.

‘South’ could be a better alternative, but rather believe that the very practice of grouping together such regions of the world is illegitimate. As Berger (1994, pp.258, 268) puts it:

... the idea of a ‘Third World’ now serves primarily to generate both a dubious homogeneity within its shifting boundaries and an analytically irrelevant distinction between the ‘Third World’ (developing) on the one hand and the ‘First World’ (developed) on the other hand. ... The solution to the problems generated by the concept of the ‘Third World’ is not to find a new label, but to dispense with the term.

As will become clear later on in this discussion, I agree – more or less – with those who reject the legitimacy of grouping together diverse regions of the world and applying labels such as ‘developing’ or ‘Third World’ to them. Nevertheless, it would be impossible for me to discuss post-development theory and critical responses to it and to answer my research question without making reference to some such terms, given that such terms are used by participants in the post-development debate and by many others writing on related issues. While I will try to avoid using terms like ‘developed’, ‘developing’ and ‘underdeveloped’ except in reference to how they have been used by others, I will have to at times use clumsy terms like ‘Third World’ and ‘the South’ to refer in very broad terms to certain categories of countries and regions or, as in my later discussion of the in-between role of Third World elites,<sup>17</sup> to refer to certain categories of people. When I do so, I use the terms to refer to the parts of the world that they are typically used to describe – Africa, Latin America and most of Asia. Nevertheless, I do hope ultimately to contribute to the questioning of such terms and especially to the undermining of the ‘us’/‘them’ logic that first brought them into widespread usage.

Another term which appears in several places in the thesis and which is in need of definition is the term ‘new social movements’ (NSMs). What do I mean by this term and how can NSMs be differentiated from NGOs? I use this term simply to refer to groups of people who share some common goals and cooperate in some way, but whose cooperation

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 7.

is less clearly defined than that of NGO workers. Also, whereas NGOs typically employ and pay people, NSMs do not. That said, the distinction is not clear-cut and there are no doubt instances of groups which fall somewhere between the two.

Finally, terms like poverty and injustice also need to be clearly defined. I will not provide such definitions here as Chapter 5 defines and comprehensively discusses these two terms.

## **1.7 Organisation of the Thesis**

I conclude by giving some idea of how this thesis is organised and structured. The thesis is organised into eight chapters, including this introduction. Chapter 2 provides an overview of recent debates in development studies, focusing particularly on the debate between the post-development theorists and their critics. Detailed discussions of both post-development thinking and of the criticisms that have been directed towards it are provided. The chapter concludes with a brief defence of post-development theory, or at least one version of it.

The third chapter provides a detailed exposition of my main research question. I clarify what exactly it is I seek to do in this thesis and relate my project to some of the literature which deals most closely with my concerns. I end the chapter by sketching arguments which are developed later on. It is this chapter that best summarises both the question I would like to address and the answers I would like to provide.

Chapter 4 introduces Enda Graf Sahel, providing an overview of its history and describing the evolution of its current approach to development. While I do not directly address my research question in this chapter, my discussion of EGS's evolution, and the reasons which

motivated certain changes in its approach, begins to hint at the arguments to be provided in the chapters to follow.

Chapter 5 develops one of the themes initially introduced in Chapter 3. I discuss the need to rethink the conceptual framework guiding our attempts to respond to poverty and injustice. Building upon EGS's reflections on poverty as well as on some relevant discussions of justice and oppression, I suggest a conceptual framework which could help guide attempts to respond to poverty and injustice in a way which is sensitive to the concerns raised in the post-development debate.

The following chapter looks at the way in which popular initiatives can be supported by the relatively privileged. It draws extensively on EGS's experiences after its decision to favour 'accompanying popular initiatives' (Ndione et al., 2001, p.26) above initiating projects of its own. I examine this strategy and point to possibilities and problems relating to it.

Chapter 7 looks at how, by making changes in spaces of privilege, we can work in solidarity with the struggles of distant others. Attention is given to possible ways to transform our research and teaching practices, to the in-between role of Third World elites, and to the need for a critical assessment of privileged lives.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis, bringing together the arguments presented in the different chapters of the thesis. It summarises my response to the research question set out above, and makes some general comments about the relevance of my research and about possible further research avenues suggested by my conclusions.

## CHAPTER 2

### AN OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT DEBATES

Given that the research questions under investigation here emerge from debates about development, it is helpful to begin with a comprehensive overview of the field of development studies and of mainstream theories of development. This chapter provides such an overview, beginning with a brief discussion of the origins of development studies and of past development debates. The focus of the chapter, however, is upon more recent debates about development. I examine in some detail the rise of neo-liberalism and its influence on development debates and then dedicate the bulk of the chapter to a discussion of post-development theory and criticisms of it.

#### **2.1 The Origins of Development Studies**

Development studies as a distinct field in the social sciences emerged only around the late 1940s and 1950s (see Alvares, 1992, pp.90-95; Corbridge, 1995, p.1; Escobar, 1995, pp.26-31; Oman and Wignaraja, 1991, pp.1-2). However, the development theories that arose at this time owe an intellectual debt to earlier theories about social and economic change, particularly those of the European Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> Philosophers and social theorists of the Enlightenment era began thinking of history as progressive rather than cyclical, and their reflections on the nature of societal progress touch upon themes later

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<sup>1</sup> Two useful, although quite different, discussions of the antecedents of contemporary development theory are provided by Cowen and Shenton (1995; 1996) and Rist (1997). The term 'European Enlightenment' refers to a period of European thought which rose to the fore in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and which emphasised science and reason at the expense of religion and traditional authority (see Blackburn 1994; Flew 1979).

taken up in development studies.<sup>2</sup> Several prominent 17th – 19th century thinkers, such as Hegel, Marx, Smith, Comte, Durkheim and Weber, can be considered antecedents to later development theorists as they made important contributions to the intellectual tradition that gave rise to development studies.<sup>3</sup> Thus while development studies as a distinct field only emerged during the post-Second World War era, it has roots reaching deep into the Western intellectual tradition.

As with development theory, development practice rose to the fore in the post-colonial era, but has its roots in earlier practices. Cowen and Shenton (1996, pp.3-59) provide an interesting account of the origins of development practice, locating these origins in nineteenth-century Europe where the idea of development was deployed in attempts to address social disorder through trusteeship. Cooper (1997) shows how in Africa early examples of development policy and practice can be found in attempts by the British and French colonialists to reinvigorate colonialism in the 1940s. The post-Second World War ideological context, with all its stress on self-determination, meant that the colonial powers needed to find a progressive basis for their continued rule in Africa (Cooper, 1997, p.70). Policies aimed at developing Africa, for the supposed benefit of both coloniser and colonised, were intended to provide such a basis. Religious organisations also promoted the idea of development with some of what later became development organisations and projects having their beginnings as part of colonialism's proselytising mission. However, the idea of development found resonance with African nationalist elites who, contrary to

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<sup>2</sup> For a lengthier discussion of the origins of the contemporary idea of progress, see Shanin (1997).

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the role of these and other 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century writers in shaping what is today development theory, see Coetzee (1996, pp.41-43), Leys (1996, pp.3-5) and Peet with Hartwick (1999, pp.23-31). See also Ferguson (1997, pp.152-156) for a discussion of the role of early anthropologists in establishing some of the ideas which, in an altered form, resurfaced in later development theory.

the intentions of the colonisers, used it to anti-imperial ends. Once it became clear that decolonisation was inevitable, the idea of development was deployed once again, this time in attempts to manage transitions to independence (see Cooper, 1997, p.80).

As decolonisation escalated, the notion of development shifted from the colonial to the international realm (Cooper and Packard, 1997, pp.6-13). International organisations, particularly those tied to the United Nations (UN), contributed to the increased prominence of this concept, as newly independent ‘developing’ nations came to form a growing proportion of UN members. The leaders of these Third World nations championed the notion of development both at UN meetings as well as at Third World meetings such as the 1955 Bandung conference. As the idea of development became increasingly prominent in discussions of how to improve the lives of people in these newly independent states, development studies became established as a field of study and competing development theories emerged.

## **2.2 An Overview of Past Development Debates**

Several excellent overviews of the development theories and approaches of the past half-century or so are readily available.<sup>4</sup> Rather than restating the insights offered in such works, I will provide only a very brief overview of the theories and approaches which have dominated these debates, choosing instead to focus on providing a more detailed overview of prominent contemporary development debates.

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<sup>4</sup> These include very brief overviews, such as those by Corbridge (1995, pp.1-16) and Cooper and Packard (1997, pp.2-13), as well as entire volumes such as that edited by Desai and Potter (2002), and those by Leys (1996) and Peet with Hartwick (1999).

Modernisation theory dominated early development studies.<sup>5</sup> From the standpoint of the modernisation theorist, the world is divided into two distinct regions: one which is ‘advanced’ or ‘developed’ and one which is ‘backward’ or ‘undeveloped’. This developed/undeveloped distinction is elaborated upon by the use of dichotomies contrasting the features of the developed societies (depicted as modern, rational, productive and complex) and those of the undeveloped societies (depicted as traditional, superstitious, unproductive and simple). Development, from the perspective of a modernisation theorist, entails the undeveloped catching up with the developed. The move from being undeveloped to being developed is sometimes detailed with reference to stages of development, with undeveloped societies being urged to move step by step along the stages already undertaken by their advanced superiors.<sup>6</sup> Development is thus conceived as teleological – the destination or goal of development is assumed to be known: it involves becoming like the developed nations (Nederveen Pieterse, 1991, p.10).

The modernisation theorist’s picture of the world soon found itself contrasted with the one painted in dependency theory, which became prominent in the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>7</sup> Whereas modernisation theory provides little explanation for the ‘backwardness’ of much of the world, presenting this backwardness as some kind of original state, dependency

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<sup>5</sup> For examples of modernisation theory see Almond (1956), Hagen (1962), Hoselitz (1960), Inkeles (1983), Lewis (1955), McClelland (1961), Pye and Verba (1965) and Rostow (1960). For critiques of modernisation theory, see Banuri (1990a), Coetzee (1996) and Peet with Hartwick (1999, pp.65-90).

<sup>6</sup> Rostow’s (1960) stages of economic growth is the most well-known presentation of stages through which the undeveloped region must pass.

<sup>7</sup> For examples of dependency theory and the related World Systems theory see Amin (1974; 1976; 1990), Baran (1957), Cardoso and Faletto (1979), Frank (1969a; 1969b; 1971), Rodney (1982) and Wallerstein (1974; 1979). For critiques of dependency theory see Conway and Heynen (2002, pp.97-101), Güralp (1998) and Hettne (1990, pp.83-98).

theorists argue that the expansion of global capitalism causes some regions to become underdeveloped while other regions prosper. It is thus the same process of capitalist expansion that enables one set of countries to develop, while another set is exploited and becomes impoverished. As the position of underdeveloped regions in the global economy is perceived as the cause of their predicament, development for the dependency theorist involves delinking from the global economy and focusing on autocentric development, typically through the application of socialist economic systems.

Debates between modernisation and dependency theorists dominated development studies for a good while, but by the 1980s these debates had lost momentum. At this time neo-liberal approaches to development, which are discussed later on in the chapter, as well as several so-called alternative approaches to development became more prominent. Among the alternative approaches which emerged during the 1980s and 1990s were the basic needs approach, the United Nations Development Programme's human development approach, sustainable development and various gender-related development approaches.<sup>8</sup> These approaches lack the broad scope and theoretical depth that would allow them to be comfortably called development theories, but they have influenced the way in which development is understood today and, especially, the way it is practised. They highlight particular issues, such as the environment or gender, and have helped to make such issues more prominent within broader development debates. However, none of these approaches can truly be said to have provided a new theory of development which breaks or contrasts clearly with other theories.

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the basic needs approach see Hettne (1990, pp.167-171), for the human development approach see Streeten (1995, pp.17-27) or Sagar and Najam (1999), for sustainable development see Adams (1993) or Lélé (1991) and for a discussion of various gender-related approaches see Visvanathan et al. (1997).

Given that much of this thesis will engage particularly with the African context, a few comments on African contributions to development studies are warranted. In many ways development studies reflects the general Western domination of formal academia, with few prominent contributors to development theory being African, or indeed non-Western.<sup>9</sup> However, the African voice in development theory has not been completely silent. For example, while much of dependency theory focuses on Latin America, the Egyptian Samir Amin (1974; 1976; 1990) and Afro-Caribbean Walter Rodney (1982) made Afrocentric contributions to dependency theory. The works of prominent anti-colonial writers, such as the Frantz Fanon (1963; 1967) and Amilcar Cabral (1966; 1973) also lent themselves to use in development debates focused on Africa. Furthermore, the speeches and writings of several prominent African leaders, like Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, and Léopold Senghor contributed to discussions about development. Recently, several African thinkers have added their voice to debates about neo-liberal approaches to development, with critiques of neo-liberal strategies such as the controversial Structural Adjustment Programmes and the now prominent New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). These contributions are discussed in more detail below.

### **2.3 Neo-liberalism and its Critics**

Much of mainstream development thinking today is rooted in or influenced by what is generally termed 'neo-liberalism'.<sup>10</sup> Neo-liberalism emerged in the mid-1970s and became

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the reasons for and implications of the absence of an Afrocentric development paradigm see Ake (1996).

<sup>10</sup> The neo-liberal position is sometimes also called neo-classical. Key neo-liberal writers include Bela Balassa, Peter Bauer, Jagdish Bhagwati, Anne Krueger, Deepak Lal, Ian Little and Julian

increasingly prominent in the 1980s. The ideas related to neo-liberalism are sometimes also referred to as the Washington consensus, in reference to an apparent consensus among Washington-based international financial institutions regarding how economies ought to be managed. Another term related to this school of thought is the ‘TINA argument’ – the ‘There Is No Alternative’ argument which arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the supposed triumph of capitalism. Advocates of this position argue that while contemporary capitalism and all that comes along with it may not be ideal, there is no alternative and thus we need to find effective ways of working within global capitalist systems, rather than aiming to overthrow them. Thus neo-liberalism is in many ways part of a post-Cold War capitalist triumphalism.

Neo-liberalism’s key contribution to development theory is its questioning of the idea that the state should play an important direct role in development. Drawing on classical economic theory, neo-liberal thinkers argue that market-led development is preferable to state-led development. A number of ‘state failures’ are outlined in an attempt to show that most state intervention in the economy is ultimately detrimental.<sup>11</sup> Unlike dependency theorists, neo-liberals lay the blame for Third World underdevelopment squarely on the Third World itself, and especially on poor economic governance. Furthermore, in contrast to both modernisation and dependency theorists, neo-liberals argue that governments are part of the problem and not part of the solution – in other words, that development is best promoted by less rather than more government involvement in the economy. Governments are depicted as inefficient, corrupt and inept at promoting economic growth (Leys, 1996,

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Simon (Corbridge, 1995, p.7; Leys, 1996, p.17; Todaro, 1994, p.85). A key document advocating the adoption of neo-liberal strategies in Africa is the World Bank’s Berg Report (World Bank, 1981).

<sup>11</sup> For summaries of the arguments made by neo-liberal thinkers with regard to state failure, see Killick (1989, pp.12-13) and Mkandawire and Soludo (1999, p.127).

p.18). The solution to underdevelopment is, accordingly, to privatise the public sector, liberalise trade, reduce government spending and repeal any policies which alter prices such that they are different to what they would have been if set by market forces. Neo-liberals believe that a relatively unregulated market is most likely to result in economic growth, and, in so far as they believe in the utility of the notion of ‘development’,<sup>12</sup> they place economic growth at the heart of development.

While neo-liberalism differs from modernisation theory in its questioning of state-led development, the two schools of thought have much in common, especially with regard to their flaws. Both sets of ideas are criticised for making generalisations based on the experiences of a few Western industrialised societies, for over-emphasising the importance of economic growth, and for promoting the ideological interests of capitalist powers (see Brohman, 1995a). Thus, neo-liberalism is sometimes considered as being a continuation of modernisation theory – but with one key difference: the state is viewed as an obstacle rather than key role-player in development.

Although neo-liberalism continues to occupy a fairly prominent place in development discourse, particularly in the discourses of governments and international financial institutions, it has been subject to much criticism. Firstly, neo-liberal distrust of the state and great faith in the market have been questioned. As Brohman (1995a, p.126) points out ‘while neo-liberals examine markets using ideal theoretical constructs, governments and states are treated as they exist in practice’. Thus it is unsurprising that neo-liberals believe

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<sup>12</sup> Several neo-liberal thinkers are unsympathetic to the idea of development. Consider Deepak Lal’s (2000, p.109) (cited in Nederveen Pieterse, 2001, p.152) comment: ‘The demise of development economics is likely to be conducive to the health of both the economics and the economies of developing countries’.

that market-led development is superior to state-led development. However, markets, especially those in the Third World, do not always function as neo-liberal theory assumes they do. Furthermore, while the neo-liberal critique of the performance of the state may, in many instances, be justified, poor state performance does not provide a theoretical justification for claims that unrestricted markets will perform much better (Leys, 1996, pp.18-19). Generally, neo-liberalism provides an inadequate defence of the argument that a relatively unregulated market is the best engine for development.

A second criticism regards certain problematic assumptions on which neo-liberal theory is premised. Slater (1993, pp.93-101) examines the underlying political philosophy informing neo-liberal thinking, paying special attention to what neo-liberalism assumes about individuals and individual behaviour. Neo-liberalism focuses on the motivations which push individuals to possess and to compete, but gives inadequate attention to other factors influencing the behaviour of individuals, and tends to focus on individual rather than group behaviour. Brohman (1995b) also draws attention to the underlying philosophy informing neo-liberal thinking, discussing the way in which neo-liberalism depicts individuals as rational, self-interested utility maximisers, and how this narrow understanding weakens neo-liberalism's ability to help us understand the 'often messy empirical world' (Brohman, 1995b, p.298). Neo-liberal thinking is criticised for neglecting non-economic factors, seeing people as 'isolated creatures of the marketplace, devoid of history, cultural traditions, political opinions and social relationships beyond simple market exchanges' (Brohman, 1995b, p.297) and thus seeing development as little more than a form of

economic change, ignoring a whole range of social, political and cultural dimensions which are surely also core to development, however development is understood.<sup>13</sup>

A third and very prominent criticism of neo-liberalism is that the policies formulated in accordance with neo-liberalism have failed and seem to have exacerbated rather than alleviated poverty in some parts of the Third World. The many African countries subjected to the neo-liberal Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in the 1980s attest to the failure of the neo-liberal approach. Advocates of neo-liberalism admit some of the failings of such programmes, but continue to have faith in and promote other neo-liberal policies as solutions to economic stagnation and decline. However they find themselves opposed by an increasing number of activists and academics. Much of the neo-liberal critique has come from Africa, which experienced acutely the negative consequences of neo-liberal policies during the heyday of structural adjustment in the 1980s. Many African academics and political role-players have put forward suggestions for alternatives to structural adjustment programmes. Of relevance here are the Lagos Plan of Action (OAU, 1982) and the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-economic Recovery and Transformation (Adedeji, 1990). Others provide stringent critiques of structural adjustment programmes, and by association of neo-liberalism.<sup>14</sup> Today, a similar critique is emerging in response to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which some critics have called a self-imposed structural adjustment programme (SAWC, 2003). Critics condemn NEPAD

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<sup>13</sup> Even if one chooses to see development as nothing more than economic growth, it is surely not possible to understand the process of economic growth without reference to social, cultural and political factors.

<sup>14</sup> For critical assessments of the role of SAPs in Africa see Adepaju (1993), Cheru (1989), Lipumba (1994), Mengisteab and Logan (1995), Mkandawire and Soludo (1999) and Van der Geest (1994).

for working within rather than challenging the neo-liberal orthodoxy, arguing that if SAPs have taught us anything, they have taught us the inappropriateness of a neo-liberal framework for addressing Africa's problems.<sup>15</sup> Afrocentric critiques of neo-liberalism often take the form of defences of state-led development. Writers such as Olukoshi (2002) defend the developmental state, arguing that '[t]he alternative to a "bad" state is a "better" state' and pushing for a new kind of developmentalism which takes into account the errors and weaknesses of earlier developmental states, but recognises the state as a 'legitimate player in the development process'.

Finally, critics of the neo-liberal approach to development argue that the rise of neo-liberalism had more to do with the interests of certain influential world powers, than with its contribution to debates about development (Brohman, 1995a, p.134; Leys, 1996, pp.18-19; Todaro, 1994, p.85). The political ascendancy of several conservative governments in the capitalist world and the increased influence of powerful transnational corporations and international financial institutions provided fertile soil for the flourishing of the neo-liberal approach to development.

Recently there has been talk of a 'post-Washington consensus' which supposedly moves past the Washington consensus and takes into account the various criticisms given of neo-liberal policies and strategies. Advocates of this new consensus remain sceptical of the benefits of extensive state intervention in the economy, but acknowledge market imperfections and attempt to address some of the criticisms of market-led development.

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<sup>15</sup> Examples of critiques of NEPAD's neo-liberal stance are the following: African Social Forum (2002), AIDC (2002), CIDA (2002), Civil Society Indaba (2002), Ngwane (2002), Pheko (2002), Pretorius and Patel (2002), Robidoux (2002) and TWN/CODESRIA (2002).

According to Öniş (2003), the post-Washington consensus is more nuanced than the Washington consensus; it sees the state and the market as playing complementary rather than opposing roles, and gives more attention to social and political issues than does the staunchly econocentric Washington consensus. While the post-Washington consensus is certainly more cautious than earlier neo-liberal approaches, critics (see for example Fine, 1999) argue that this new consensus fails to seriously take into account all the arguments made by opponents of neo-liberalism, and that its more nuanced approach makes opposition more complex, but no less necessary. Regardless of whether the post-Washington consensus is an improvement on its predecessor, what is clear is that the dominant discourses influencing governments and institutions charged with bringing development to the Third World, are characterised by a reluctance to advocate a leading role for the state in development, and that such discourses continue to emphasise the importance of a market economy and trade liberalisation. Meanwhile, opposition to neo-liberalism, in both its Washington and post-Washington consensus forms, continues unabated in the realms of civil society and academia in Africa, and many other parts of the world.

The post-Washington consensus is associated with a new focus on poverty reduction on the part of the World Bank, IMF and other important donors. Since 1999, the controversial SAPs have been replaced by Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). PRSPs differ from SAPs in their emphasis on poverty reduction and their stress on partnership and greater ownership by the countries implementing the reforms. According to the IMF (2005), PRSPs are prepared by governments of developing countries (rather than by the IMF itself) and are compiled in a participatory manner which draws in both 'domestic

stakeholders’ and ‘external development partners’. Generally, poverty reduction and partnership have become buzz-words in the broader donor policy framework guiding development assistance.

While PRSPs and similar policy packages certainly do reflect awareness of some of the key problems with SAPs, and are an apparent attempt to address some of these problems, critics of structural adjustment and neo-liberalism are not convinced that they are a significant improvement on SAPs. In a review essay summarising the findings of three studies of the new focus on poverty reduction,<sup>16</sup> Abrahamsen (2004) argues that this new focus is limited in that the neo-liberal paradigm which guided SAPs remains non-negotiable under PRSPs which are silent on measures to address poverty outside of this paradigm. Furthermore, despite the rhetoric about partnership and ownership, Abrahamsen questions the extent to which recipient countries are really able to participate in negotiating the policy fundamentals underlying PRSPs. Similarly, Whitfield’s (2005, pp.658-659) analysis of poverty reduction in Ghana leads her to conclude that

The PRSP approach is a way for the World Bank and IMF to publicly reposition away from the deeply unpopular approach of structural adjustment, but without substantially changing their lending practices or policy agenda.

Generally, critics are not convinced that PRSPs, and more generally the new focus on poverty reduction and partnership, represent a real break from earlier neo-liberal policy agendas. Rather they are dismissed as being little more than ‘a “Third Way” re-morphing of neo-liberal approaches’ (Craig and Porter, 2003, p.54). The key problems related to the

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<sup>16</sup> The three studies discussed by Abrahamsen are those by Gould and Ojanen (2003), the Panos Institute (2002) and Saasa (2002).

neo-liberal approach and summarised above are thus not addressed, or not fully addressed, by this new focus on partnership and poverty reduction.

## **2.4 The Impasse in Development Studies**

In the 1970s debates around the dependency critique of modernisation theory dominated development studies, but as this debate lost steam, development studies appeared to reach crisis point. By the mid-1980s there was talk of an ‘impasse’ in development studies (see Booth, 1985; 1994; Power, 2003, p.83; Schuurman, 1993; 2002; Sharp and Briggs, 2006, p.7; Simon, 1997, p.183; Simon, 2003, pp.5-7). There was a feeling that development studies had lost its way and may not have a future.

The 1980s, which are often referred to as the ‘lost decade’ of development, dampened optimism about the prospects of development in the Third World. During this decade, economic growth dwindled, debt escalated, unemployment and poverty in the Third World increased alarmingly, environmental degradation became more and more evident and the gap between the world’s rich and poor countries widened to terrifying proportions.<sup>17</sup> In addition, new problems such as HIV/AIDS emerged. As a result, optimism about development waned and indeed the whole idea of development was brought into question.

The crisis in development practice was not the only factor contributing to a crisis in development studies. By the mid-1980s both modernisation and dependency theory had been confronted with so much criticism that both seemed discredited. Neither theory

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<sup>17</sup> For discussions of this lost decade, see Escobar (1995, pp.89-94), Schuurman (1993, pp.9-10) and Slater (1993, p.93).

provided a suitable 'way forward' but the emerging neo-liberal approach and the various alternative development approaches also did not seem to provide a way out of the crisis. Neo-liberalism focuses almost exclusively on the economy, making it an unlikely successor to the broader modernisation and dependency theories, which pay attention to the socio-cultural and political aspects of development, and the alternative development approaches lack the theoretical depth necessary to provide an adequate alternative for earlier theories.

The increasing significance of the post-modern critique of modernity played a role in bringing about the impasse. From a post-modern perspective, dependency theory did not represent a complete break with modernisation theory as both are rooted in the Enlightenment tradition – a tradition post-modern theory calls into question. Because modernisation and dependency theories, and to some extent neo-liberalism as well, share an evolutionary perspective of development which includes a firm belief in progress, they were affected negatively by post-modern critiques. These critiques call into question notions such as the universality and realisability of modernity and as such present a challenge to the whole of development studies as the entire field of study implicitly accepts these notions (Schuurman, 1993, p.187).

Thus, development studies had reached an impasse by the late 1980s – an impasse that, arguably, it has yet to overcome. Development studies has been and is still being confronted with challenges serious enough to call into question its continued place in the social sciences and its continued relevance to the Third World. This impasse has not, however, led to an end to debate about and research regarding development, nor to the

impossibility of defending the very idea of development. As Schuurman (2000, p.19) notes: ‘... development studies has crossed the millennium threshold though, admittedly, not with a gracious jump.’ Development studies as a discipline shows little sign of disappearing,<sup>18</sup> but the issues that led to the impasse are far from resolved.

## **2.5 Post-Development Theory**

An important debate that began during and continued throughout the so-called impasse, is that between post-development theorists and their critics. Given the importance of this debate to the research questions under investigation here, the rest of the chapter will deal with this debate beginning with an overview of important themes in post-development theory.

Key texts in post-development theory include those by Claude Alvares (1992), Frédérique Apffel Marglin and Stephen Marglin (1990; 1996), Tariq Banuri (1990a; 1990b), Arturo Escobar (1984; 1988; 1991; 1992; 1995; 2000), Gustavo Esteva (1992; 1996), Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash (1997; 1998), James Ferguson (1990), Eduardo Galeano (1997), Ivan Illich (1979; 1997), Serge Latouche (1986; 1993; 1998; 2004a; 2004b), Douglas Lummis (1992), Ashis Nandy (1983; 1986; 1988), Majid Rahnema with Victoria Bawtree (1997), Gilbert Rist (1997) Wolfgang Sachs (1992; 1999; 2000; 2002), Vandana Shiva (1989; 1991; Mies and Shiva; 1993), Nanda Shrestha (1995), Thierry Verhelst (1990) and Yapa (1996; 2002a; 2002b). While some of these authors, notably Escobar, Latouche, Rahnema and Esteva and Prakash, are best known for their writings on

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<sup>18</sup> See Simon’s comments relating to the continued popularity of development studies (2003, p.9 and related endnote, p.36).

development, others, especially Nandy, Illich, Shiva and Ferguson, are perhaps better known for their work on other issues,<sup>19</sup> but at least some of their writings fall under the very general category of ‘post-development theory’. Also included in this category are some, but not all, of the writings of Enda Graf Sahel staff members (see especially Ndione et al., 1994; 2001; Ndione, 2002). Some EGS texts closely echo themes in post-development theory so, although I do not believe that EGS literature as a whole should be described as post-development theory,<sup>20</sup> I do think that some of the writings of Ndione and his co-authors at EGS belong in the library of post-development literature.

A brief comment on the label ‘post-development’ is required. I use this label to refer to the above-mentioned authors because it is the label that several of these authors use in reference to their own writing and because it is the most common term used by commentators to describe their arguments. However, the term is not without its flaws. The ‘post’ in the label immediately brings to mind post-modernism suggesting that post-development theory adopts a post-modern approach to development. This is misleading because while some of the above authors have been influenced by post-modern writing and concerns, overall, post-development theory cannot be said to unambiguously reflect a – and certainly not the – post-modern approach to development.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, given that there is little clarity about what exactly post-modernism is, it is not at all clear what a post-modern approach to development would entail. While I acknowledge these ambiguities

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<sup>19</sup> Nandy is best known for his work on the psychology of colonialism, Illich for a wide range of work including reflections on education and medicine, Shiva for her writings on women and the environment, and Ferguson for his exploration of modernity in Zambia.

<sup>20</sup> The extent to which EGS’s ideas and practice can be considered to reflect a post-development position will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

<sup>21</sup> This is not to say that post-development theory has not been considered by some post-development thinkers and some commentators as such. Power (2003) seems to equate a post-modern approach to development with post-development theory, and Esteva and Prakash (1998) seem to consider their approach to be a post-modern take on development.

regarding the use of the term ‘post-development’, I use it here for want of a better expression and because it is commonly used.

In order to provide a comprehensive but fairly concise overview of the arguments made by post-development theorists, I will discuss post-development theory with reference to several themes which are prominent in post-development literature. Each section below discusses one such theme.

### 2.5.1 The Failure of Past Development Initiatives

Post-development theorists believe that development has failed in that its promises remain unfulfilled. Here they are in agreement with most critical development theorists who concur that, since the 1980s, the so-called lost decade of development, there has been growing disappointment with the whole project of bringing development to the Third World. Various development initiatives, which were supposed to bring prosperity and an improved quality of life for Third World peoples, have failed to achieve this goal. As Sachs (1992, p.1) puts it

The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crimes have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, problems such as poverty and inequality persist despite decades of attempts at bringing about development. Post-development theorists consider this inability of past development initiatives to significantly reduce poverty and inequality as testimony to the failure of development.

These theorists also believe that in addition to its failure to bring about the benefits it promises, development brings problems of its own. Rist (1997, p.20) argues that over and above failing to alleviate poverty in the Third World, development has increased the dependence of the Third World and resulted in the depletion of its resources; and Rahnema (1997, p.378) says that ‘not only did development fail to resolve the old problems it was supposed to address, but it brought in new ones of incomparably greater magnitude’. The problems to which he is referring here are problems such as cultural alienation, environmental destruction, loss of self-esteem, conflict and the creation of perpetually unfulfilled expectations.

Post-development thinkers believe that the failure of development and the new problems it has apparently provoked have led to a loss of faith in development. This loss of faith is a further indicator that it may be time to call for an end to development, to ‘write its obituary’ (Sachs, 1992, p.1) and proclaim a post-development era. The contemporary notion of development has been delegitimised, such that it is increasingly difficult to remain convinced that poverty, inequity and other problems can be solved by development. There is not just increasing disappointment at the perceived failure of past development initiatives, but also disillusionment about the prospects of future development initiatives.

### 2.5.2 Development as a Flawed Idea

One reason why post-development theorists do not find the failure of past development initiatives a motivation to intensify efforts to bring about development is that they understand the failure of development to be related to flaws within the idea itself, rather

than being the result of failed implementation of a basically sound idea. To post-development theorists, development as an idea is deeply problematic, such that the failure of development is inevitable, and indeed such that the success of development would ultimately be no better than its failure. Development is premised upon shaky assumptions.

To make this argument, post-development theorists stress that development is not just a set of projects aiming to address a set of problems, but rather that development is a ‘cast of mind’ (Sachs, 1992, p.1), an ‘ideology’ (Alvares, 1992, p.90), an ‘interpretive grid’ (Ferguson, 1990, p.xiii), a ‘discourse’ (Escobar, 1995, pp.5-6) and a ‘myth’ (Latouche, 1993; Rist, 1997). In this way they emphasise that development is more than just a series of policies and practices, and that the failure of development is ultimately the failure of an idea. Marglin (1990, p.1) sums this up nicely when stressing that criticisms of development offered by contributors to a book he co-edits ‘are directed not at particular failures, which might be explained away as poor implementation of basically sound ideas, but at the theories which have undergirded and legitimised practice’.

Rist’s (1997) *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* offers a useful discussion of this theme. Rist stresses that development is a Western idea, and that to understand it one needs to acknowledge and explore its Western origins. Rist reveals development to be part of the ‘religion of modernity’ (1997, p.21), and stresses that ‘modern society’, like all other societies, has its own traditions and myths and is not, as is often suggested, different from all other societies by virtue of being ‘secular’ and ‘rational’. He then presents the idea of development as a myth of Western society, tracing the intellectual history of the idea and showing how development thinking fits into

Enlightenment thought. Rist shows that development is rooted in a particular intellectual tradition and that the flaws in this tradition are reflected in the idea of development itself. He identifies the idea of infinite progress as ‘an idea which radically distinguishes Western culture from all others’ and also an idea that is hopelessly flawed (Rist, 1997, p.238). The contemporary idea of development, he argues, fits into a set of Western ideas regarding the infiniteness of progress and, given the flaws of these ideas, the idea of development is also deeply flawed. Progress is not infinite, and development, as it has been conceived, is not possible.

If, as Rist and other post-development theorists argue, development’s failure can be attributed to flaws in the very idea itself, rather than flawed implementation, then no amount of improved development practice will allow the problems which development purports to address to be solved. For this reason, post-development theorists believe that what is needed is a new approach to these problems, one which might even reveal certain ‘problems’ not to be problems at all, and which may expose new difficulties.

### 2.5.3 The Misrepresentation of the ‘Developed’ and the ‘Underdeveloped’

One of the flaws in the idea of development, according to post-development theorists, is that it misrepresents both those it labels ‘developed’ and those it labels ‘underdeveloped’. For post-development theorists these labels make little sense, involve the essentialisation of both those labelled ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ and create false impressions about those assigned to each camp.

It is important to note that while post-development theorists take issue with the developed/underdeveloped distinction, they do believe that important distinctions exist between regions classed under these headings. However, they question the explanatory value of relating these distinctions to 'levels of development'. Post-development theorists are not denying that parts of the world differ in terms of their levels of production, urbanisation, industrialisation, dependence on complex technology and so on, but they do dispute the validity of labelling the countries of the world with higher levels of the above-mentioned and other features, as more developed than other regions.

Post-development theorists point out that 'underdevelopment' is not an objective condition. People, it seems, came to be described as 'underdeveloped' at some stage. In an account of his own experience of development, Shrestha (1995, p.268) writes that as a young boy growing up in Nepal he had no idea that he was 'underdeveloped' – '... poor and hungry I certainly was. But underdeveloped? I never thought – nor did anyone else – that being poor meant being "underdeveloped" and lacking human dignity.' It was only in the 1950s that this word (or the local translation of it) began to take on some meaning in the village where Shrestha grew up, and indeed in many other parts of the world. Post-development theorists point out that describing a group of people as underdeveloped means defining them in relation to what they are not and ignoring their diversity. Diverse groups of people are united by their lack of something that has been achieved by others (Sachs, 1992, p.3). Highlighting this, Esteva (1992, p.7) talks about how the emergence of development discourse meant that people

ceased being what they were, in all their diversity, and were transmogrified into an inverted mirror of others' reality: a mirror that belittles them and sends them off to the end of the queue, a mirror that defines their identity, which is really that of a heterogeneous and diverse majority, simply in the terms of a homogenizing and narrow minority.

Development literature tends to present ‘underdeveloped’ ways of life as absolutely undesirable and inferior to the ‘developed’ way of life. But, asks Rahnema (1997, p.379), ‘Was everything so bad in the old world?’. He refers to the work of Marshall Sahlins and others who have shown that the life of hunter-gatherers, who would typically be classified as extremely underdeveloped, was not as bad as it is often presented to be – in fact, Sahlins (1997) calls this kind of society ‘the original affluent society’.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in Shrestha’s (1995, p.276) narrative of his own development experience, he argues that the Nepalese economic system and values, which he had earlier rejected in favour of the ‘developed’ way of life, had much more going for them than he originally thought. This way of life was ‘generally self-reliant, self-sufficient, sustainable, and far less destructive of humanity as well as nature’ (Shrestha, 1995, p.276). Likewise, Shiva (1989, p.10) points out that traditional diets, building styles and forms of clothing are often healthier and ecologically more appropriate than their modern counterparts. The ‘underdeveloped’ way of life cannot so easily be dismissed as completely undesirable.

While most post-development theorists, including Rahnema, Shrestha and Shiva, caution that they do not mean to suggest that everything about the ‘underdeveloped’ way of life is good and desirable,<sup>23</sup> they would like to stress that development discourse misrepresents

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<sup>22</sup> Sahlins argues that while the lifestyle of the hunter-gatherers is generally presented as a terrible one in which the people are condemned to a continuous struggle for survival, in fact the lives of hunter-gatherers are fairly pleasant. They live lives in which ‘human material wants are finite and few, and technical means unchanging but on the whole adequate’ (Sahlins, 1997, p.4).

<sup>23</sup> Shiva (and Mies, 1993, p.11), for example, stresses that not all cultural practices are of equal value and describes traditional practices such as dowry, India’s caste system and genital mutilation as undesirable; and Shrestha (1995, p.276) emphasises that he is ‘not trying to suggest that whatever was old was good and desirable and that every aspect of our lost heritage should be reclaimed ... Nobody should be oblivious to the many tyrannical practices of our feudal-religious heritage’.

this way of life when it presents ‘underdeveloped’ life as being like Hobbes’ state of nature – ‘poor, nasty, brutish and short’. It is misleading to present the lives of the ‘underdeveloped’ as perfect and trouble-free but, as Latouche (1993, p.216) points out

the incredible joie de vivre that strikes many observers in African suburbs misleads less than the depressing objective evaluations using statistical apparatus which discern only the Westernised part of wealth and poverty.

More positive accounts of life in the ‘underdeveloped’ world are often criticised for romanticising the poor, but post-development thinkers suggest that such romanticisation is no less misleading than the standard way in which the ‘underdeveloped’ are presented in development literature.

Not only do post-development theorists believe that development literature exaggerates the ills of the ‘underdeveloped’ life, but also that it tends to present the ‘underdeveloped’ as being victims and sufferers; as people in need of help, and incapable of escaping their terrible lives. It would seem that the underdeveloped are unable to help themselves and desperately in need of some outside saviour to intervene and rescue them. Rahnema (1992, p.169) sarcastically notes that if the ‘underdeveloped’ were really as incapable and desperate as they are presented, ‘three quarters of the world’s population would already have perished’. Despite lack of aid and despite persisting ‘underdevelopment’, the ‘underdeveloped’ continue to live and to find ways to cope with their problems.

#### 2.5.4 A Critique of the Modern, Western Way of Life

Most post-development theorists are deeply critical of contemporary Western society.<sup>24</sup> If developing means adopting the modern, Western way of life, then, as Sachs (1992, p.3) comments, 'it is not the failure of development which has to be feared but its success'. According to post-development theorists, the modern, Western way of life is not sufficiently good and desirable to function as a model for what other parts of the world ought to become. Development surely means becoming like those labelled 'developed', but if this is so, then the form of development being proposed is only desirable if the developed way of life in which it results is desirable. But, argue post-development theorists, it most assuredly is not.

Much of the development literature implies that suffering, deprivation and misery are the preserve of the underdeveloped. Citizens of the developed world apparently live basically good, meaningful, happy lives. From the perspective of a Third World citizen, familiar only with images of the developed society and not with the reality of day-to-day life in the developed world, this developed way of life seems very desirable. But, as a character in the play *Mon oncle d'Amerique* commented, 'America doesn't exist. I've been there' (quoted in Banuri, 1990a, p.59). Much the same can be said of the 'developed' world. If the developed world is the world in which poverty, injustice, conflict, want and misery have been eradicated, then indeed, the 'developed' world does not exist. Nevertheless, certain

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<sup>24</sup> As with the terms 'Third World' and 'South' discussed earlier, I have some reservations about using a term as general as 'Western'. However, given that it is widely used in post-development literature I use it here and use it to refer to Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand.

parts of the world are continually labelled ‘developed’ and development literature continually assumes the desirability of life in these parts.

Post-development theorists acknowledge that there are many benefits to life in the ‘developed’ world, but point out that ‘[t]he attractions of the Western model need no elaboration’ (Marglin, 1990, p.3) – we are well aware of the high levels of physical comfort enjoyed by those in the West and of the other benefits of the Western way of life. Despite these benefits, post-development theorists argue that ‘the Western model remains less than compelling’ (Marglin, 1990, p.3). There are several problems with the ‘developed’ way of life, and post-development theorists feel that these problems ought to be highlighted. As Verhelst (1990, p.66) points out, many in the Third World are attracted by the well-advertised benefits of the Western way of life, and surely honesty requires that the problems of the West be publicly described and analysed to prevent the ‘persistent, servile admiration’ of the West reflected in the attitude of some Third World citizens.

One of the problems of the West highlighted by post-development theory relates to the environmental destruction which the developed way of life has brought with it. This problem is well known and many in the developed world are actively trying to pursue ways in which to continue the developed way of life while mitigating its effects on the environment. The environmental crisis casts doubt on the viability and desirability of the development project.

Another problem experienced by the developed world has to do with the socio-cultural characteristics of the developed regions. The developed world has certainly not found a

way to eradicate misery. Marglin (1990, p.3) lists 'spiritual desolation, meaningless work, [and] neglect of the aged' as some of the characteristics of the 'developed' society which make it a 'dubious example' for the rest of the world. Latouche (1993, pp.11-13) talks of the West as 'an impersonal machine, devoid of spirit' and stresses that Western civilisation has its 'dark side' which includes desolation, numbness and insecurity. Verhelst (1990) dedicates a chapter (entitled 'Alienation Amidst Plenty') in his book on culture and development, to the cultural desolation of the West. He begins the chapter by noting that

... there is something insulting and narrow-minded in speaking only of the 'problems of the Third World' as if humanity's evils were confined to the tropics and to people of colour; as if the West, in contrast, was sheltered from all the misery and depravity that thrives overseas (Verhelst, 1990, p.65).

Verhelst says that contrary to some people's expectations he does not find visiting the 'underdeveloped' depressing, rather 'it is when I land in one of those ascepticized airports in Europe or North America that I am overwhelmed by sadness' (Verhelst, 1990, p.65). To him the West is in a cultural crisis:

A society that offers neither jobs nor reasons to live, that literally dispenses with human beings – whether by means of robots or missiles – that designs factories with no regard for their social functions, that reduces everything to profit, acquisition and power is a sick society: sick in the very definition of its values, sick to the depths of its cultural being (Verhelst, 1990, p.69).

A further problem that post-development theorists identify with the developed society is that it is parasitical upon the existence of underdevelopment. Here, they echo and build upon the ideas of dependency theorists who argue that the underdevelopment of some regions is a result of the same process that brought development to other regions. It seems to post-development theorists, that the developed society is only made possible by the deprivation of others. Alvares (1992, p.145) argues that the levels of resource use and

wastage of the developed world require the ‘permanent victimhood’ of the many excluded from this way of life.

Disillusionment with the benefits of the modern Western way of life is thus a key feature of several post-development writings. From the perspective of post-development theorists, development appears to be premised on exploitation and oppression and to result in a way of life which, while having many benefits, is by no means unambiguously far superior to other ways of life.

#### 2.5.5 Becoming ‘Developed’ is Neither Possible nor Desirable

The critique of the West enables post-development theorists to question both the possibility and the desirability of development. If development is premised upon environmental destruction and the exploitation of others, then it may not be possible for the Third World to develop as it lacks a periphery to exploit and as it seems that the development of the Third World would escalate already terrifying levels of environmental destruction, until such a point that all further development becomes impossible. Furthermore, if the goal of development – becoming ‘developed’ – is not as desirable as it has been presented, then there seems to be no reason to justify the exploitation of people and nature in pursuit of development.

Several post-development theorists, particularly Sachs (1992; 2000; 2002) and Shiva (Shiva, 1989; Shiva, 1991; Mies and Shiva, 1993) draw attention to the ecological limits which suggest that the developed way of life cannot possibly be generalised. Sachs (1992,

p.2), for example, talks of the ‘five or six planets [that] would be needed to serve as mines and waste dumps’ if the industrialised model was to be generalised, and Galeano (1997, p.216) warns that the universalisation of the developed way of life would mean the ‘collective suicide of humanity’. Shiva and other so-called ecofeminists argue that something more radical than the ‘greening’ of development or so-called sustainable development is required.<sup>25</sup> Drawing on statistics about current and projected future resource usage, post-development theorists argue that proposing development as the solution to the problems of the Third World is at best unwise and at worst suicidal. They do not see new ‘green’ technology and ‘sustainable’ development as solutions to such problems. It seems clear that even with attempts to ‘green’ development, it is not possible for the whole of humanity to consume or waste in a manner similar to that of citizens of the ‘developed’ world. For post-development theorists, then, ecological limits make development impossible, and suggest the need for a new approach to the problems of the Third World.

Development is also impossible because it seems, as mentioned earlier, that the development of some parts of the world was at least to some extent predicated on the exploitation of other parts of the world. We can only speculate on what our contemporary world would look like had there been no imperialism, no slave trade and no colonial and neo-colonial trade practices; however, it seems reasonable to assume that the developed parts of the world could not have achieved their current levels of material comfort if these practices had never taken place, and indeed did not continue to take place today. To use

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<sup>25</sup> While Shiva and Mies are the only ecofeminists to be explicitly linked to post-development theory, the broader ecofeminist literature (see for example Plumwood, 1993; Eaton and Lorentzen, 2003) also has some features in common with post-development theory.

Sachs' (1992, p.2) image, the underdeveloped would not only need five or six planets to serve as mines and waste dumps, but also to serve as areas to be exploited and to provide cheap labour. Thus the exploitative nature of the development of the developed world suggests that the underdeveloped will not be able to achieve development. Furthermore, the exploitative nature of development makes development undesirable to those who see exploitation as undesirable regardless of its consequences.

For post-development theorists, development is not only undesirable because it seems to be at least partially predicated upon exploitation, but also because the outcome of development – the developed society – does not make development seem a worthwhile process. If, as discussed earlier, developed society affluence has not led to the eradication of misery, hopelessness, loneliness, fear and deprivation among its citizens, then it seems necessary to question both the possibility and desirability of becoming developed.

#### 2.5.6 Emphasis on the Non-Material

A further distinguishing feature of post-development writing is its emphasis on the non-material – on culture, discourse and mindsets. Many critics of past development initiatives point to the material failures of past development practice, but few give as much attention to the non-material aspects of development, and of its failure, as do post-development theorists. As mentioned earlier, post-development theorists emphasise that development is a way of seeing the world, an ideology or a mindset. This emphasis on the non-material also extends to the approach that post-development theorists take when suggesting how to address the failure of development. Rather than proposing new strategies and approaches

which could bring about ‘real’ benefits such as GDP growth, increases in literacy levels and so on, they suggest that the most important requirement for addressing the failure of development is a change in the way we understand the world.

Post-development theorists point out that the way we act and the way we see the world are intimately connected – ‘The act of belief is performative, and if people must be made to believe, it is so that they can be made to act in a certain way’ (Rist, 1997, p.22). Development has become the preoccupation of so many in the Third World because their imaginations have been conquered by the contemporary idea of development. In order for this idea of development to be popularised, people had to begin to see the world in terms of development – they had to perceive certain situations as being situations of underdevelopment and see the solution to certain problems as development. As Esteva (1992, p.7) points out ‘in order for people to seek to escape underdevelopment, they first have to believe that they are underdeveloped’. Likewise, if contemporary development initiatives are to be discarded and new ways of approaching problems such as poverty and injustice are to be initiated, then new ways of seeing and understanding the world need to emerge. Verhelst (1990, p.71) stresses this, saying that ‘there can be no solution to the crisis if we merely change structures without effecting the sort of personal conversion that allows collective changes of mentality and behaviour’. So often, talk of the discourse and imagery of development is seen as neglecting the ‘real’ effect of development or the lack thereof, but, as Ferguson (1990, p.xv) underlines, ‘thinking is as “real” an activity as any other ... ideas and discourses have important and very real social consequences’.

Post-development theory's emphasis on the non-material is one way in which it breaks with dependency theory. Post-development theory echoes dependency theory in its belief that the development of the West was premised upon the exploitation of the Third World, but it does not see this exploitation as being only or even primarily material, nor does its way of addressing the problem stress the material. Verhelst (1990, p.20) discusses the importance of paying attention to non-material aspects, and quotes Ziegler (in Verhelst, 1990, p.20) who argues that many radical approaches are so fascinated by the 'practical aspects of class struggle' and on material conflicts that they neglect another 'battlefield' – 'the one where wars are fought for the control of the imaginary'. Post-development theory seeks to enter into combat on this battlefield.

Post-development theorists believe that the idea of development is losing its hold over people's imaginations and that it is consequently becoming possible to approach the problems of the Third World in new ways. Sachs (2000, p.13) says that the failure of development initiatives is not enough to cause people to abandon development, but that development only loses its appeal when its implicit promises no longer command credibility. This, he believes, has begun to happen. Banuri (1990a, p.32) also believes that development is losing credibility, arguing that the dominant models of development 'have relinquished their hold over the imagination of Third World intellectuals'. It is this shift in beliefs that ultimately signals the 'end of development' to post-development theorists, rather than just the material failure of development.

### 2.5.7 Importance of Difference and Diversity

As pointed out earlier, post-development theorists believe that to group together large sections of the world under the label of the 'underdeveloped', is to ignore the differences between these groups. The underdeveloped regions of the world are home to diverse cultural groups with diverse ways of seeing and being in the world. Post-development theory gives much attention to this diversity and presents it as a valuable asset which is being undermined by development.

Shanin (1997) suggests that the idea of progress, a core element of the idea of development, emerged partly in response to the West's need to explain the diversity of humanity. As European travellers became more and more aware that the world consisted of a vast variety of different people groups who lived in numerous very different ways, it became necessary to try to explain this diversity. The old dichotomy of civilisation/barbarity no longer seemed adequate given the vast variety of societies which came to light during the period of European conquest. The idea of progress or development proved a useful tool to explain this diversity. Different societies were portrayed as being at different levels of development with Western society presented as a more evolved version of earlier societies (Shanin, 1997, p.67). This way of explaining diversity strengthened the West's belief in its superiority and helped legitimise colonialism. The post-colonial era may have seen the delegitimisation of the idea that the 'advanced' countries should rule over the 'backward' regions, but it has not seen an end to the belief that differences in societal arrangement reflect varying levels of some kind of evolutionary progress.

By explaining social difference in a way that ranks different people groups, non-Western ways of life are denigrated. Moreover, this way of understanding difference denies non-Western societies a future other than by gradual assimilation with the West. As Marx (1958, p.74) (cited in Rist, 1997, p.42) put it, 'the country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future'. According to this understanding of difference, a developed world would be one in which differences in terms of socio-economic arrangements and general lifestyle would be significantly reduced. Post-development theorists believe that current development initiatives have thus far served to reduce diversity and that the reduction of diversity is to be lamented and opposed.

Diversity, to post-development theorists, is an asset. As long as there is diversity, alternative ways of living are evident. The persistence of diversity means the existence of 'other ways of building economies, or dealing with basic needs, of coming together into social groups' (Escobar, 1995, p.225), and thereby provides us with lived alternatives to the way we do things. Marglin (1990, pp.15-17) compares cultural diversity with biological diversity. Just as biologists speak in favour of maintaining the diversity of the genetic pool, so we should defend cultural diversity as the existence of a variety of cultures maintains 'the diversity of forms of understanding, creating, and coping that the human species has managed to generate' (Marglin, 1990, pp.16-17).

#### 2.5.8 Focus on the ‘Local’ and Support for ‘New Social Movements’

Post-development theorists are defenders of the ‘local’. They give attention to what is happening ‘on the ground’ and at the ‘grassroots’, rather than focusing on international strategies and the like. In line with their defence of diversity discussed above, many are opposed to ‘global solutions’ as such solutions tend to ignore the specificities which may make a solution appropriate in one place but less appropriate elsewhere. Thus, for some post-development theorists, to resist development is not to propose in its place another solution to the world’s problems, but rather to stress that different societies need to find different ways to cope with the problems they face – and that these problems too will differ from place to place.

Some, like Esteva and Prakash (1997; 1998), are opposed to both thinking and acting ‘big’. They argue that the slogan ‘Think globally, act locally’ epitomises a common approach among ‘alternative development’ activists, but that it is preferable to both act and think locally as they believe global thinking to be impossible and unwise. It is impossible, they argue, because we cannot ever know more than a little part of the world well, and so global thinking tends to amount to a kind of arrogance. Local thinking is then the more humble approach. It should be noted that Esteva and Prakash are not opposed to ‘effective coalitions for specific purposes’ (Esteva and Prakash, 1997, p.24) nor to the articulation of a ‘shared No’ to common enemies (1997, p.28), but are cautious about more general and restrictive affirmative coalitions which try to define a broader common project. Similarly, Escobar (1995, p.222) believes that ‘... there are no grand alternatives that can be applied to all places or all situations ... One must resist the desire to formulate alternatives at an

abstract, macro level ....' And Ferguson (1990, p.282) wonders if there is any role at all for development 'experts', arguing that if there is, that role is to answer 'specific, localized, tactical questions' rather than to 'dictat[e] general political strategy'. The argument is not one in favour of a radical localism which seeks no contact outside the immediate locality, but is a position that both favours the local and is rather suspicious of big, far-ranging approaches.

Other post-development theorists are less cautious about presenting general solutions or identifying general problems. Mies and Shiva (1993, pp.12-13) warn against a position that is so sensitive to difference, and so opposed to universalism, that it advocates a form of cultural relativism. They argue that what 'grassroots women activists' want is a new form of universalism and that we should not only focus on differences between people but also on 'interconnectedness among women, among men and women, among human beings and other life forms, worldwide' (Mies and Shiva, 1993, p.12).

Post-development theorists' suspicion of big, grand-scale projects leads them to support local social movements. Rather than placing their faith in government agencies, international institutions and large NGOs, post-development writers place their faith in smaller, 'grassroots' organisations, many of which are referred to as 'new social movements' (NSMs). It is hoped that these locally-based, locally-inspired groups will be better able to play a role which is sensitive to difference and which is based on the particular needs of particular groups of people.

Awareness of the importance of sensitivity to difference makes post-development theorists favour local initiatives because these are more likely to be sensitive to the particular needs of the communities of which they are a part. There is variation within post-development literature with regard to the extent to which cooperation among diverse local groups is viewed as desirable, but generally there is a sense that local rather than broader initiatives ought to be favoured and that any kind of cooperation and broader consciousness that results from interaction between such groups must maintain a sensitivity to difference and an openness to diversity.

#### 2.5.9 Validation of the Non-Western

In line with their critique of the West, their emphasis on the value of diversity and their focus on the local, post-development theorists stress that many non-Western, ‘non-developed’ ways of life are valid and worth defending. Thus they challenge the desirability of ‘development’, both by challenging the desirability of becoming ‘developed’ and by challenging the undesirability of being ‘underdeveloped’.

Ndione’s (2002; et al., 1994; 1995; 1997; 2001) work is interesting in this respect. Rather than providing a critique of the ‘developed’ way of life as do post-development theorists such as Latouche and Verhelst, his opposition to this way of life is reflected in his choice to use the ‘underdeveloped’ as a reference point, and his attempts to demonstrate the validity of ‘underdeveloped’ ways of life. *The Future of Community Lands* (Ndione et al., 1995) begins with a description of a rural community in Fandène, Senegal, in the words of the people who live there, rather than with a list of statistics about the area or an overview by

the authors of the book. Throughout this book, the views of the ‘ordinary people’ in the community are taken as authoritative and are presented in a way that validates and respects them. In this way the views and practices of the community are shown to be of great value. This position is made more explicit in a later piece in which he discusses the idea of free exchange and contrasts it with the traditional Senegalese attitude towards wealth, showing the Senegalese attitude towards wealth to be a viable and, in many ways, preferable alternative (Ndione, 2002). He speaks here of the importance of the *valorisation du local* - of showing the local to be of value and worth.

Post-development theorists are more likely than other development theorists to draw on non-Western thinkers and philosophies in defence of their arguments. One of the non-Western thinkers much respected and referred to by post-development theorists is Gandhi (see for example Alvares, 1992, pp.131-135; Shiva, 1993, p.264; Shiva and Mies, 1993, p.322). Alvares (1992, pp.131-141) also draws on other non-Western thinkers, including Indian academics and philosophers such as Manu Kothari and Lopa Mehta, and a Japanese agricultural scientist, Fukuoka. Rahnema (1997, pp.389-387) refers to the Chinese thinkers Confucius and Lao Tzu in the closing chapter of *The Post-Development Reader*. This reliance on non-Western thinkers is by no means unique to post-development theory, but contributes to their general stance in favour of the non-Western.

Post-development theorists clearly do not think that development should be rejected only because being ‘developed’ is not all it has been made out to be; they believe, too, that the ‘underdeveloped’ ways of life, and the philosophies of those coming from ‘underdeveloped’ areas, have much to contribute to discussions about how to live good

lives. In order to make this point, they implicitly and explicitly stress the value of ‘underdeveloped’ worldviews and practices.

#### 2.5.10 ‘Alternatives to Development’ not ‘Alternative Development’

What ultimately characterises post-development theory, and sets it apart from other critical development theory, is its rejection of ‘development’. While many critical development theorists would agree with many of the arguments outlined above, they draw the line at calling for an ‘end to development’. At this point they caution against ‘throwing the baby out with the bathwater’ (see for example Parpart, 1995, p.264; Sutcliffe, 1999, p.151; Sharp and Briggs, 2006, p.8). Rejecting the whole contemporary notion of development seems to many a little extreme.

Extreme it may be, but this appears to be the position of post-development theorists. In Sachs’ (1992, p.4) introduction to his *Development Dictionary* he describes the intention of the contributors to the book as being ‘to clear out of the way this self-defeating development discourse’. Alvares (1992, p.108) talks about a need for ‘a frontal attack on the ideology of development’, and says ‘[t]here is no such thing as a developed or an undeveloped person’. Rahnema (1997, p.381) states that while he does not believe that all development projects are bad, he and most other contributors to *The Post-Development Reader* ‘have come to the conclusion that development was indeed a poisonous gift to the populations it set out to help.’

It seems clear that post-development theorists differ from other critical development theorists in that they choose to oppose development rather than to reform and rehabilitate it. However, the difference between the two positions is not all that clear: is it a squabble about words – about whether or not the word ‘development’ should still be used in descriptions of initiatives aiming to improve people’s lives; or is there some deeper difference? My impression is that to a certain extent the dispute is about whether or not the word ‘development’ ought to be used given the many problematic connotations it has, but that this disagreement does go deeper than words.

From the perspective of post-development theorists with their emphasis on the non-material, the power of words such as ‘development’ and ‘modernity’ must be recognised as such words do not just indicate and describe ‘things out there’, but conjure up a whole number of images and feelings. We need to recognise that ‘development’ and related terms have been used in particular ways and that such terms carry with them a number of connotations. Esteva (1992, p.10) argues:

Development cannot delink itself from the words with which it was formed – growth, evolution, maturation. Just the same, those who now use the word cannot free themselves from a web of meanings that impart a specific blindness to their language, thought and action. No matter the context in which it is used, or the precise connotation the person using it wants to give it, the expression becomes qualified and coloured by meanings perhaps unwanted.

In a later work, Esteva (1996) describes the words common in development discourse as buoys in a net, such that when one uses them, one finds oneself trapped in the net. In a similar vein, Latouche (1993, p.160) argues that ‘[w]ords are rooted in history; they are linked to ways of seeing and entire cosmologies which very often escape the speaker’s consciousness, but which have a hold over our feelings’. Latouche does not believe that the

debate about the word 'development' is simply a matter of words. For him development is a 'toxic word' (Latouche, 1993, p.160) that cannot escape the connotations that attach themselves to it. To argue that development must be completely different to what it has always been, seems dangerous to him – it is to 'don the opposition's colours, hoping perhaps to seduce rather than combat it – but more likely to fall into the abyss itself' (Latouche, 1993, p.160). For Esteva, Latouche and others, it seems safer to avoid the terminology generally used in development discourse altogether. In this, post-development theorists clearly differ from many other critical development theorists who prefer to redefine development, arguing like Tucker (1999, p.15) and Rahman (1993, pp.213-214) that the term 'development' is a powerful word and that to reject it 'would amount to handing over a powerful tool to those who exploit it for their own purposes' (Tucker, 1999, p.15).

Post-development theorists distance themselves from the advocates of various forms of 'alternative development', arguing instead for 'alternatives to development'. Their distaste for 'alternative development' stems partly from the realisation that many so-called alternatives have been co-opted into standard development discourse, and that what is needed is a more radical position – one that opposes standard development discourse, rather than trying to coax it in a new direction. Banuri's (1990a, pp.35-38; 1990b, pp.75-76) distinction between 'internal' and 'external' critiques is useful here. 'Internal' critiques of development accept the underlying moral arguments and assumptions made in the development theories they criticise, while external critiques of development 'reject the basic notions of welfare and behaviour implicit in such theories' and are opposed to the 'presumed superiority of Western values' implicit in much development theory (Banuri,

1990a, pp.35-36). External critiques resist being assimilated into development theory, while internal critiques do not. Post-development theorists, unlike the advocates of 'alternative development', are clearly external critics, standing outside the value system from which development initiatives emerge, and opposing the assumptions upon which the idea of development is premised. In this way, they resist being 'co-opted' into standard development discourse. The recent history of development discourse demonstrates the very real risk of co-optation: when development's impact on the environment was criticised, the idea of sustainable development came to the fore; when development was criticised for the way it approached culture, attempts were made to see culture as a 'tool' for development, and so on. Thus, the post-development theorist's position of standing outside standard development theory and vehemently opposing it, can be understood as an attempt to resist co-optation within standard development discourse.

Of course, it should be pointed out here that the internal critic/external critic distinction is not a very clear one. Many advocates of 'alternative development' share some but not all the values and assumptions implicit in standard development theory, and post-development theorists cannot be said not to have a single value or assumption in common with mainstream development theorists. Nevertheless, the post-development theorists' position is at greater variance with the standard development position than is the position of most advocates of various 'alternative' forms of development.

Indeed, some post-development theorists not only distance themselves from 'alternative development', but show themselves to be completely opposed to it. Latouche (1993, p.149) calls 'alternative development' a 'siren song' and describes it as more dangerous than 'true

blue' development. By presenting a 'friendly exterior', 'alternative development' is harder to resist than standard development; nevertheless, it shares many of the pitfalls of standard development. For Latouche (1993, p.159, emphasis in the original), '[t]he opposition between "alternative development" and *alternative to* development is radical, irreconcilable and one of essence, both in the abstract and in theoretical analysis'.

As indicated earlier, post-development theorists do not just believe that past development initiatives failed, but that the failure of development is a result of the inherently flawed nature of the contemporary concept and project of development, and, furthermore, that development has not only failed to bring about prosperity and a better life for the citizens of the Third World, but that it has harmed the Third World and undermined their belief systems and ways of living. Thus, they feel the need to adopt a position that is clearly and radically opposed to development, rather than one that seeks to improve, alter, rehabilitate or even redefine development.

## **2.6 Criticism of Post-Development Theory**

Given the radical nature of post-development theory, it is not surprising that it has attracted significant criticism. This criticism has come from a variety of sources, but it appears that most critics are advocates either of a Marxist, neo- or post-Marxist understanding of development, or otherwise of some alternative conception of development. While it could thus be said that criticism of post-development comes mainly from 'the left' within development studies, I should stress that critics of post-development theory are by no means a homogeneous group and that there is no single 'anti-post-development' position –

rather there are a number of different thinkers coming from a number of different academic disciplines, and different subject positions with regard to development, who have found aspects of post-development theory, the work of particular theorists, or in some cases the whole body of literature, problematic.

In the section that follows, I discuss the most common criticisms directed against post-development theorists and theory. I provide here a long discussion of critical comments with regard to the politics of post-development theory, partly because such critique is most relevant to the arguments I seek to make in the rest of the thesis; but partly, too, as it also becomes clear that one of the problems in need of resolution by post-development theorists is the question of whether it is possible to respond ethically to poverty and injustice while rejecting development.

#### 2.6.1 Poor Methodology and Argumentation

One of the most common criticisms of post-development theory is that the methodologies used and arguments made by post-development theorists are unsound and that post-development theorists provide inadequate support for their conclusions. Post-development theory is shown to have inconsistencies: for example, Kiely (1999, p.38) finds post-development theory's stance against essentialisation to be inconsistent with what he considers to be the latter's essentialisation of development as a whole. Gidwani (2002, p.6) concurs with Kiely, arguing that by rejecting development, post-development theorists 'succumb to the same kind of epistemological universalism that [they] ... are at such pains to reject'. In order to reject development out of hand, it is necessary to essentialise it, yet

post-development theorists purport to be opposed to essentialisation. Also, post-development theory uses official development indicators, such as those produced by the United Nations, to show how development has failed, something which appears to be inconsistent with the rejection of the validity of these indicators (Kiely, 1999, p.47). If such indicators are invalid reflections of development, then how can they be valid reflections of the failure of development?

A related criticism directed against post-development theory is that its conclusions are based on sentiment rather than sound argumentation. Sidaway (2002, p.18) notes that some see post-development as nothing more than an 'intellectual fad', while Nanda (1999, p.9) argues that post-development theory's rejection of development stems from a particular predisposition or 'mood' rather than from careful analysis of development practice. Similarly, Corbridge (1998a, p.143) argues that 'Post-development fails to convince because it too often trades in dogma and assertion, and too rarely resorts to proper argumentation'. The general feeling among critics of post-development theory, then, is that post-development theorists make several sweeping unsubstantiated claims and tend to rely on rhetoric rather than careful analysis.

A further criticism that has been levied at the methodology used in much post-development theory is that the post-development critique is one that is based mainly on textual analysis to the neglect of a study of the way in which development interventions get reworked and adapted 'on the ground' (Moore, 2000, pp.657-658). This reliance on texts makes it easier for post-development thinkers to dismiss development as some kind of a homogenising monolithic project, whereas more attention to the way in which 'global development

discourses are refracted, reworked and sometimes subverted in particular localities' (Moore, 2000, p.655) would help make post-development theory more nuanced.

Post-development theory's use – or misuse – of post-modern writings, especially of Foucault, is highlighted by several critics. Some critics feel that Foucault is poorly used by post-development theorists, while others feel that the use of Foucault, and of post-modern thinking in general, is in itself a flaw which compromises post-development theory. Lehmann (1997) takes the former position, arguing that Escobar's use of Foucault is a 'demeaning and impoverishing' one. Likewise Brigg (2002), who is generally sympathetic to post-development theory, believes that a better use of Foucault, and especially of Foucault's idea of 'bio-power', would enrich post-development theory. In turn, Ziai (2004, pp.1046-1049) points to many deviations from Foucault in the writing of some of the post-development writers who claim to be influenced by Foucault. Taking a different stance, Kiely (1999, pp.41-42) suggests that it is not the misuse, but in fact the very use, of Foucault by post-development theorists, that is problematic. According to Kiely, the Foucauldian understanding of power implies relativism and is ultimately a politically disabling position. The reliance of post-development theorists on Foucault and other post-modern writers thus results in the problem of relativism surfacing in their work too.

A final problem with regard to methodology and argumentation relates to certain gaps in the arguments presented by post-development theorists. Berger (1995), for example, repeatedly criticises Escobar for paying insufficient attention to the Cold War; and Lehmann (1997, p.576) and Nederveen Pieterse (1998, p.364) accuse post-development theorists of not adequately examining the experiences of the Asian countries, especially the

Newly Industrialised Economies, in their analyses of the way in which development operates.

### 2.6.2 Unhelpful Generalisations

As mentioned earlier, many critics point out that post-development theory essentialises development. Part of this essentialisation is what critics see as the unhelpful generalisations post-development theorists make about development theory, about the effects that development has had upon Third World countries, and about citizens of both the Third World and the West.

Several critics argue that the rejection of development by post-development theorists is a consequence of their homogenisation of all development experiences – they do not recognise that development has changed over the decades and that not all development is the same (see for example Grillo, 1997; Kiely, 1999; Simon, 1997; Storey, 2000; Van Ausdal, 2001). Simon (1997, p.185) argues that post-development theory ‘set[s] up a straw elephant in seeking to portray postwar engagements with poverty in the South as a single or singular “development project” in order to be able to knock it down more easily’, and that post-development theory ignores ‘the very tangible achievements’ of many development programmes (see also Simon, 2006, pp.12-13). Kiely (1999, p.30) accuses post-development theorists of conflating modernisation and development such that they claim to be rejecting development when in fact they have grounds only to reject modernisation. Critics feel that it is unfair to claim that development has failed or generated harmful consequences, and argue that while *some* development initiatives may

have failed or harmed people in some way, post-development theorists ought to recognise that other development initiatives have been very different. As a result of this homogenisation of development, post-development theory ignores the achievements of development of any kind and too easily reaches the conclusion that contemporary development initiatives ought to be rejected (Storey, 2000, p.42; Corbridge, 1998a, p.145).

Post-development theory has also been accused of making generalisations about both the Third World and the West. Kiely (1999, p.47) says that post-development is a kind of reverse Orientalism which 'turns all people from non-western cultures into a generalised "subaltern" that is then used to flog an equally generalised "West"' (Chow, 1993, p.13)(cited in Kiely, 1999, p.47). Corbridge (1998a, p.144) accuses post-development theory of presenting the West as 'inauthentic, urban, consumerist, monstrous, [and] utilitarian' and Westerners as 'lonely, anxious, greedy and shallow'. In contrast, the non-West is presented as 'authentic, rural, productive, content, in tune with nature and so on'. To Corbridge, it seems that post-development theory essentialises both the West and 'the Rest' in a way that is not sufficiently impartial and that does not sufficiently acknowledge the extent to which non-Westerners aspire to a more Western lifestyle. A related criticism of post-development theory is that it romanticises the non-West, the peasant, the traditional way of life and, in the case of ecofeminist writers, women and nature (Corbridge, 1998a, p.145; Storey, 2000, p.42; Molyneux and Steinberg, 1995, pp.91-92). Indeed, Kiely (1999) goes so far as to ask if post-development theory is 'the last refuge of the noble savage'. Post-development theorists tend to exaggerate the benefits of the non-Western way of life and to underestimate the appeal of the Western way of life to non-Westerners.

### 2.6.3 Inadequate Presentation of an Alternative

One of the most common criticisms of post-development theory relates to its call for alternatives to development. Blaikie's (2000, pp.1038-1039) feeling is that the deconstruction of development offered by post-development theorists 'leaves only fragmented remains ... an agenda-less programme, a full stop, a silence, after the act of deconstruction'. Critics feel that if post-development theorists would like to completely reject contemporary development initiatives, they need to present a more detailed description of what they mean by 'alternatives to development'. From the perspective of some critics, a critique without a 'positive programme' is pointless and potentially politically problematic. For Nederveen Pieterse (1998, p.365) to stop at critique amounts to endorsing the status quo, with result that post-development theory's failure to provide detailed alternatives emerges as its core weakness. Post-development theory is all 'critique but no construction' (Nederveen Pieterse, 2000, p.188).

In a review of Sachs' *Development Dictionary*, Dower (1993, p.87) points out that in the light of the critique offered by the contributors to the dictionary, there are two strategies available to critics of development (assuming one does not want 'to rail without effect against the inevitable'): either concepts like 'development' and the others 'defined' in this dictionary must be redefined so as to make their meaning compatible with the values of the critics of development, or else a new set of concepts and strategies must be provided. According to Dower, *The Development Dictionary*, does neither. This criticism could be extended to post-development theory as a whole, which tends to reject current concepts and

strategies, but not to provide a comprehensive alternative set of concepts and strategies, thus giving us the sense that post-development theory lacks a cohesive future programme.

Some critics avoid accusing post-development theory of completely lacking a future programme, but criticise the alternatives on offer of having ‘a high New Age-like content clad in Third World clothes’ (Schuurman, 2001, p.6) and of seeming ‘romantic and utopian’ (Berger, 1995, p.725). There is a feeling among critics that the alternatives presented by post-development theorists lack detail, are unlikely to be realised and are ultimately less constructive than the alternatives offered by ‘alternative development’ approaches.

Gidwani (2002, pp.10-12) provides some interesting comments on some of the problems with the ‘alternatives to development’ offered by post-development theory. He argues that the ‘traditional’, non-modern way of life that is so celebrated by post-development theory, and upon which the alternatives to development are based, is in fact a caricature of non-Western societies, and what is more, it is a caricature that has its roots in the writings of Eurocentric authors like Henry Maine, Ferdinand Tönnies, or Emile Durkheim, who wrote extensively about the ‘traditional’. Gidwani (2002, pp.10,12) argues that ‘the traditional community’ that post-development theorists celebrate ‘is, ironically, the discursive product of the very same knowledge-making apparatus of modernity that Rahnema and his fellow critics want to discredit’ and therefore that ‘post-development scholarship ... remains trapped within the straightjacket of Eurocentric, modernist thinking’. Thus for Gidwani, attempts by post-development theorists to propose an alternative which escapes the kind of thinking that has informed past development theory and practice, are unsuccessful.

#### 2.6.4 The Politics of (Post-)Development Theory

For many critics of post-development theory, development is ultimately about addressing the terrible inequities evident in our world by emancipating the underdeveloped from their appalling condition. The failure of past development initiatives only makes this task more urgent, and makes the post-development theorists' contemplation of the ultimate desirability of becoming 'developed' seem like immoral navel-gazing. While a position that is critical of past development theory, but supportive of the idea of development, enables further action to bring about development – and is, therefore, a politically feasible position – post-development theory's focus on discourse, ideas and images and their questioning of mind-sets and philosophies, seems to some to pause if not to halt action in favour of improving the lives of the 'underdeveloped'.

To understand the position of critics of post-development theory, one must understand what they believe development to be all about.<sup>26</sup> Schuurman (2000, p.14) provides a sense of what he and many others opposed to post-development theory regard as the purpose and nature of development, saying:

The very essence of development studies is a normative preoccupation with the poor, marginalized and exploited people in the South. In this sense inequality rather than diversity or difference should be the main focus of development studies: inequality of access to power, to resources, to a human existence – in short, inequality of emancipation.

Given this position, it is not surprising that Schuurman and others who share these ideals are appalled by post-development rejection of the contemporary notion of development.

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<sup>26</sup> Of course, critics of post-development theory differ in terms of their position towards a whole range of things, but I think many would share Schuurman's view with regard to what they believe development to be about.

How can initiatives which aim to improve the lives of the poor, marginalised and exploited be rejected? Many defenders of development believe that ‘underdevelopment’ is a terrible situation which calls for immediate political action, not critical reflection on the underlying assumptions and intellectual heritage of the idea of development. Schuurman (2002, p.15) notes that the growing inequality within and between the West and the Third World is reason enough for many to feel that we should remain committed to development.

Critics feel that post-development theorists place too much emphasis on the non-material to the neglect of the material situation of the people in the ‘underdeveloped’ parts of the world. Kiely (1999, p.43) argues that while the ‘discursive turn’ in development studies is ‘in some respects welcome, it should not be at the expense of a materialist analysis’. While post-development theorists stress that words, ideas and mindsets are important, critics counter that ‘Hunger and high morbidity rates in the Third World do not just disappear by merely changing the subjective perspective of the people involved’ (Schuurman, 2001, p.10). The disagreement here seems to be partly about the importance of discourse. Post-development theorists, often influenced by post-modern writings, stress the importance of discourse, while most of their critics are more cautious about this ‘discursive turn’. While post-development theorists draw upon post-modern discussions of power, especially those of Foucault, critics find the post-modern ‘imaginary of power’ to be one that ‘leaves little room for forward politics’ (Nederveen Pieterse, 2000, p.186).

Critics of post-development theory emphasise the material and believe that development is, and indeed should be, chiefly about improving people’s material conditions. Furthermore, they believe that it is possible to determine, more or less, what sorts of material conditions

are universally desirable. Post-development theorists stress that meaning, dignity and other non-material things play a very big role in making people's lives good, and are less quick to believe that an apparent improvement in people's material conditions amounts to a real improvement in their lives. Furthermore, post-development theorists are not at all convinced that we can pinpoint universally desirable material conditions. This difference is clear when the following two passages – one from Schuurman, a critic of post-development theory, and the other from Shiva, an advocate – are juxtaposed. Shiva (1989, p.10) says that:

People are perceived as poor if they eat millets (grown by women) rather than commercially produced and distributed processed foods sold by global agri-business. They are seen as poor if they live in self-built housing made from natural material like bamboo and mud rather than in cement houses. They are seen as poor if they wear handmade garments of natural fibre rather than synthetics ... [However] millets are nutritionally far superior to processed foods, houses built with local materials are far superior, being better adapted to the climate and ecology, natural fibres are preferable to man-made fibres in most cases, and certainly more affordable.

By contrast, Schuurman (2001, p.10) calls the post-development position 'astonishingly naïve', saying that post-development theorists seem to say:

...let the poor in the Third World forget about needs which resemble our own. Let them forget about wanting a standard of living like that in the North, let them forget about wanting a decent house, access to health care, employment, etc. These needs would draw them into the development process with all the implied negative connotations.

While for Shiva, a bamboo house is an ecologically sound and pleasant type of housing, Schuurman would probably dispute that it is a 'decent house'. For Shiva, it may be better for people to live as subsistence farmers, eating what they grow, building their own houses and living simple rural lives. Schuurman, however, suggests that this way of life is clearly not as desirable as the Western way of life or, at the very least, that there are very good reasons for Third World citizens to desire very many aspects of the Western way of life. Shiva thinks that perhaps people in different parts of the world have different needs, but

Schuurman sees it as naïve to think that people in the Third World will not and should not aspire to the standard of living of those in the North. For their critics who are far more convinced about the desirability of these benefits, and believe that development ought to be about universalising the benefits that people in the affluent, industrialised countries have, post-development theorists are at best naïve and at worst immoral to believe that people in the Third World do not and/or should not aspire to having the benefits of the Western way of life.

According to its critics, post-development theory's focus on critique is politically impoverishing and morally questionable. By focusing on, and often stopping at critique, post-development theorists imply, according to these critics, that there is nothing to be done. Indeed, many post-development theorists seem to intentionally stop at critique out of a sense that it is not legitimate for them to tell other people how to solve their problems. For many critics of post-development theory, the post-development position seems nothing less than indifference to the suffering of distant others, a shirking of duty, or an unwillingness to assist those less well off. It does not seem to many critics that this position is of any use to those in the Third World – to those who Simon (1997, p.184) says 'can still only aspire to safe drinking-water, a roof which does not leak and the like'. Post-development theorists are thus not only politically, but also morally irresponsible. Corbridge (1998b) argues along these lines when he suggests that post-development theory is 'ethically deficient' because insufficient attention is paid to the 'costs and disbenefits' that the 'alternatives to development' suggested and the 'end of development' would entail (Corbridge, 1998b, p.35). Similarly, Fagan (1999, p.180) and Simon (1999, p.18; 2003, p.7) have a sense of moral discomfort about the idea of rejecting development from the

position of a person who has access to all the benefits of a modern, 'developed' life. Mkandawire (2005, p.37) expresses similar discomfort, although in stronger words, accusing post-development writers of agitating against modernity while remaining themselves '[c]omfortably ensconced in the material accoutrements of modernity'.

Another criticism of post-development theory is that it unwittingly plays into the hands of neo-liberal thinkers. Critics feel that while post-development theory differs from neo-liberalism, it is more similar to the position of neo-liberals than may be immediately obvious. Hart (2001) sees key similarities between the polemical approaches of the neo-liberal writer Deepak Lal and those of the post-development writer Wolfgang Sachs. For Hart, (2001, p.650) the approaches of Lal and Sachs are similar in that the 'full force of their combined ferocity is directed at precisely the same target: Development understood as a postwar international project' and in that both employ 'crude conceptions of power' and are anti-state. Bebbington (2000, p.497) argues that the neo-liberal and what he calls the 'poststructural' critiques of development 'converge to a considerable degree'. Both believe that orthodox development has failed, both identify this failure by making use of 'externally defined criteria', and both suggest alternatives which involve diminishing the role of the state. Thus the two approaches are not ultimately that different, especially in that the politics of both involves assigning a very small role to the state. Nederveen Pieterse (2000, p.184) provides a very similar argument, saying that the 'net political effect' of neo-liberalism and post-development theory seem to be the same in that both reject the state as an agent for development, although for different reasons. Likewise, Rapley (2004, p.353) argues that 'politically, [post-development theory] meshes with

presently ascendant neo-liberal thinking that eschews grand development projects in favour of local initiatives'.<sup>27</sup>

Most of the critics of post-development theory retain faith, implicitly at least, in the state as a key agent of development. In this way they differ from neo-liberals and from post-development theorists as both of these groups of writers reject the idea that the state can and ought to play a significant role in the upliftment of its citizens. Even where post-development thinkers do not explicitly reject the state their enthusiasm for grassroots organisations and social movements suggests that they regard such actors as more capable than the state in providing for people's needs. Several critics of post-development believe the state and international organisations have a responsibility to bring about development, and thus that the post-development position ends up letting them off the hook (see for example Nederveen Pieterse, 2000, p.187). Post-development theorists see the improvement of the lives of those in the Third World as more likely to result from the activities of local groups and from local strategies, than from the initiatives of the state or supra-state organisations, but critics question whether the 'local' can really offer a solution. Schuurman (2001, pp. 61-76) wonders what 'emancipatory spaces' are left in our post-modern globalising world. He assesses claims that 'local spaces' have emancipatory potential and finds this unlikely – arguing that 'Concentrating on the emancipatory potential of local space could well turn out to be a neo-liberal cul-de-sac for the poor in the Third World' (Schuurman, 2001, p.74). Drawing on David Harvey's discussion of the 'local space', Schuurman argues that a focus on the local, such as in post-development

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<sup>27</sup> Much neo-liberal thinking certainly does not seem to eschew grand projects although it does eschew grand *state-led* projects, but Rapley may be referring here to the so-called 'post-Washington consensus' discussed earlier, which does to some extent shift the focus towards local initiatives.

theory, only furthers local fragmentation and the 'hollowing out of the state' which will ultimately do nothing to prevent the poor from continuing to be the victims of global capitalism. For Schuurman the nation-state remains a better locus of emancipatory struggle than the 'local'.

A further problem with post-development theory's focus on the local and 'grassroots' movements, is that some post-development theorists seem naïvely to believe that local and grassroots movements will necessarily act in the interests of the poor and marginalised. Nanda (1999) discusses agrarian populism in India, arguing that the example of farmers' movements in India shows the danger of trusting in 'local groups' to solve the problems of the poor in the Third World. While these groups have adopted an anti-imperialist, anti-state and anti-development stance similar to the one advocated by post-development theory, Nanda (1999, pp.16-18) argues that these groups cannot be understood to be serving 'pro-poor and progressive ends'. In fact, it seems that they use post-development discourse to protect their own position of relative power against the poor and landless local agricultural workers. Their use of post-development discourse appears to assist them to get these workers on their side, while acting to entrench their own relatively privileged position. Thus

[f]ar from resisting modernization, the rhetoric of the local serves the interests of those who are most keen and most able to join the modern world of profits and competition and comforts (Nanda, 1999, p.23).

Of course, this does not suggest that post-development discourse will necessarily be used in this way in the local setting, but it does call into question the faith of post-development theorists in local grassroots movements. Storey (2000, p.43) makes a similar point, arguing that local movements are just as likely to have racist, ethnocentric, sexist or other

questionable aims as they are to be truly pro-poor. It does not seem to make sense to entrust the future of the poor in the Third World into the hands of the local. Kiely (1999, p.45) calls this faith in local social movements ‘Pontius Pilate politics’ – because post-development theorists do not provide clear criteria for the identification of the kind of groups that can help improve the lives of the poor in the Third World, they are actually washing their hands of the fate of the poor.

## **2.7 Clarifying the Key Differences between Post-Development Theorists and their Critics**

At this point it is useful to try to identify the core disagreements between post-development theorists and their critics. As mentioned earlier, a key difference relates to their faith in the emancipatory potential of contemporary development initiatives. For post-development theorists, the contemporary idea of development has lost much of its emancipatory appeal, and a careful deconstruction of this idea reveals why this is the case, and justifies the pursuit of radically different approaches. For critics, the failure of past development initiatives, which, it should be noted, they do not altogether dispute, is a partial failure only and demonstrates the need for the refinement and adjustment of the contemporary notion of development, and for its improved implementation.

Why these different responses to the failure of past development initiatives? Much of this has to do with different stances adopted with regard to modernity. For the most part, critics of post-development theory maintain a faith in modernity, while post-development theorists have either lost this faith completely or never had much of it in the first place.

Critics share a sense of duty to expand the benefits of modernity to the rest of the world, whereas post-development theorists question these benefits and draw attention to problems that appear to inevitably accompany the spread of modernity. Relatedly, post-development theory, unlike other critical development theories, includes a critique not only of past development initiatives but also of the contemporary notion of what it means to be developed. As mentioned earlier, much post-development writing includes long discussions of the problems of the modern Western developed way of life, stressing its undesirability. This theme is not as evident in other critical development theory, and shows why post-development theorists come to more radical conclusions. For their critics, the modern Western way of life, despite its flaws, is superior to previous and other contemporary ways of life. They are inspired by the idea that the benefits of this way of life could be extended to the Third World. For post-development theorists, on the other hand, the modern Western way of life, despite its obvious appeal on account of the benefits it offers to specific aspects of our lives, is not significantly better, and may indeed be worse than some earlier and contemporary ways of life. Furthermore, post-development theorists argue that the modern Western way of life causes several of the problems evident in other parts of the world through the exploitation of the environment and Third World people. The goal is thus to find other better ways of life, drawing chiefly on currently marginalised ways of seeing and being in the world.

## **2.8 New Directions in Post-Development Thinking?**

As indicated in Chapter 1, the post-development debate has abated somewhat and some key post-development thinkers have begun to write on topics other than development. While I will be concentrating on the post-development writings of these thinkers rather than on their other work, it is interesting and revealing to note the directions which they have recently taken.

Escobar, perhaps the best-known of the post-development theorists, has recently been writing about social movements and the World Social Forum (WSF) with which he has been actively involved (see Escobar, 2004a; 2004b). But while his key post-development writings focus predominantly on critique, his new work is more concerned with building alternatives to current economic practices. Two other prominent post-development thinkers, Sachs and Latouche, have also shifted focus a little. Sachs' recent publications focus on the environment and sustainability, and he was involved in a large critical discussion forum related to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (see Sachs, 2000; 2002; Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2002). For his part, Latouche has been writing about and campaigning for something called *la décroissance* ('low growth' or 'degrowth' economics). He, and other proponents of *décroissance*,<sup>28</sup> oppose infinite economic growth and believe that we should work towards the creation of 'integrated, self-sufficient, materially responsible societies' (see Latouche, 2004a). These shifts in focus on the part of Escobar, Sachs and Latouche are slight, with their recent research building on their earlier work. Indeed, if anything, their more recent work is more moderate and

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<sup>28</sup> Rahnema is another post-development theorist who has begun to advocate *décroissance* (see Rahnema, 2004).

forward-looking and all three authors now collaborate with a variety of alternative development thinkers, who do not necessarily embrace post-development.

## **2.9 A Brief Defence of Post-Development Theory, or a Version Thereof**

After reviewing post-development theory and the criticisms levied at it, I now need to indicate my own position with regard to this debate. Throughout the rest of the thesis, I would like to assume what could be described as a broadly post-development position. By this I mean a position with the following features: first, a generally critical approach to past development theory and practice; second, a profound scepticism about the universalisability and desirability of the way of life of those living in the so-called developed regions; and, third, a belief that the worldviews, ways of living and ways of responding to poverty and oppression of the so-called ‘underdeveloped’ merit more attention than they currently receive in mainstream development literature. For while the criticisms of post-development theory reveal many flaws in the latter, I do not believe that they make a post-development position characterised by these features indefensible.

The first feature is one shared by many contemporary commentators on development theory and practice. The failure of past development initiatives to achieve their stated goals makes a critical approach to past development theory and practice easily defensible. The second feature of my post-development position, that relating to the questioning of the universalisability and desirability of the developed way of life, is also easily defended, although it must be said that critics of post-development theory are right to be concerned about the way in which post-development rejection of the developed way of life leads them

to romanticise and uncritically embrace non-Western ways of life and to essentialise both the West and the Third World. Debate about the extent to which so-called developed region lifestyles are more desirable than other ways of living (real or imagined, past or present) is certainly needed to counter the pervasive allegiance to this way of life implicit in much mainstream development theory and practice. While there is much to recommend the way of life of those in the developed world, it is not sufficiently desirable to merit such uncritical allegiance. Scepticism about the possibility of universalising this way of life is even more easily defended than scepticism about its desirability. Even those who believe that current concerns about ecological limits are exaggerated would not argue that the way of life of those in the developed regions can be extended to all of the earth's inhabitants. Ecological limits do indeed make the belief that we can and should all live lives similar to those in the industrialised North problematic. The post-development argument that the developed way of life is dependent on the exploitation of the labour and resources of the poor, is perhaps more controversial than the question of ecological limits, but not so controversial as to make it indefensible to suggest that the likelihood that the developed way of life is premised at least partly upon exploitation should give us pause when presenting this life as desirable. Thus, a sceptical stance with regard to the desirability and universalisability of the developed way of life, is a position that can easily be defended. Thirdly, the desire to explore and disseminate the ideas and practices of Third World and other marginalised people seems difficult to oppose. While the claim that post-development theorists romanticise the poor may be justified in several instances, there is surely nothing questionable about a desire to explore the validity and usefulness of approaches that have often been disregarded by development theorists and practitioners.

Thus it seems that a post-development position, as defined above, is worth defending. However, some clarification is needed. It could be said that while what I choose to call a post-development position is indeed defensible, the position *actually* adopted by a number of prominent post-development thinkers is not. To this, all I can say is that the position I identify is one that seems to me to capture some of the better and more important arguments that have been advanced as part of post-development thinking and that have been better articulated by post-development theorists than by other critical development theorists. It may well exclude some features of the post-development literature and is certainly a more moderate position than that suggested by some post-development thinkers. It is nonetheless a position inspired by a reading of the post-development literature, albeit tempered by several of the critical responses to post-development theory. If the position I adopt meets with the approval of some of the critics of post-development theory, many of whose criticisms I am fairly sympathetic to, that is all the better.

I choose then to adopt this post-development position, while acknowledging the validity and importance of many of the criticisms of post-development theory summarised above. The first two criticisms discussed – those relating to flaws in methodology and argumentation and to unhelpful generalisations – are to a considerable extent deserved. Several post-development theorists risk being dismissed because of a lack of rigour and careful argumentation and a predilection for sweeping statements where more subtle and cautious wording would be more prudent.<sup>29</sup> Although I think these criticisms are correct, it should be noted that the problem is sometimes one of style and intended audience rather than content, where the flamboyant style of some post-development writers, whose

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<sup>29</sup> Rahnema, Latouche, Esteva and Prakash are perhaps most guilty here.

intended audience is often outside academia, jars with the more careful, analytical style of their critics. With regard to the criticisms relating to the inadequate presentation of alternatives and the politics of post-development theory, I am sympathetic to the post-development theorists, although I think that the points made in this respect by Nanda (1999; 2002), Corbridge (1998a) and Gidwani (2002) deserve careful attention. I do not believe that an inadequate presentation of an alternative is on its own sufficient reason to reject a body of literature.<sup>30</sup> And, turning to the politics of post-development theory, I disagree with those critics who suggest that adopting a post-development position *necessarily* entails an abandonment of the poor and oppressed, but accept that some of the arguments advanced as part of post-development theory could certainly lead us in politically problematic directions.<sup>31</sup>

The position that I adopt in this thesis, then, is clearly one adopted in the light of a critical engagement with the post-development debate as a whole, rather than on the basis of an exclusive preference for either post-development ideas or the criticisms levied at these ideas. It is thus a position that, while certainly sympathetic to post-development theory, can hardly be described as being loyal or completely committed to it. I am not the first to try to accept some of the arguments advanced by proponents of post-development while rejecting others. And, as Ziai (2004) and Simon (2006) do something similar, it is helpful to briefly consider their attempts to take on board aspects of post-development theory while distancing themselves from other elements of post-development thinking. Simon (2006, pp.11-12; 2003, p.7, 36 [in endnote]) distinguishes between what he calls ‘anti-

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<sup>30</sup> For an argument along these lines see Nustad (2001).

<sup>31</sup> An example here is the call to ‘leave the poor alone’ (*Laissez donc les pauvres tranquilles*) made at a Francophone post-development colloquium (see Rahnema et al., 2002).

development' and 'post-development'. Anti-development texts present a radical and derisive critique of development, lambasting it for causing cultural destruction, marginalisation and dependency in the Third World. Simon points to Escobar's *Encountering Development* as a key text in the anti-development library. In contrast, Simon characterises post-development theory as more forward-looking, involving literature in which new alternatives to development are proposed, both by some of those who earlier wrote anti-development texts, such as Escobar and Sachs, but also by other critical commentators on development. The distinction Simon makes, then, is not one between two sets of writers but rather a distinction between critical backward-looking anti-developmentalism, about which he is not very positive, and more forward-looking ideas which concentrate on proposing alternatives, about which he is more optimistic.

Ziai (2004) also distinguishes between two variants of post-development theory: a reactionary populist one and a radical democratic one. According to Ziai (2004, pp.1054-1056), one variant of post-development theory rejects modernity completely and argues in favour of a return to a romanticised subsistence-based existence. This he calls the neo-populist variant, singling out Rahnema (with Bawtree, 1997) and Alvares (1992) in particular as advocates of this position. The other variant, which Ziai believes is promoted by writers like Escobar (1995), Esteva and Prakash (1998), Banuri (1990a; 1990b) and Apffel-Marglin (1996), is as cautious in its praise of both 'the local' and cultural traditions, as in its criticism of modernity. He argues that this variant fits nicely with the idea of radical democracy as espoused by Lummis (1996) and Laclau and Mouffe (2001), in that it favours radical decentralisation and the rejection of universal models.

Like Ziai and Simon, I seek to build upon the valuable insights of some post-development theorists while disregarding some of the less helpful post-development literature and while taking into consideration much of the criticism of post-development theory. Building thus upon the post-development debate as a whole rather than only on post-development literature, I seek to suggest some possible ways in which we who are relatively privileged may be able to contribute to struggles against poverty and injustice. What follows is thus neither a critique nor a defence of post-development theory, but rather an attempt to address the question of how to respond to poverty and injustice in the light of the concerns raised in the post-development debate.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

A number of interesting and difficult issues arise from the post-development debate. One such issue relates to the difficulty of finding an adequate response to poverty and injustice, given the failure of so many development initiatives aimed at addressing these problems. If post-development theorists are right to be so critical of past development initiatives, and of the theories which undergirded them, but their critics are right in stressing the importance of a continued commitment to respond to poverty and injustice, then some way of moving past and building upon this debate is needed. In the chapters which follow, I will try to provide some pointers for doing just this.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **WHAT, THEN, SHOULD WE DO?**

There is a nagging concern which informs criticisms of the politics of post-development theory: if development is not the solution to the problems of the poor and oppressed, what is? One reason why many development theorists find the post-development critique so offensive is because it suggests that past development theory and practice have done little to improve the world, and may indeed have done more harm than good. For those development theorists who have seen their work as playing some role in bringing about positive societal change, this is obviously a disturbing and offensive claim. In countering it, they argue that the post-development position could be used to defend inaction on the part of educated elites, as it suggests that such elites are incapable of providing meaningful assistance to the poor, and that societies will be better improved by local grassroots initiatives than by elite or foreign intervention. For critics of post-development theory, this position amounts to a shirking of a moral duty; it lets educated elites ‘off the moral hook’ (Simon, 1997, p.197). Thus, we are left with the very important question I highlight at the start of this thesis: how should we who are relatively privileged respond to the problems of poverty and injustice in the light of the post-development debate? In this chapter I address this question in more detail, beginning with a clarification of the ‘us’/‘them’ distinction that seems to inform my research question and then relating this question to some relevant points made by those engaged in the post-development debate. I end the chapter by sketching in broad outline the way in which I will respond to this question in the chapters to follow.

### **3.1 'Us', 'Them' And 'Distant Others': Some Clarification**

The question I explore here seems to suggest some distinction between 'we, the privileged' and 'they, the poor and oppressed'. Given that one of the features of post-development theory is its rejection of the legitimacy of the developed/underdeveloped distinction, I need to explain why I use a distinction which appears to be similar to this problematic developed/underdeveloped one. It seems that even if we do reject the legitimacy of labelling some people or regions 'developed', and others as 'underdeveloped' or 'developing', there is a relevant distinction to be made between those who suffer as a result of the problems development initiatives purport to address and those who do not; between those who are poor and oppressed and those who are not. Post-development theory's rejection of development ought not to be read as a complete denial of the problems to which development initiatives aim to respond, but only as a denial of the way in which such problems are defined and addressed.

Despite rejecting the developed/underdeveloped distinction, Sachs (2000; 2002), and Esteva and Prakash (1998), key post-development thinkers, make a distinction which is similar but not identical to the developed/underdeveloped distinction they reject. Esteva and Prakash (1998, p.16) distinguish between 'the social minorities', who they define as being

those groups in both the North and the South that share homogeneous ways of modern (western) life all over the world ... and are immersed in economic society: the so-called 'formal sector'

and, on the other hand, 'the social majorities', who are those who 'have no regular access to most of the goods and services defining the average "standard of living" in the

industrialised countries' (Esteva and Prakash, 1998, p.16). Likewise, Sachs distinguishes between 'the global consumer class', which is 'made up of the majority of citizens in the North, along with a varying number of elites in the South' with an 'overall size equat[ing] roughly to those 20 percent of the world population who have direct access to an automobile' (Sachs, 2002, p.14); and the 'social majority' who are the many excluded from this category (see also Sachs, 2000). This distinction is similar in some ways to the developed/underdeveloped one, but differs from it in that the division is not explicitly geographical/spatial, but rather one related to ways of life and economic wealth. Furthermore, writers such as Esteva, Prakash and Sachs seek to challenge the connotations usually associated with the two groups created by such distinctions. Rather than presenting the social minorities as the normative ideal to which all others ought to aspire, this 'global consumer class' is presented as living an unsustainable, destructive and ultimately unfulfilling consumerist lifestyle. The social majorities, on the other hand, are presented in a positive, some would say romanticised, way: they 'share a common freedom in their rejection of "global forces"' (Esteva and Prakash, 1998, p.17) and are 'opening roads to prosperity' and 'regenerating social fabrics within which personal and collective hopes can be interwoven into a whole' (Esteva and Prakash, 1998, p.205). It seems, then, that some post-development theorists do not so much reject the act of distinguishing between two such groups as they do the presentation of the minority group's way of life as an ideal to be aspired to by the majority.

Likewise, most critics of post-development theory do not want to get rid of some kind of distinction which places school-educated, car driving, credit card swiping, supermarket shoppers on one side and a whole host of other people on the other, united more by what

they do *not* do than what they do. When such critics warn that post-development theory seems to say ‘let the poor in the Third World forget about needs which resemble our own’ (Schuurman, 2001, p.10) or that it lets educated elites ‘off the moral hook’ (Simon, 1997, p.197), they are acknowledging the existence of two groups more or less equivalent to the ‘developed’ and the ‘not developed’, although I suspect that most such critics (and certainly Schuurman and Simon) would agree with Sachs, Esteva and Prakash in stressing that these categories are not geographical so much as to do with lifestyle. Thus, the educated elites who must not be let off the hook live not only in the West but also in the comfortable suburbs of many Third World cities.

It seems correct then to say that even if the developed/underdeveloped distinction is flawed, it is reasonable to make a distinction between those who live lives which correspond to the ideals that have been associated with the developed way of life and those who do not. However, I think that a further distinction might be made between those who live lives which are comfortable and secure but do not correspond to the ideals of the developed way of life and those who live lives of poverty and suffering. Esteva and Prakash’s social majorities certainly include many who are able to point to different kinds of prosperity and propose viable alternatives to unfulfilling consumerism, but this category also includes those whose lives are characterised by real and continued deprivation and oppression. While post-development theorists are correct to point out that many of those living lives others label as ‘underdeveloped’ are actually living meaningful, sustainable, pleasant lives; critics are correct to draw our attention to the suffering of those whose material and security needs are not met and whose lives are characterised by misery. Thus, within the ‘social majorities’, there is a sub-category of people who live lives that cannot

just be considered to be different to our own, but must also be considered to be unambiguously worse. And it is arguably to this category of people that those of us who are privileged need to respond.<sup>1</sup> Thus, I think it possible to speak of an ‘us’ who live lives of relative material privilege and power and a ‘them’ who live lives of suffering and oppression, without forgetting that there are also many who fit into neither category – whose lives cannot be characterised as materially privileged but which are also not characterised by poverty and misery. The privileged are perhaps not compelled to respond to the latter category of people, but surely we must ask how we may respond to those who are poor and oppressed.

In attempting to discuss possible responses I will use this rough us/them dichotomy to distinguish between the ‘global consumer class’ or ‘social minorities’ on the one hand, and the poor and oppressed who make up a significant part of the ‘social majorities’ on the other. I should stress that my ‘us’ includes Third World elites like myself and that references to ‘our’ societies are references to the sorts of societies to which members of this global consumer class, be they citizens of the West or of the Third World, belong. I use the term ‘societies’ loosely and certainly do not mean geographically bounded communities but rather groups which associate in some way and have some sense of commonality.

Related to the above, I should also clarify what I mean by the ‘distant others’ to whom I will refer several times in the sections to follow. This term is often used in discussions

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<sup>1</sup> I do not defend this claim here, but I do provide arguments for why privileged people ought to respond to the less privileged elsewhere in the thesis – see for example my discussion further on in this chapter of Corbridge (1991; 1994; 1998b) and Yapa’s (1996, 2002a) arguments about the interconnectedness of privilege and poverty.

about our responsibilities to those who live radically different lives than we do. Sometimes this term is used to refer to geographically distant others, but I use it more often to mean those who are distant from us in that their lives, their experiences, and their problems are radically different from our own such that there is great ‘distance’ between us even when we meet face to face – for example, I regularly meet face to face with hungry, homeless beggars, but there is a great distance between us in these encounters in that neither I nor the beggar can properly imagine what the other’s life is really like. Whether these others are geographically distant or not, the expansion and increasing complexity of economic relations today means that their lives are intricately tied up with our own in a variety of complicated and often obscured ways. Finally, it should be noted that the ‘distant others’ to whom I refer are typically members of the social majorities described above.

### **3.2 Debating Our Responsibilities**

The question of what we the privileged should do in the face of the suffering of others, has been addressed or at least touched upon by several of those engaged in the post-development debate, some of whom advocate a post-development position and some of whom do not. In what follows I draw on James Ferguson (1990), Gilbert Rist (1997), Lakshman Yapa (1996; 2002a), David Simon (1999; 2003; 2006) and Stuart Corbridge (1991; 1994; 1998b),<sup>2</sup> bringing out certain common themes but also highlighting differences between these five writers. While Ferguson, Rist and Yapa are typically associated with post-development theory, Simon and particularly Corbridge are critical of,

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<sup>2</sup> The question ‘what should we do’ cuts through the articles by Simon and Corbridge rather than being addressed in one particular place within them. Ferguson and Rist both conclude their books with a discussion of this question (see Ferguson, 1990, pp.279-288; Rist, 1997, pp.238-248), while Yapa (1996, p.723) concludes his article with a brief discussion of this point.

although not completely unsympathetic to, post-development theory. I have chosen to more closely examine these writers as they have all made insightful comments on what ‘we’ ought to do in the light of post-development theory and, while I think there are significant points upon which they disagree, later sections of the thesis will focus on strategies which are broadly compatible with their responses to this question.

Ferguson, Yapa and Rist each address the question ‘What should we do?’ at the end of discussions in which they have provided profound critiques of development. Each points to ways in which we can respond to the plight of the poor of the Third World without taking the pitfall-strewn paths that have typically been taken by development workers. All three point out that responding to the plight of the poor does not necessarily mean going ‘out there’ and intervening in poor communities themselves. Ferguson (1990, p.285) feels that two approaches are often unhelpfully juxtaposed:

‘Applied’ researchers, the cliché goes, are willing to go out and get their hands dirty working for ‘development’ agencies; ‘academic’ researchers, on the other hand, stay in their ivory towers, and keep their hands and consciences clean.

In a quest to ‘do something’, many scholars use their position to give advice to state agencies in the hope that these agencies will use this advice to uplift the oppressed. For Ferguson, however, this strategy has many limitations. His experience of the role of the state in development interventions suggests that we need to guard against a ‘falsely universalizing or even heroizing view of the state’ (Ferguson, 1990, p.284). Another strategy adopted by scholars committed to ‘doing something’ is one of providing advice to national and international development organisations, but this approach too seems to be flawed as the kind of advice that these organisations will accept is often very limited. Ferguson (1990, p.285) believes that while advising development organisations may ‘have

some beneficial or mitigating effects ... it does not change the fundamental character of [their] interventions'. According to Ferguson, it is the overall character of such interventions, and not just specific strategies that need changing. Ferguson (1990, p.286) is more optimistic about another form of engagement – political participation 'in one's own society' – arguing that Western anthropologists (and surely also other academics too) are able, through their teaching and through public speaking and advocacy, to apply their knowledge 'to the task of combating imperialist policies and advancing the causes of Third World peoples'. This may not be the only role that we can play, and Ferguson does not suggest that it is or should be. But we ought to recognise that teaching, public speaking, advocacy and, I would add, research can contribute to the alleviation of poverty, albeit from a distance and in ways that are not always immediately evident.

In a similar vein Yapa (1996; 2002a) points out that it is wrong to understand poverty as located 'over there' with the poor and thus to assume that in order to address poverty one needs to intervene in the poor community or region. Rather, we should see that poverty arises within a complex nexus of relations and that this nexus extends into non-poor communities and regions. It follows, then, that one can help to transform the relations that cause poverty and oppression without necessarily intervening in the poor community itself.

Thus, argues Yapa (1996, p.723):

'My solution' [to the problem of poverty] is aimed at fellow academics who, like myself, are deeply implicated in the problem and whose power lies primarily in our capacity to engage the discourse critically.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Before making this statement, Yapa stresses that he does not seek to provide a general solution or a 'solution in the world', but rather that he would like to talk only about what he himself is able to do in response to the problem of poverty. Thus he does not think 'his solution' is *the* solution, but that it is something he can do.

Relatedly, Rist (1997, p.245) suggests that one of the things we can and should do is to question the underlying concepts informing development theory and practice and to propose new ones in their stead. Rist (1997, p.247) argues that more action in favour of the less advantaged is insufficient. We also need to interrogate the ideas which have been associated with the many failed attempts to help such people and to challenge 'evident ideas' that form part of contemporary discourses on development. Once the currently dominant ways of analysing and explaining poverty and related problems have been interrogated, other kinds of analysis and other explanatory models can be proposed and their merits debated.

In the light of the specific comments made by Ferguson, Yapa and Rist, and also of the general thrust of post-development theory with its emphasis on words, ideas, discourse and knowledge, it seems clear that sitting behind a desk thinking and writing about concepts and theories or standing in front of a university class teaching is also 'doing something' and is a viable and necessary way to respond to the suffering of the less privileged. But is this the only legitimate way of responding to the question 'What should we do?'. In the current climate of sensitivity to difference and reluctance to speak on behalf of others, is there any scope at all for more direct intervention among poor communities? None of the above three writers argue that all intervention in such communities is inadvisable or dangerous and certainly not that all contact and engagement with them ought to be avoided; but they are very cautious about what possible roles the privileged should play within poor communities. For example, Ferguson (1990, p.287) cautions

We must entertain the strong possibility that there will be no need for what we do among such actors [referring here to local organisations such as labour unions, peasant movements, religious organisations and the like]. There is no guarantee that our knowledge and skills will be relevant. We must recognize that it is possible too, that different kinds of

knowledge and skills will be required, that the nature of our intellectual activity itself will have to be transformed in order to participate in this way. But the possibilities are there to be explored.

This approach is significantly different from, although not necessarily opposed to, that of David Simon and Stuart Corbridge who call for continued intervention in the Third World. In an impassioned plea for continued commitment to development practice, Simon argues that ‘it is the *basis of intervention* rather more than *whether* to intervene that is at stake’ (1999, p.45, emphasis in the original). While he cautions against the sort of Eurocentrism and missionary zeal that characterised many earlier development interventions, he opposes ‘important strands of mainstream post-structuralist, postmodern and postcolonial work [which] would have us disengage from practising development at all’ (Simon, 1999, p.18), and stresses that

we cannot abandon our moral responsibility to the poor unless we see ourselves as café patrons who studiously if somewhat uncomfortably ignore the pavement beggar or we regard the struggle for survival and development of the poor in (our own and) other cultures and countries as a leisure-time spectacle akin to a latter-day gladiatorial contest to be observed and discussed at a safe distance, albeit on television rather than in the Coliseum! (Simon, 1999, p.46)

Simon suggests that reflection on or debate about the plight of the poor is insufficient, stressing the importance of fieldwork and practical engagement with poor communities as an important part of our moral responsibility.<sup>4</sup> While I do not believe that he would necessarily oppose the sort of work suggested by Ferguson, Yapa and Rist, his emphasis is different. He continually stresses the importance of practical, face-to-face engagement with such communities and with those who work closely with them, and he would likely be

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<sup>4</sup> Simon is referring particularly to the moral responsibility of academics, especially Western academics. What he says regarding fieldwork is not relevant to privileged people outside of academia.

uncomfortable with any response to poverty that avoided fieldwork in the Third World and practical engagement with, and intervention in, poor communities.

Like Simon, Corbridge is uncomfortable with criticisms of development which imply that the best that we can do to help distant others is to withdraw and allow their local movements to improve their lives. He insists:

... that a mistrust of grand political projects and their associated 'metanarratives' should not encourage us to betray reason and the claims of justice entirely in favour of a political localism which is at best activist and at worst deconstructive to the point of voyeurism (Corbridge 1994, pp.109-110).

Corbridge is not just concerned about the trend to withdraw from practical engagement with and intervention in poor communities, but also with the extreme sensitivity to difference that informs this withdrawal. Those who feel that development interventions unavoidably involve insensitivity to cultural difference and the imposition of foreign values, and that such imposition should always be resisted, would tend to argue against 'us' getting involved in helping 'them' in any way. Corbridge warns that this sort of attitude can drift into 'an amoral politics of indifference' (Corbridge, 1998b, p.46) or may 'shunt us towards a politics of despair' (Corbridge, 1991, p.317). If we believe that others are fundamentally different from ourselves and that we can neither understand their needs nor meaningfully respond to them, then the only way we can help them is by 'backing off; by listening to and not speaking for, and by effecting spatial absences not spatial presences' (Corbridge, 1998b, p.43). Corbridge would like to avoid this extreme position and to salvage a concern that has been at the heart of much development theory and practice – the concern to respond morally to the terrible inequities between different people and regions.

In order to do this he argues that we need to maintain a minimalist universalism rather than embracing the sort of cultural relativism that seems to follow from some of the arguments made by post-development thinkers. He does not believe that it is possible to work for meaningful transformation, even on a local level, without some sort of broad vision of social change, even if only a very general one. International trade, economic integration and new information and communication technologies mean that the local and the global are tied up in complex ways and so it seems inappropriate to advocate an avowedly local approach which refuses to engage with more general questions at all. Corbridge (1998b, p.44) argues that in our contemporary context hardly any communities are completely closed off from all others: ‘ours is a radically modern age in which the lives of distant strangers are ever more entangled in a dense web of disembedded and unequal social relations’. It is thus unrealistic to advocate the complete severance of all ties, both direct and indirect, between different groups and so we have to think about what claims those who are in a relatively disadvantaged position within these webs of relations may have towards those of us who are more advantaged. As a result of these webs of social relations their poverty and our wealth have something to do with each other and so we have a moral duty to respond in some way to their plight.<sup>5</sup> Corbridge would like to see more attention being given to the field of development ethics through a closer engagement between development studies and moral and political philosophy (Corbridge, 1994, p.110).<sup>6</sup> In sketching the broad contours of the path that he would like to see taken he argues in favour of a position which acknowledges the distant causes of many local conditions, which does not shy away from calling the inequities between different parts of the world unjust, and

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<sup>5</sup> Several other writers working in the field of moral and political philosophy make similar arguments – see especially Pogge (2002; 2005).

<sup>6</sup> David Smith (1997; 1999; 2001) makes a similar point when he argues for greater contact and communication between moral philosophy and human geography.

which pushes for action to be taken in response to the plight of distant others following guidelines drawn from the insights of moral and political philosophy and particularly from theories of justice (Corbridge, 1994, p.111).

Following Corbridge (1991; 1994; 1998b), and to some extent Yapa (1996; 2002a), I would argue that the level of interconnectedness between ourselves and distant others means that we cannot understand their situation as being completely unrelated to our own and that, because of this relatedness, we have some sort of moral obligation to respond to the plight of those who occupy a disadvantaged position in the complex webs of relations in which we are more favourably positioned. As post-development theorists point out, it is all too easy for our concern to help these others to degenerate into an arrogant paternalism or clumsy insensitivity to difference. However, while this means that responding to the plight of distant others is complex and fraught with potential pitfalls, it is neither possible nor desirable to advocate just 'leaving the poor alone'.<sup>7</sup> It is not possible because our lives are intricately tied up with the poor as there are so many economic, social and political webs of relations from which we cannot realistically completely extricate ourselves. This is particularly so in a globalising world in which an increasing number of people live transnational existences. It is not desirable because to do so would be to refuse the possibility of any kind of meaningful engagement with these others and surely our lives can be enriched by engaging with and learning from those whose lives are radically different from our own. But, as Corbridge stresses, meaningful engagement with others and an appropriate response to their plight requires a carefully constructed theory of justice

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<sup>7</sup> It has sometimes been suggested by post-development theorists that we should indeed just leave the poor alone – see Rahnema et al. (2002).

which takes on board concerns about sensitivity to difference without abandoning a general vision of justice.

Following Ferguson, Rist and Yapa, I would stress however, that active intervention in poor communities is not the only way in which to respond to the plight of the poor and that an over-emphasis on such intervention may obscure other, possibly more appropriate, ways in which to respond to their plight. If we are to truly address the situation of these distant others we need to reflect on and work to transform our own lives and the lives of those less distant from us. Without the transformation of the attitudes of those in our societies, we will not be able to change the relations between 'us' and 'them'. Thus thinking, teaching, writing and participating in public and not-so-public debates in our societies is also a viable and important way to respond to the plight of the poor. However, as Simon stresses, this should not entail an abandonment of meaningful engagement and conversation with distant others. While we ought to recognise the many difficulties involved in fieldwork and in other ways in which we may have contact with such others, it is difficult to see how we will be able to transform the relations between us and them without having some idea about how they live and what they advocate. We may, as Ferguson suggests, need to radically transform the way in which we engage with others; but complete withdrawal from any form of engagement seems indefensible.

The scathing critique of development provided by post-development theory and the recognition of the failure of so many past development initiatives did, at least to some extent, bring the 'towering lighthouse' of development (Sachs, 1992, p.1) tumbling down. But now, a decade after the emergence of a whole host of anti-development texts, the dust

is settling and in the ‘silence after the act of deconstruction’ (Blaikie, 2000, p.1039) an insistent whisper is becoming increasingly audible – ‘What, then, should we do?’.<sup>8</sup> The five authors discussed above provide us with some important pointers in this respect. Their discussions point out the importance of continuing to respond to the plight of distant others, but do not advocate continuing along the same old road that development activists have taken over the last few decades. Rather, argue Ferguson, Yapa and Rist, we need to explore ways in which reflection, research and advocacy within ‘our’ societies can play an important role in transforming the web of relations which advantages ‘us’ and disadvantages ‘them’. However, in order to do this effectively we must, as Simon stresses, continue to have some sort of engagement with distant others. Furthermore, following Corbridge, we need to relate our engagement to a broad theory of justice thereby refusing to succumb to more extreme forms of cultural relativism which seem to view meaningful cross-cultural engagement as impossible.

### **3.3 Where To From Here?**

What paths are we then to take? What responses to poverty and injustice can take shape in the aftermath of the post-development critique? What are we to do? The rest of this chapter begins to answer such questions, preparing the way for the more detailed responses that are set out later in the thesis. Here, I outline responses to the question ‘What should *we* do?’ rather than the broader question ‘What should be done?’. I try to think through ways in which we who occupy relatively advantaged positions in contemporary relations of power and privilege can try to respond to poverty and injustice, both effectively and ethically. I do

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<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to Blaikie not only for the phrase indicated, but for the general metaphor being used here.

not answer the question ‘What should they do?’, both because I have deep reservations about my ability to respond to it and because I do not think that the academic arena is a particularly helpful space in which to answer this question, given that those who are not privileged are for the most part unable to participate in this space, although activist-academics have been trying to increase such participation.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, I set out to respond only to the question of how those who are relatively privileged can and ought to respond to the suffering of those who are not. I introduce and outline three broad responses, all of which I believe are compatible with what I earlier defined as a post-development position. All three will be fleshed out in much more detail, and with reference to the experiences of the NGO Enda Graf Sahel, in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I introduce them here to provide an indication of the general direction of the discussion to follow.

### **3.3.1 Rethinking the Struggle**

Post-development theory devotes a lot of time to dissecting the conceptual framework within which the ‘development industry’ operates. Sachs’ (1992) *Development Dictionary* is a seminal text in this respect. However, as Dower (1993, p.87) points out in a review of the dictionary, once the deconstruction of the development discourse has been completed, it is necessary to provide an alternative conceptual framework through the redefinition of the deconstructed terms or the proposal of new terms in their place. If we acknowledge that at least some of the problems development initiatives purport to address do exist, albeit not as defined in much development literature, and we acknowledge that we ought to respond

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<sup>9</sup> See Ferguson’s (1990, p.281) comments on the question ‘What should they do?’ for some insights into why we ought to be very careful about responding to this question.

in some way to these problems, we then need to define what exactly our struggle is against and what it favours.

Development is often presented as the solution to the problems of poverty, inequity and injustice or to some combination of these problems or others related to them. While post-development theory has problematised the way in which such problems have typically been defined and addressed, it has not gone as far as to suggest that poverty, inequity and injustice ought not to be addressed in one way or another. This is acknowledged in Escobar's *Encountering Development*, for example, which admits that:

To be sure, there is a situation of economic exploitation that must be recognized and dealt with ... There is also a certain materiality of life conditions that is extremely preoccupying and that requires effort and attention. But those seeking to understand the Third World through development have long lost sight of this materiality by building upon it a reality that like a castle in the air has haunted us for decades. Understanding the history of the investment of the Third World by Western forms of knowledge and power is a way to shift the ground somewhat so that we can start to look at that materiality with different eyes and in different categories (Escobar, 1995, p.53).

Texts like Escobar's have performed some of this 'ground shifting' and so perhaps now we can begin to try to look at these problems with the 'different eyes' to which he refers.

Chapter 5 will thus examine some different ways of looking at the problems of poverty, inequity and injustice – three very broad concepts which, depending on how they are defined, can encompass much of what seems to characterise the suffering of the 'distant others' which development initiatives continually fail to address. In doing so, it will draw on post-development literature, the literature of Enda Graf Sahel, as well as relevant literature on justice which I believe can be helpful here.

### **3.3.2 Supporting Popular Initiatives**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, post-development theorists are generally suspicious of ‘expert’ knowledge and draw attention to the wisdom and creativity of local and grassroots movements. They prefer to place their faith in such movements than to continue to look to development initiatives – particularly large, international initiatives – to solve problems such as poverty.

Some post-development literature spends much time trying to dispel the image constructed by mainstream development discourse, sometimes unintentionally, of Third World citizens as helpless victims and First World citizens as capable and in control and as able to assist these poor victims. Esteva and Prakash’s (1998) *Grassroots Post-Modernism* and Mies and Shiva’s (1993) *Ecofeminism* are two examples of this kind of literature. Both books, particularly *Ecofeminism*, include lengthy critiques of the Western way of life, arguing that the lives led by First World citizens may not be as meaningful and as happy as suggested in standard development literature. Both books go on to discuss the lifestyles of particular groups of so-called underdeveloped people, presenting their lives as being considerably more fulfilling and enabling than mainstream development literature would suggest. They show that people in the Third World constantly find ways to address their problems, that these problems are often different to what is supposed,<sup>10</sup> and that there is no justification for the arrogant assumption that ‘we’ have the solutions and ‘they’ the problems. Indeed, the authors of these two books suggest that ‘they’ may well have the solutions to ‘our’ problems. Esteva and Prakash (1998, p.73) talk about how these ‘social majorities’ can teach us ‘how to remain outside the trap of becoming extensions of our Apples and IBMs’

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<sup>10</sup> For example, while it may be supposed that what poor people need is more job opportunities, specific groups of poor people may benefit more from, for example, greater access to land.

and make us realise ‘that we can learn from our ancestors to walk the paths of escape from the horrors of modernity’ (1998, p.193).

While this kind of analysis – one that presents ‘us’ as in need of ‘their’ help – is a much needed antidote to the mainstream depiction of ‘us’ and ‘them’, it risks flipping the problematic Third World victim/First World helpful agent dichotomy over and presenting ‘us’ as confused, alienated, depraved victims and ‘them’ as wise sages able to guide us out of our modern nightmare. We need to applaud the questioning of the standard depiction of each of these groups, but need to then ask questions about how ‘we’ can relate to ‘them’ if we are to be neither their paternalistic helpers nor their admiring disciples. If we accept that ‘they’ have something to teach us but may also require our help in responding to certain problems, how are we to learn from them and how are we to help them respond to their problems? The first question is an important one but not one that I will be addressing extensively in this study. No participant in the post-development debate has suggested that ‘they’ have nothing to teach ‘us’, making this a not very controversial claim,<sup>11</sup> whereas there is much disagreement about whether and how ‘we’ should help ‘them’ respond to their problems. Once we have cast off our arrogant missionary zeal, and even while we listen to and learn from these social majorities, are there also ways in which we may be of assistance to them?

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<sup>11</sup> I do not mean to suggest that this claim is completely uncontroversial nor that it deserves no further research. My study is very much a response to the post-development debate and thus focuses on much-discussed issues in this debate. As such, I will not be paying much attention to this question of how and what we can learn from the ‘underdeveloped’ as critics of post-development theory have not really taken issue with the post-development theorists’ claim that the ‘underdeveloped’ have something to teach us. Nevertheless, I do think that there is a need for further discussion and research about this issue.

One of the ways in which we may set about providing such assistance is through favouring the support of existing local initiatives above the initiation of new projects based on the assessments or ideas of those outside the community in need of assistance. This strategy is less likely to involve the imposition of inappropriate values or practices as it takes what poor people are already doing and believe ought to be done as the starting point. While there are several questions to ask about how this can be done, this path seems a promising one. It is significant therefore that one of the main characteristics of Enda Graf Sahel's recent approach to poverty relief is a commitment to supporting existing local initiatives rather than initiating projects of their own. How this is done and the triumphs and difficulties that have been recorded in this respect aid reflection on the question of what role 'we' may have in advancing 'their' emancipation. In Chapter 6 I use the ideas and experiences of Enda Graf Sahel staff members to explore ways in which those who are privileged may support popular initiatives.

### **3.3.3 Solidarity with Distant Others Here at Home**

As mentioned previously, post-development theory draws to some extent on dependency theory. Like dependency theorists, post-development thinkers argue that much of the suffering experienced by those in the Third World is a result of exploitative and oppressive relations. It follows then, that if we are to improve the situation of distant others, we need to work to change the relations between people and societies such that these relations are less likely to involve exploitation and oppression. If we are to change the relations between the more and less privileged, then we need to change the privileged too: we need to change the way in which the more privileged regard their own privilege and the poverty of others.

Thus addressing poverty and oppression involves not only intervening in the lives of those who are impoverished and oppressed, but also in our own lives, in our ways of seeing and living in the world, in what happens ‘here at home’.

I explain above that by ‘distant others’ I do not only refer to those who are geographically distant, and that by ‘we’ I do not mean to refer exclusively to those in the West, but rather to all those who live lives of relative privilege. Likewise, ‘at home’ does not refer to a particular geographical space, but rather to the spaces and settings to which the relatively privileged have access and where they feel comfortable, but from which the less privileged are marginalised. Universities, parliaments, the NGO sector and some parts of the media are some of the spaces in the Third World which I would include in this ‘home’. Making use of this very general understanding of ‘at home’, I outline in Chapter 7 some of the ways in which we can act with solidarity with distant others through what we do ‘here at home’.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Endeavours to ‘develop’ the Third World may for the most part have been misguided, arrogant and tainted with more than a touch of imperialist insensitivity, but development initiatives were, at least in some instances, sincere attempts to respond to problems experienced perhaps most noticeably, even if not exclusively, by people in the Third World – problems such as poverty and exploitation. The question of how to address these problems in the light of post-development theory’s critique of development, and more particularly the question of what *we* ought to do in response to these problems, is an

important question which has been discussed but not yet fully addressed in the debate between post-development theorists and their critics. In this study I suggest some possibilities for navigating paths through the arrogance and insensitivity to difference of much development theory and practice, on the one hand, and the indifference and inaction to which critics of post-development theory fear a post-development position may ultimately lead us, on the other. The discussion that follows will flesh out these paths, making particular reference to the experiences of Enda Graf Sahel.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF ENDA GRAF SAHEL

Enda Graf Sahel, formerly Enda Chodak, was created in 1975 by the NGO Enda TM (*Environnement et Développement du Tiers Monde* or Third World Environment and Development).<sup>1</sup> At its inception it was intended to be a project in which Enda TM's ideas about development could be applied in response to the problems of the poor in Dakar. Today, it has become a large and multi-faceted network of organisations and projects. It remains loosely affiliated to, but increasingly independent from, its founder Enda TM, which has itself been transformed into a large network bringing together numerous organisations. Both organisations are very prominent actors in Senegal's burgeoning NGO sector and, through their increasing involvement in other countries, are fairly significant players in the broader Francophone African NGO sector. In this chapter I present a brief overview of both Enda TM and Enda Graf Sahel to provide the necessary background for the chapters to follow which make extensive reference to Enda Graf Sahel's experiences and ideas.

#### **4.1 The Senegalese NGO Context**

NGOs have increased in number and expanded in influence since the 1980s,<sup>2</sup> notably with the weakening of the state as part of the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies such as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). As a result, the NGO sector is today a

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<sup>1</sup> Enda TM's official English name is sometimes given as Environment and Development Action in the Third World, but the name given above is a direct translation of the French name.

<sup>2</sup> In Chapter 1 I refer to figures quoted by Edwards and Hulme (1996, p.1; 1997, p.4) and McGann and Johnstone (2005).

very influential one into which billions of dollars are channelled and on which many people rely for poverty relief. While this increase in NGO influence is a worldwide phenomenon, it has perhaps been particularly evident in Africa where Adjustment has been particularly intensively (and extensively) applied.

To properly understand the Senegalese NGO context, it is perhaps necessary to have some understanding of Senegal's history, its current political dispensation, and its economy. While a comprehensive overview cannot be provided here, a concise summary will aid understanding of the context in which Enda Graf Sahel works. This is provided below.

The area which currently makes up Senegal did not exist as a political entity prior to the colonial era. During pre-colonial times parts of Senegal were incorporated in several West African empires: Old Ghana (8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries), Mali (13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries) and Djolof (13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) (Devey, 2000). The current boundaries came into existence during the colonial period when Senegal rose to prominence as its capital city, Dakar, became the capital of the whole of French West Africa. Senegal was a flagship for France's colonial assimilationist policy and a relatively high number of Senegalese (although still a tiny percentage of the total population) qualified for French citizenship and travelled to France to be educated (Gellar, 1995). One such person, Léopold Sédar Senghor, became president of Senegal at independence in 1960. His party, the Socialist Party, governed for the first forty years of independence, although Senghor handed over the leadership of the party and country to Abdou Diouf in 1980. The rule of the Socialist Party finally came to an end in 2000 when Diouf's long-time rival, Abdoulaye Wade of the Senegalese Democratic Party, won the presidential elections of that year. His power was consolidated the following year

when the Senegalese Democratic Party also won the parliamentary elections. The most recent presidential elections saw Wade elected for a second term of seven years. The most noteworthy features of the Senegalese political system are perhaps its stability and the peaceful manner in which Diouf conceded defeat to Wade in 2000.

While Senegal can in many ways be considered a hub of activity in Francophone West Africa – it receives more visitors than any other West African country (ISS, 2006) – its economy is relatively small according to most measures. For example, the World Bank (2006) places it 176<sup>th</sup> out of 208 countries in terms of its Gross National Product per capita, adjusted for purchasing power parity. Broader measures of prosperity also evaluate Senegal fairly poorly: the United Nations Development Programme (2006), for example, places Senegal 156<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries on its Human Development Index. Income inequality in Senegal is also fairly high – Senegal’s gini-coefficient is 0.41 (Earth Trends, 2003) – although it has no higher inequality than neighbouring countries and lower inequality than most central and southern African countries (see Reding, 1999). Recent economic growth figures are fairly positive, however, with growth in excess of 5% being recorded for most of the last decade. With regard to economic policy, Senegal followed the Africa-wide trend in favour of neo-liberal economic policies in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1986, Senegal adopted its first SAP and, in line with the requirements of this programme, began to favour export-led development, cut public expenditure and privatised many public enterprises (Hesse, 2004, p.5). The next two decades saw the implementation of further neo-liberal reforms. Wade’s accession to the presidency only deepened the economic shift to the right as Wade and his party have long advocated a more neo-liberal economic agenda. Public expenditure in Senegal remains low and, given Senegal’s high levels of poverty, the needs

of many Senegalese citizens are not being met by the state. Significantly, Senegal's local government policy explicitly encourages cooperation between local government and civil society (Hermier, 2004). This opens up possibilities for NGO intervention, particularly for those organisations which are willing to cooperate with the state in social service delivery.

Given the foregoing, it should come as little surprise that Senegal today has a thriving NGO sector. While it is difficult to get an exact picture of the size of this sector, available figures suggest that it is considerable. The number of NGOs officially listed by the Senegalese government exceeds 300, a figure which excludes trade unions and reflects only formally structured NGOs (Hermier, 2004). There are two main umbrella groupings for Senegalese NGOs. The first, the CONGAD (*Conseil des Organisations Non-Gouvernementale d'Appui au Développement* – Council of Non-Governmental Organisations for the Support of Development) groups together national and international NGOs working in Senegal and has 166 members (CONGAD, 2006). The other, the FONGS (*Fédération des ONG du Sénégal* – Federation of Senegalese NGOs) has a more rural focus than CONGAD and consists of 24 regionally-based associations which bring together over 2000 mainly rural local groups (SOS Faim, 2006). The NGO and broader associational sector in Senegal is large and diverse, encompassing both rural and urban populations and a wide range of NGO types.

Most of the NGOs working in Senegal, whether local or international, are financially dependent on funding from Europe and, to a lesser extent, North America. This means that even if an NGO is based in Senegal and staffed exclusively by Senegalese citizens, it is open to considerable influence by external actors. Ibrahima Thioub, who is currently

researching the way in which global civil society influences local civil society, reports that some Senegalese NGOs function as de facto branches of those who fund them.<sup>3</sup> However, Thioub cautions that the apparent alignment between the approach of a local NGO and that of its international sponsor may in fact disguise differences which the local NGO skilfully keeps under wraps in order to secure further funding. He also notes that an organisation of the size and stature of Enda TM may be able to resist such pressures – indeed, he suggests that it would be difficult for overseas donors to get a foothold in Senegal without the cooperation of Enda TM and thus that Enda TM is not easily beholden to overseas donors.

The rise of NGOs in Africa, and the fact that these NGOs are almost always funded from outside, has led to the emergence of a class of people that some authors describe as development brokers (*courtiers de développement*) (see Olivier de Sardan and Bierschenk, 1993; Blundo, 1995). These actors serve as intermediaries between donors and local communities, translating the needs of specific local groups into language comprehensible to donors and then channelling any funding secured back to the group in question (Blundo, 1995, p.74). According to Blundo (1995, p.77), who conducted a study of such brokers in rural Senegal, they have emerged in a context in which clientelist relationships between the state and local actors have broken down. This, along with an international development discourse which places increasing stress on localisation and decentralisation, opens up spaces for entrepreneurial local actors to take up the role of intermediary, setting up local associations and then approaching donors to fund these associations. Clearly, these brokers themselves accrue some benefits in this process, although Blundo (1995, pp.89-90) stresses

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<sup>3</sup> Ibrahima Thioub is a professor in the Department of History at the Cheikh Anta Diop University. His insights were secured in a personal interview which took place at the Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, on 3 August 2005.

that these benefits need not be financial but may take the form of prestige and increased social status. Blundo (1995, p.85) also notes that contrary to what some may expect, these brokers do not necessarily come from politically powerful local families – indeed, perceived political neutrality seems to be an important condition for successful brokerage. This class of development brokers has emerged out of the context created by the decline of the state and the rise of NGOs and has come to play an important role in the Senegalese NGO sector.

It could be said, then, that the current context in Senegal is one that is conducive to the flourishing of NGOs. In many ways Senegal is particularly well-positioned to receive international aid because while its population suffers from many of the problems which NGOs typically seek to address, in comparison to some of the desperately poor and conflict-ridden countries in sub-Saharan Africa, it is a more attractive destination for international development workers. This context has contributed to the increase in the size and influence of many Senegalese NGOs, including Enda TM and its sub-organisation Enda Graf Sahel.

#### **4.2 Enda Tiers Monde**

Enda TM was first set up in 1972 in Dakar. Its founder, Jacques Bugnicourt, a French national, was the organisation's executive secretary from its inception until his death in 2002. Given Bugnicourt's long tenure at the helm, Enda TM cannot be properly understood

without reference to his vision and drive.<sup>4</sup> Bugnicourt first came to live in Senegal in 1961 at the request of the then president, Léopold Sédar Senghor, who had been one of Bugnicourt's university professors. Senghor wanted Bugnicourt to take up the position of Director of Urban and Regional Planning (*Directeur de l'Aménagement du Territoire*) in his newly formed government (Diagne, 1999). Bugnicourt accepted this position but did not remain in it very long, finding that he preferred teaching to administration. In 1962 he began teaching at the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (*Institut Africain de Développement Économique et de Planification* or IDEP), which was headed by the well-known economist Samir Amin (Mataillet, 2002). A decade later Bugnicourt left IDEP to set up Enda TM, partly out of a desire to be more directly involved in initiatives aimed at addressing Africa's problems, and partly, too, out of apparent disillusionment with his IDEP colleagues and their preoccupation with doctrinal debates. Enda TM functioned initially as a joint programme of the United Nations Environment Programme, IDEP and the Swiss Agency for International Development Cooperation. However, in 1978, after signing an agreement with the Senegalese government, Enda TM became an independent Senegalese-based NGO.

Bugnicourt's – and, by extension, Enda TM's – approach to development issues was, from the beginning, politically left of centre but not socialist (Diagne, 1999). Bugnicourt (quoted in Diagne, 1999) described Enda TM's approach as being an environmentalist one, saying that this approach 'presented an opportunity to overcome the ideological divisions between

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<sup>4</sup> It should be acknowledged, however, that such a focus risks over-emphasising his dominance and neglecting the role of other people who helped to shape the organisation. However, as many of these people remained in the background during Bugnicourt's leadership of Enda TM, it is difficult to tell their stories in any detail, particularly in the absence of official documentation of their role. It can be hoped that the stories of their contributions to the early years of Enda TM will receive more attention as the hype following Bugnicourt's death dies down.

socialism and capitalism and to call into question the compartmentalisation of ideas into discrete disciplines'. This kind of approach was quite novel and unusual at the time of Enda TM's beginnings, but has become more prominent with the emergence of contemporary alternative and sustainable development approaches which also aim to be interdisciplinary and which also place great importance on the environment.

The organisation has experienced continual growth since 1972 such that it is now a large umbrella body which brings together a number of different organisations and programmes. Bugnicourt's close connection to many prominent intellectuals and politicians helped drive this growth. In addition to his links with intellectuals such as Amin and others at IDEP, Bugnicourt had close friends in the French Socialist Party, among them Michel Rocard who was French prime minister between 1988 and 1991.

Enda TM grew through the establishment of sub-entities which were set up to address particular development challenges. The first of these was Enda Graf Sahel, but a further 20 sub-entities have subsequently been created.<sup>5</sup> With the exception of Enda Graf Sahel, which today has a very broad mandate, each of these sub-entities has a particular focus (such as youth, health, energy or new information technologies) but all are involved in what could be broadly described as development activity. In addition to these sub-entities, all of which are based in Senegal, Enda TM has also established 13 branches outside Senegal in places as far afield as Brazil and Vietnam. The organisation generally functions in a fairly decentralised way, so that its various sub-entities and branches are able to forge their own individual approaches. There is no single Enda TM approach, although

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<sup>5</sup> A list of these sub-entities is provided in Table 1 in Section 4.3.

Bugnicourt's vision of development has had a broad influence. The degree of control that the central office of Enda TM exercises over the various sub-entities depends on a number of factors, particularly the personality and stature of the person heading up the sub-entity in question.

In many ways, Bugnicourt was the centre which held the organisation together. His death in 2002 thus presented something of a crisis for Enda TM. Indeed, as the organisation was considered by many to be very much *his* organisation, this led to speculation about Enda TM's capacity to survive his death. In 2005 there were media reports of disputes within Enda TM relating to the departure of 20 employees, with commentators suggesting that the organisation was facing a financial crisis (see Ndiaye, P., 2005a; 2005b; Bore, 2005; Diop, 2005). The newspaper *Le Témoin* went so far as to say that 'save for a miracle [Enda TM] will join the late Jacques Bugnicourt in his grave' (Ndiaye, P., 2005b). In response to these reports, Enda TM issued a press communiqué in which it stated that it 'is not experiencing a crisis of financial or any other nature and continues to receive the support of a variety of sponsors' (Diop, 2005; Ndiaye, P., 2005b). This appears to be confirmed by Enda TM's annual reports which indicate an annual increase in funding in the three years subsequent to Bugnicourt's death (Enda TM 2004; 2005a; 2006).

While it seems that reports of Enda TM's imminent demise are sensationalist and exaggerated, Bugnicourt's death certainly did deepen an existing debate about the organisation's future. For around a year and a half following his death, there was no permanent executive secretary, with Mohamed Soumaré, the coordinator of one of Enda TM's sub-entities, Enda Ecopop, assuming this role in an acting capacity only. In 2004,

Soumaré was eventually confirmed as substantive executive secretary for a period of three years (Samb, 2004). At the time of his confirmation, Soumaré had already worked for Enda TM for 20 years and so was well-versed in the ways of the organisation. Unfortunately, he was unable to hold this position for very long as he passed away unexpectedly in May 2006. Marième Sow, coordinator of Enda Pronat, was immediately installed as acting executive secretary and, in July 2006, was confirmed as Enda TM's new executive secretary (Sud, 2006). With two changes in leadership in less than five years, it is likely that Enda TM will take a while to carve out a stable post-Bugnicourt identity. Some stability is provided by the organisation's president, well-known author Cheikh Hamidou Kane, who has been president of Enda TM since 1978. While this position is mainly a symbolic one, he has been forced to play a more hands-on role since the death of Bugnicourt and is credited with helping to ensure that the organisation did not disintegrate in the immediate post-Bugnicourt era (see Diallo, 2005).

Enda TM's growth has been accompanied by an increase in the amount of funding it attracts, with its budget almost doubling over the last decade (Enda TM, 2005a). In 2005, the last year for which figures are available publicly, Enda TM's budget was 14 million Euros, of which over 11.5 million were funds raised by the different Enda TM sub-entities for various projects (Enda TM, 2006). The balance was money raised centrally and directed towards institutional expenditure (Enda TM, 2006). It is interesting to note that while the funds raised by the various Enda TM sub-entities increased by almost half a million Euros between 2004 and 2005, the amount of money raised centrally declined slightly (Enda TM, 2006). According to Enda TM's 2005 annual report, almost half the budget was raised from Northern NGOs; just over a quarter came from the European Union

or directly from Northern governments; with the balance coming from Enda TM's own fundraising activities, the United Nations and various Southern sources (Enda TM, 2006). What these figures indicate is that fund-raising, like the general functioning of Enda TM, is fairly decentralised with different entities raising money for their own projects. Another noteworthy feature is that an increasing proportion of funds (9% in 2003 and 14% in 2004 and 2005) are raised through ENDA TM's own activities.

Evidently, Enda TM is a large and influential organisation – indeed, it is probably correct to describe it as *the* most influential NGO operating in Senegal today. This influence is evidenced by the amount of media attention the organisation receives. It has for years compiled annual folders of all the press articles relating to the organisation; the latest such folder (for 2005) consists of over 400 newspaper articles and television transcripts, all including some reference to the organisation's activities or to key Enda TM personalities (see Enda TM, 2005b). It is also evident, just from speaking to people in Dakar, that in the city at least, the work of Enda TM and its sub-entities is well known. Indeed, when visiting the home of someone working on an Enda Graf Sahel project, I was informed by her sister, who is actively involved in politics, that their family was very well-positioned because one member was 'doing politics' while another was 'doing Enda'.

From being the personal project of one committed individual, therefore, Enda TM has grown into a large, multi-faceted and influential player in Senegal's NGO sector. While recent changes in its leadership have resulted in some uncertainty about the organisation's future, it seems likely that it will continue to play an influential role in Senegal and the other countries where it is active, and that institutional decentralisation is likely to increase

even more now that the central personality around which the organisation revolved is gone. Given the current favourable socio-political climate in Africa for the flourishing of NGOs, Enda TM and its sub-entities are likely to continue to attract funding for their many and diverse projects.

### **4.3 Enda Graf Sahel**

Established initially as Enda Chodak (*Chômage à Dakar* – unemployment in Dakar), Enda Graf Sahel (EGS) is not only the oldest but also the largest sub-entity of Enda TM. As the name suggests, its objective was to find solutions to unemployment and related problems in Dakar. Enda Chodak focused its attention on the suburb of Grand Yoff, at the time one of Dakar's most marginal and informal suburbs, which Enda TM considered in urgent need of development intervention. At first, Enda Chodak cooperated closely with the state Department of Social Welfare (*Sécretariat de l'État à la Promotion Humaine*) and had two coordinators: a French priest, Olivier Laurent, who represented Enda TM, and a Senegalese government employee, Emmanuel Ndione, who represented the Department.<sup>6</sup> The initial concerns of Enda Chodak were nutrition, particularly of mothers and children; sanitation and town planning in Grand Yoff; and income-generation for women and young people (EGS, 2005a).

In the mid-1980s, Enda Chodak lost a number of staff members who left to pursue studies overseas or were transferred to other branches of Enda TM (Ndione et al., 2001, pp.247-

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<sup>6</sup> This information, as well as some of the details in the paragraph to follow, was disclosed to me during an interview with Mamadou Ndiaye, coordinator of Enda Graf's Guediawaye branch on 19 July 2005 in Guediawaye.

248). One of the two coordinators, Olivier Laurent, also left the organisation at this time, leaving Emmanuel Ndione as the sole coordinator. This loss of staff members and change in leadership stimulated a period of reflection during which the remaining Chodak members were forced to acknowledge both that their early projects had been outright or partial failures and that the organisation needed a change of direction. As part of an attempt to chart a new course, Enda Chodak's name was changed to Enda Graf Sahel, with 'Graf' standing for *Groupe de Recherche Action Formation* (Research Action Training Group) and 'Sahel' referring to the broader geographical region in which the organisation planned to work in the future. At around the same time Enda Chodak merged with another branch of Enda TM, Enda Thiès, which had been set up in 1983 to work in and around the city of Thiès, located about 60 kilometres from Dakar.

Another change which took place during this time of reflection, was that Enda Graf Sahel became increasingly autonomous of the Department of Social Welfare, with Ndione leaving its employ in the early 1980s but staying on with Chodak.<sup>7</sup> EGS also became more and more autonomous of Enda TM and was officially declared a legally independent entity in 1993 although it retains official links with Enda TM (EGS, 1996). These links are fairly tenuous and EGS staff members are keen to stress their autonomy from Enda TM, making it clear that their sense of loyalty and belonging is to EGS rather than to Enda TM. Interestingly, in the wake of Bugnicourt's death, one of the media reports suggesting that there was a crisis in Enda TM noted that this crisis did not seem to have affected EGS and that there were rumours that EGS would break official ties with Enda TM (see Ndiaye, P., 2005a). My impression is that it is unlikely that EGS will officially sever ties with Enda

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<sup>7</sup> This information was disclosed to me by Ndione himself in the course of an interview which took place on 7 September 2005 in Dakar.

TM in the foreseeable future, although the organisation is likely to operate even more independently of Enda TM than it did before Bugnicourt's death. The organisation's ties to various people in Enda TM have a long history and there does seem to be a sense of loyalty to the original vision of Enda TM, at least among those who have been working for EGS for a long time. Indeed, it was suggested to me by Ndione that of all the Enda TM sub-entities, EGS best embodied Bugnicourt's vision of development but that, in his opinion, some other key people within Enda TM do not adequately understand this vision.

Enda Graf Sahel, like Enda TM, has experienced both growth and decentralisation. Several EGS 'poles' have been set up, some of them outside Senegal. These vary greatly in size and purpose with some being long-standing branches of EGS which focus on providing a broad range of services in a particular geographical setting, while others focus on a particular theme and may work in a number of different settings. Each of EGS's poles is encouraged to be relatively autonomous of the coordinating office. Some of these poles, such as the one set up in Guediawaye on Dakar's periphery, have in turn established poles of their own,<sup>8</sup> allowing EGS to spread out in a web-like fashion. In its recent literature, EGS describes itself as a 'network', a 'movement' and a 'way of doing things' (EGS 2004a; 2004b; 2005a). This reflects its decision to embrace a decentralised way of functioning. The coordinating office remains in Grand Yoff and under the leadership of Emmanuel Ndione, but EGS activities are coordinated from a number of different places by different people, resulting in a very diffuse day-to-day functioning arrangement.<sup>9</sup> The total number of EGS full-time salaried staff members exceeds a hundred (De Leener et al.,

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<sup>8</sup> This is according to Mamadou Ndiaye, coordinator of EGS's Guediawaye branch, who I interviewed on 19 July 2005 in Guediawaye.

<sup>9</sup> EGS's decision to embrace this kind of decentralised way of functioning is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, see especially Section 6.3.

2005) but the total number of people working for EGS on a part-time or ad hoc basis is much larger than this.

Because of this decentralised functioning, it is very difficult to get a clear picture of the organisational structure of EGS. The organisation intentionally functions in a fluid and complex manner rather than maintaining a clear, hierarchical structure. Vice-Coordinator Babacar Touré says that it would be inappropriate to try to depict EGS's functioning through the construction of a pyramid-like organogram:

For us, things function like this [makes circular hand movements]. So there is no real organogram as one would find in a hierarchical structure ... with a leader, a deputy, etc and finally a pyramid. We don't function like that. So, in the end we had to invent the word 'dynamogram' to explain the dynamic functioning of the organisation!<sup>10</sup>

This is a valid description of both the relations between people within the organisation and between the various entities making up the organisation. For while it is clear that Emmanuel Ndione and the coordinating office are at the core of the way EGS functions, there is no clear line of authority extending downwards from Ndione and the coordinating office and no clear bureaucratic structure or set of procedures to be followed in decision-making. Furthermore, as new projects are initiated, certain people and sub-entities work closely together, but these relationships may or may not outlast the projects in question, making relations very fluid and in continual flux. These projects may also bring on board various actors from outside EGS who may continue to work closely with EGS after the completion of the projects in question, making both the boundaries and membership of the organisation very unclear. When meeting people involved in one or another EGS activity,

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<sup>10</sup> This quote comes from the transcription of an interview I conducted with Touré on 20 June 2005 in Dakar.

it is often difficult to determine who is actually an employee of EGS and who is an outside partner of some sort.

But how exactly does EGS function? What is the scope of its activities? And how does it fit within the Enda TM structure? Table 1 presents in a very straightforward way the various components of Enda TM and EGS; while Figure 1, whose deliberately complicated layout attempts to capture some of the complexity and fluidity of EGS's functioning, illustrates the way in which some of these components relate to one another and to outside organisations.

### **Table 1: ENDA TM, ENDA GRAF SAHEL AND THEIR SUB-ENTITIES**

Note: names have been translated into English where necessary and brief English explanations have been provided where the name of the entity does not explain its purpose.

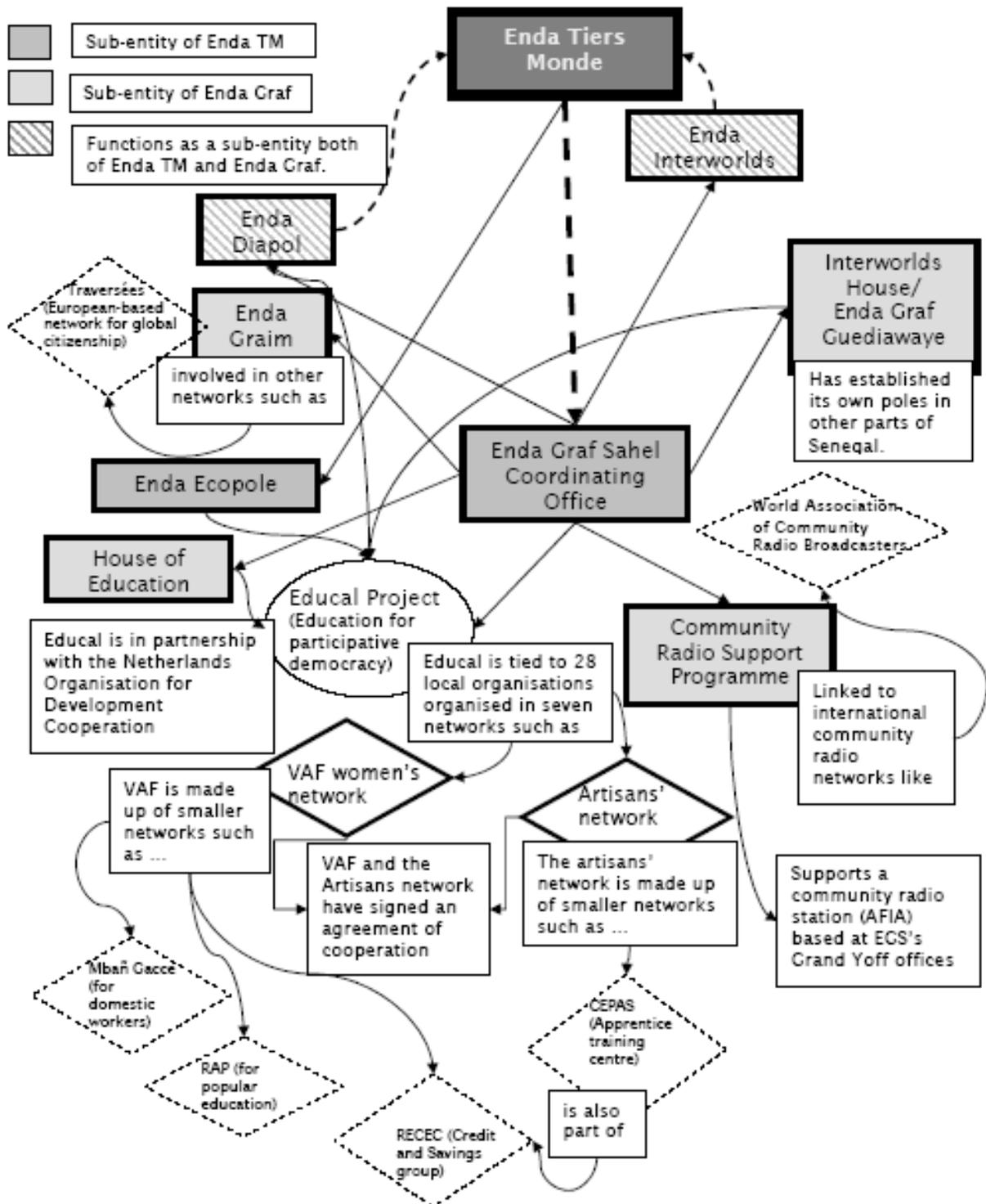
Enda TM consists of the following 21 sub-entities:

- CAF (administrative and financial coordination office)
- ACAS (Actions in the region of Casamance)
- ACAS Bukol (ACAS office in the region of Kolda)
- Diapol (promotion of political dialogue) \*
- Cyberpop-Bombolong (new information technologies for popular use)
- Water for the People
- EDDOC (publishing, documentation and diffusion)
- Ecopole West Africa (alternative education and popular political participation) \*
- Ecopop (popular urban economies)
- Enda Energy
- Jeuda (action for youth)
- LEAD Francophone Africa (provision of training and support)
- Madesahel (health, micro-credit and small farming initiatives)
- Pronat (activism for environmentally-friendly farming and against genetically modified foods)
- RUP (participatory urban development)
- Health – Medicinal Plants
- Health – Action against AIDS
- Synfev (women and development)
- Syspro I (development of agricultural practices)
- Syspro II (lobbying/campaigning on global trade issues)
- Enda Graf Sahel\* (which in turn consists of:)
  - Coordinating office
  - ACD (support for political decentralisation initiatives)
  - FID (finances and development)
  - EVE (water and environment)
  - Enda Graf Guediawaye branch (also called Interworlds House) \*
  - Social Entrepreneurship Support Programme
  - 3D (Decentralisation, Local Development and Human Rights)
  - Food Self-Sufficiency Programme
  - Training Programme
  - House of Education\*
  - Support Programme for Community Radio Stations \*
  - Enda GRAIM (branch of EGS in Thiès) \*
  - Enda Interworlds (Belgium branch for international cooperation) \*
  - Interafrica (integration and cooperation in Africa)

\* Entities which also feature in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: THE FUNCTIONING OF ENDA GRAF SAHEL**

- This is a snapshot of one section of the complex and overlapping Enda TM and EGS networks.
- Arrows indicate direction of link.
- Dotted lines suggest more tenuous links than solid ones
- Link between Enda TM and Enda Graf Sahel in bold for emphasis



As Figure 1 illustrates, the description of EGS as a network or a web is accurate. The various sub-entities of EGS are tied to each other in a number of different ways, with these relations waxing and waning in intensity, in addition to changing continually in nature. For example, the programme Educal currently brings together several of EGS's sub-entities and links them to some of Enda TM's other sub-entities, as well as to outside bodies like the Netherlands Organisation for Development Cooperation which funds Educal. Indeed when Educal which has been running since 1998 eventually ends, some of the partnerships established as part of the project may endure, but others may disappear.

EGS has thus grown from being a small project initiated by Enda TM into a large and complex programme network. Its size and influence makes it of general interest to anyone concerned with development work, although what makes it of particular interest in the context of the post-development debate is the approach it developed after going through the period of reflection described earlier. In very broad brushstrokes, since the mid-1980s, the organisation has moved away from their earlier development approach, in favour of one that stresses the importance of building upon existing attempts on the part of poor and oppressed people to improve their lives. The section that follows describes this shift in detail, highlighting some of the key features of this new - and EGS's current - approach.

#### **4.4 Evolution of the EGS Approach to Development**

The EGS staff members describe the initial approach of Enda Chodak as being a fairly typical community development one. Thus the Chodak staff members entered 'the field' – Grand Yoff – and set out to identify and define the problems facing the Grand Yoff

community. They then established groups among their 'target population', which was specifically the youth and women in Grand Yoff, and encouraged these groups to take up income-generating activities with Chodak's assistance. Information and education sessions were held and loans were granted to assist with the setting up of such activities. These loans were accompanied by very strict guidelines about what the money was to be used for and clear sanctions in the case of abuse. Chodak encouraged the groups to organise in a democratic and non-hierarchical way and to involve all group members in financial decisions. In addition to creating and supporting these income-generation groups, Enda Chodak set up projects aimed at improving the general living conditions of the people of Grand Yoff, with one of its first major projects involving the construction of sumps for the disposal of household waste water. Enda Chodak's approach was thus one that involved the identification of problems (such as unemployment and poor hygiene) and the introduction of projects to address these problems.

After almost a decade of pursuing this approach, and following the departure of staff members in the mid-1980s, the Chodak team was forced to admit the limited impact of its attempts at development intervention up to that point: despite attempts to present them as successful, these early initiatives had for the most part failed and the money that had been granted to community groups for the purpose of supporting income-generating activities had in fact often been used for other purposes (Ndione et al., 2001, p.248). Furthermore, while participants in Chodak initiatives had given the impression of having gone along with Chodak's advice about how to democratically structure their groups, they had in fact structured these groups according to local social hierarchies. Chodak staff had to accept that their 'big ideas' about community development made little sense to the population

they were supposedly there to assist and that their initiatives had not been as successful as they had envisioned.

EGS is today very critical of its early approach. The authors of a recent EGS publication, for instance, describe sarcastically how they whole-heartedly took to the game of ‘victim, persecutor and saviour’, presenting the poor as victims, the neglectful state as the persecutor and themselves as the ‘good cowboys’ heroically rescuing the poor (Ndione et al., 2001, pp.230-232). Eventually, EGS staff members were forced to recognise that the inhabitants of Grand Yoff did not view EGS in this way and were at least as likely to turn to other ‘saviours’, such as religious leaders and even politicians in times of distress. In hindsight, EGS acknowledges, the first ten years of its existence saw it function as little more than a ‘transfer point in the development aid system’ (De Leener et al., 1999, p.7). With both its funding and ideas coming from its Northern partners, Chodak simply channelled these uncritically to the Grand Yoff population. After several years of work in Grand Yoff, community members remained unconvinced of either the relevance or importance of Enda Chodak, even if they were not noticeably opposed to Chodak’s presence.

At the time of the transition from Enda Chodak to Enda Graf Sahel, the organisation decided to break with its earlier approach and to explore ways of becoming more relevant to, and effective in, the community. For a while its activities were reduced to a minimum and all staff members were encouraged by Ndione, the coordinator, to regard themselves as ‘researchers’ rather than simply ‘development practitioners’ and to try to be more critical and reflexive (De Leener et al., 1999, pp.107-108). In many ways this period of uncertainty

and change could be seen as representing, on a smaller scale, the broader ‘impasse in development’ which began to emerge from the mid-1980s onwards.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, EGS acknowledges this broader link in one of its publications (EGS, 1996, p.1), noting that the decision to change approach did in fact ‘originate firstly in an assessment of [its] own experiences, but also in the failure of thirty years of development in most African countries’. In recognition, then, both of the failure of their own initiatives and of many other development initiatives throughout Africa, the Enda Graf Sahel staff members embarked on a long process of creating and continually adapting what they hoped would be a more effective and appropriate approach to responding to the needs of the population of Grand Yoff. I discuss aspects of this new approach below.

#### 4.4.1 The Increasing Integration of EGS with its ‘Target Populations’

Enda Chodak staff members had, implicitly at least, made a clear distinction between themselves – the researchers, ‘experts’ and agents of development – and, on the other hand, ‘the people’ who were viewed as research ‘objects’ or project beneficiaries (Ndione et al., 2001, pp.157-158). An integral part of the change in approach was a change in EGS perception of the inhabitants of Grand Yoff. EGS personnel gradually began to recognise the ability and eagerness of community members to be involved in EGS research and planning. Moussa Mbaye, a local carpenter and long-time participant in EGS activity, describes the shift in EGS approach as follows:

The change was felt in many different ways. Initially, we [carpenters] were not completely implicated in Enda. We didn’t attend the meetings – we weren’t even invited to them. We didn’t know the other partners [of Enda Chodak] at all. After cooperating with them for around two years, we began to see changes in their approach, little by little. At that time

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<sup>11</sup> This impasse has been described in more detail in Section 2.4 above.

Enda had programmes and sent ‘animators’ to us. Thus, we were their ‘target group’. Actually, you could say that this was the second phase in their approach. During the first phase we weren’t even involved in their work, not even in the meetings, but in the second phase we were co-opted as ‘target groups’ within their programmes. And now, today, we design the programmes ourselves and then present them to Enda, thus it is we who manage the programmes – with Enda’s cooperation .... We said to Enda: ‘We are no longer your target group’. Today everything we do with Enda is managed jointly.<sup>12</sup>

The people Enda Chodak had set out to help were, it appears, not willing to be treated simply as the objects of Chodak’s research and ‘targets’ of its projects as this made them feel undervalued and excluded.

Grand Yoff community members did not only want to be allowed to participate meaningfully in Enda Chodak’s activities, they also wanted Enda Chodak staff members to participate in community networks and activities, for Chodak to be integrated into the broader Grand Yoff community. However, initial attempts to incorporate Chodak staff members in community life and activity were met with some resistance, largely because Chodak personnel were uncomfortable, both with the way in which the community sought to integrate them and what they perceived as community expectations of them. As Chodak staff members were relatively rich and located in fairly powerful networks which extended beyond Grand Yoff, local population expectations of them approximated those of other relatively prominent and powerful community members. In other words, they were expected to use their power and influence to access various goods and services which would then be distributed/dispensed in the form of favours to the community as a whole. Thus, the community wanted the Enda Chodak team to adopt a role similar to the one associated with lineage chiefs and other relatively powerful community leaders and members. In turn, the community would reciprocate by according Chodak members a high

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<sup>12</sup> This quote comes from the transcription of an interview I conducted with Mbaye on 2 August 2005 in Dakar.

social status; additionally, Chodak would secure the loyalty of the less privileged community members.

Research and reflection on the way in which the community was organised led Chodak staff to better understand the functioning of Grand Yoff's social networks and to become less reluctant to be drawn into these networks. Ndione (1993) describes the population of Grand Yoff and similar communities as being organised around clusters (*grappes*) or networks. These networks are characterised by relationships of reciprocity, involving the continual exchange of gifts and 'counter-gifts' – people call on those in their network for help when needed and, in return, reciprocate when called upon to do so. The relations of exchange at the heart of this form of reciprocity operate in fluid ways. For example, a poor person may offer loyalty, praise and a small gift as adequate recompense for substantial financial assistance from a wealthier person. Because these networks are very important, both socially and economically, people in Grand Yoff and similar communities continually work to expand them and to try and attract influential people into them.

While being drawn into these networks meant engaging in these complex systems of reciprocity, EGS staff came to realise that to resist being drawn in would earn them people's distrust and leave them outside the community and cut off from its internal functioning and dynamics. The new EGS approach thus involved greater integration into the community, not only through inviting community members to participate in EGS meetings and in the planning of projects, but also through EGS staff members allowing themselves to be drawn, at least to some extent, into the Grand Yoff community's networks.

#### 4.4.2 A Broadening of Focus

While EGS's recent geographical expansion is largely a result of the success of its current initiatives and its ability to attract more funding, its initial move away from an exclusive focus on Grand Yoff happened as a result of being drawn into local social networks. Chodak's limitation of its work to the suburb of Grand Yoff was incompatible with the community's frame of reference which stressed the broader social networks in which each individual was positioned rather than the geographical space which he or she occupied. Many of Grand Yoff's inhabitants were recent migrants to Dakar and still had close ties to people in their regions of origin. Thus, the social networks into which they sought to draw Chodak extended beyond Grand Yoff. A catalyst for Chodak's shift away from an exclusive focus on Grand Yoff came with requests from recent young migrants to Grand Yoff who wanted to attract Chodak attention to, and development intervention in, their home village of Sob in north-western Senegal (Ndione et al., 2001, pp.263-264). Initially, Chodak resisted these requests out of reluctance to leave its 'area of specialisation'; however, on reflection, Chodak staff decided to abandon their exclusive focus on Grand Yoff. Today, EGS remains active in Grand Yoff, where its coordinating office is still located, but projects and activities increasingly take place in and are coordinated from a variety of locations.

EGS did not only broaden its geographical coverage; it also began to participate in a broader range of activities. As EGS opened itself up to the demands of the Grand Yoff community, and sought to support what community members were doing, it was drawn

into many different activities and forced to develop a broader range of skills. Over the years, EGS has found itself involved in fruit-juice production, community radio, carpentry workshops, transport networks, fish smoking/drying and a whole range of other equally diverse activities. Thus EGS does not today limit itself to any particular set of themes or key preoccupations, but allows itself to be drawn into all kinds of different initiatives.

#### 4.4.3 Changes in EGS Understanding of Research

As mentioned above, while initially the EGS (or Chodak) staff members had made a fairly clear distinction between themselves and the people they sought to help, they gradually began to allow the population of Grand Yoff to play a more integral role in the planning and implementation of EGS activities. Related to this was a shift in EGS understanding of research as something which gradually came to be recognised as something that ‘ordinary’ community members could also undertake. EGS began to question preconceptions about the nature of research – for example, the idea that research is something conducted only in laboratories or in universities – and came to define research as:

an activity undertaken by anyone who, in seeking to respond to situations experienced by him or herself or by people or groups with which he or she is involved, finds him or herself in a situation of questioning and experimentation (Ndione et al., 2001, p.287).

The new understanding of research embraced by EGS is one that considers any activities meeting this description as research. Thus research need not involve outside researchers going into a community and identifying the problems facing this community. Rather, research is typically understood as a process through which a number of actors, who may come from outside or from within a community, collaborate to identify what changes this

particular community needs to undergo and explore ways in which such changes can be brought about.

Not only does this current EGS understanding of research involve bringing ‘non-experts’ into the process of research, but it also involves a new understanding of what role the outside, or ‘expert’, researcher can and ought to play. Ndione (1992, p.26) speaks, for instance, of how EGS staff members decided that they could no longer follow in the footsteps of the ‘classic researcher’ who purports to be objective and detached from the object of his or her research. They had to become a new kind of researcher:

The new researcher is ‘engaged’ although not in the purely political sense and not according to a vision of change which has been defined elsewhere by more ‘enlightened’ people. Rather, he [or she] is engaged in the community’s own mechanisms of functioning – those of the family, the clan, the village – and also in the community’s relationship with the environment. Such a researcher may also, if he [or she] chooses, be engaged in the community’s struggles against various forms of oppression and domination (Ndione, 1992, p.26).

Related to this idea of a new kind of researcher is a distinction EGS makes between two kinds of research – ‘popular’ research, on the one hand, and what could be called ‘expert’ research, on the other (Ndione et al., 2001, pp.156-158, 287-291). Expert research, according to EGS, is done exclusively by those who have a professional research-related qualification and is motivated by concerns that come from powerful entities outside the community – international financial institutions or overseas aid organisations, for example. Such research seeks to legitimise the norms of these entities and, while expert researchers may visit ‘the field’, their frame of reference and those to whom they are accountable are very distant from the people about whom they do research (Ndione et al., 2001, p.298). EGS argues that such research tends to shore up existing power relations and the assumptions that perpetuate them (Ndione et al., 2001, p.98). Popular research, on the other

hand, can be conducted both by those who are qualified professionals and those who are not, and both by ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ to the community under investigation. The distinguishing characteristic of this kind of research is that it is conducted in solidarity with those whose problems it seeks to address. EGS believes that such research is more likely to be a tool of emancipation than is ‘expert’ research.<sup>13</sup>

An important feature of EGS’s new approach to research is its insistence that research be done in collaboration with those who would otherwise be considered the ‘objects’ of the research. When Chodak first began its work in Grand Yoff, the Chodak staff members did not widely consult with the community in deciding what problems needed addressing in Grand Yoff and certainly did not bring community members on board when planning how to respond to these problems. Today, EGS emphasises that the process of identifying problems and deciding how to respond to them should always be an inclusive one that invites the active participation of ‘ordinary’ community members.

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<sup>13</sup> This distinction raises a number of issues and possible objections which I do not address here as I seek simply to outline the EGS approach to research. However, Chapter 7 subjects the EGS notion of popular research to critical scrutiny as part of a discussion of the role of research in opposing oppression and injustice.

#### 4.4.4 EGS and the Women of Grand Yoff: Illustrating the Evolution of the EGS

##### Approach

An examination of a number of EGS initiatives in support of the women of Grand Yoff can serve as an illustration of the evolution of its approach to development. Early initiatives aimed at women in Grand Yoff were built upon Chodak assessment of what the women needed. As Chodak evolved into EGS and a new approach to community involvement slowly developed, EGS initiatives began to build upon the pre-existing strategies of Grand Yoff women in order to address their stated needs. In so doing, EGS found a way to fit into the Grand Yoff community and support its women's attempts to improve their situation.

One of Chodak's first initiatives was a project which had as its objective the improvement of maternal and child health (see Ndione, 1993, pp.75-86). Regular meetings were organised at which health lectures were delivered and cooking demonstrations were held to encourage women to take better care of themselves and their babies, with the latter being weighed in order to assess their development. Initial attendance at these meetings was fairly high, but to Chodak's disappointment attendance tapered off after a few weeks. On investigation, it was discovered that the women perceived their attendance at these meetings as a favour granted to Chodak. They were coming along to give support to Chodak and to win the approval of the Chodak staff members, rather than because they found the content of the meetings valuable. The women expected that their support of Chodak's initiative would be rewarded in some way, but when it became clear that they would get nothing – or nothing they considered of much value – in return for their support

of the initiative, their enthusiasm dwindled and they stopped attending the meetings. One of the women explained the situation as follows (quoted in Ndione, 1992, p.33):

This initiative brings little to us. When we join, you don't give us provisions as they do in the social centres and whenever we ask for some or other service, you refuse us. So we lose in more ways than one – we don't receive milk or sugar, and you refuse to join us, to be a 'parent' to us. This initiative is all good and well, but you are selfish. You are using us.

Another commented (quoted in Ndione, 1993, p.84):

We are ridiculed. All the time in the neighbourhood our neighbours think Chodak must be giving us something as how else can they explain our devotion to Chodak? Now people are beginning to mock us, and for good reason.

While Enda Chodak saw the weighing and information sessions themselves as a service they were providing to the women, the women saw their attendance and devotion to Chodak as a gift to be reciprocated. They gave Chodak the attention and support they believed ought to be given to high status community members, but then expected Chodak to become their 'parent' – to be a provider in the community. When their loyalty to Chodak went unrewarded, they felt ridiculed.

Enda Chodak continued with the health meetings for a while but, realising that they were not going very well, decided to provide, in addition, financial support for women's economic activities in Grand Yoff. One of the first such projects aimed at assisting women who sold fish at the local market (see Ndione, 1992, pp.17-18; Ndione et al., 2001, pp.203-204). Many of these women borrowed money each day from moneylenders in order to buy their stock of fish. The money was repaid, with interest, once the fish had been sold. Enda Chodak offered to provide these women with interest-free loans which would prevent them from having to turn to moneylenders, thereby allowing them to save the extra amount of

money they earned each day. The project attracted the support of some women but was not as successful as Chodak staff members had hoped. The women accepted the credit extended by Chodak but, rather than saving the extra money they made as Chodak had hoped, used it to cover pressing expenses, including the cost of gifts at family ceremonies, or as loans to relatives and friends. Furthermore, many of the women continued to use the services of moneylenders, with whom they maintained relationships which were more complex than Chodak had supposed. In the event, the moneylenders were often members of the women's social networks who could be relied upon to give generously at baptisms, weddings and other celebrations, thereby outweighing the disadvantage of the interest they charged on their loans.

Other projects involving the provision of interest-free loans were also set up, the aim in each case being to improve income-generation and allow women to accumulate some savings. Another set of women was, for example, given loans to buy wholesale goods for resale and to then set aside some of the profits to assist with future wholesale purchases. The women were required to account for how they had spent their loans. But while it initially seemed that these loan-provision schemes were working in the manner envisaged, Chodak staff members eventually became suspicious of the 'too perfect' accounts the women presented when asked to describe how they had spent the money and what their profits had been. On investigation, it emerged that the women were in fact not using the loans exclusively to bolster their economic activities, but were spending some of the money in other ways, such as buying food or contributing to the costs of family weddings and funerals. Furthermore, the women were not setting aside savings, but spending any profits they made immediately.

Such discoveries were discouraging for Chodak, which decided not to halt the provision of loans but rather to explore more carefully the women's use and repayment of these loans and to try to better understand the logic guiding the women's financial decisions. During the course of a credit initiative administered in cooperation with the State Department of Social Development, Chodak did a survey of a group of women to determine exactly how they spent the loans (see Ndione, 1992, pp.54-61). It was found that although the loans were explicitly given with the goal of supporting income-generating activities, less than half (47.9%) of the money had in fact been used for this purpose. The rest had been used to repay debts (6.9%), to cover household costs (20.9%), for religious sacrifice (1.9%) and for 'social investments' (22.6%). Social investments included money placed in *tontines*<sup>14</sup> and given as gifts to family and friends. When the time came to repay loans granted by Chodak, the women did not rely only on profits from the economic activities for which the loans had been granted to repay the lion's share of the loans; money was also raised from secondary economic activities, *tontines*, gifts and loans.<sup>15</sup>

Chodak's view of how the loans ought to be used and repaid seemed perfectly sensible: the loans should be used in order for the women to make their economic activities more viable and the resulting profits ought to be used to build up some savings in order to increase the

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<sup>14</sup> A *tontine* is a group where all members are required to pay a fixed amount of money on a regular basis (e.g. weekly or monthly). At each meeting, the contributions of all members are given to one of the members on a rotational basis (e.g. in a group of 10 members, each member may provide £1 every week, but will receive £10 every 10<sup>th</sup> week). A tontine is thus an informal savings scheme.

<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, Enda Chodak was not able to trace both the use and repayment of the loans of a single group of women and so these findings are based on surveys of two different groups. Chodak traced the use of loans granted to 26 women and the repayment methods of a different set of 17 women. These are fairly small numbers and Ndione (1992, p.64) notes that conclusive evidence cannot be drawn from this research. However, it does at least give an indication of the way in which the women of Grand Yoff used these loans.

financial security of the women. However, after further research into the women's economic strategies, Chodak came to the conclusion that these strategies could not be considered irrational or imprudent even though they deviated from Chodak's preferences (see Ndione, 1992, pp.111-145). Rather than examining the women's economic strategies in isolation, it seemed that it was better to explore what Ndione (1992, pp.111-145) calls their 'eco-social strategies' in recognition of the way in which these women's economic and social strategies were inter-related. In Grand Yoff, a person is unlikely to succeed economically if he or she cannot depend on the assistance of friends and relatives. When tracking the economic activities of Grand Yoff inhabitants, Chodak came to realise the importance that such relations played in ensuring the success of almost all economic endeavour. Similarly, when examining the monthly expenditure of Grand Yoff households, Chodak staff members discovered that the women managing such households brought in money from various relations and in this way managed to ensure the survival of their families even if their husbands were unemployed or poorly paid (see Ndione, 1992, pp.111-145). No household depended solely on the income of the principal breadwinner and poor women became very adept at managing their social networks in ways that helped them to survive economically. A woman may, for example, regularly provide the local charcoal merchant with cold water and in exchange will often be given free charcoal. She may be very hospitable to children in the neighbourhood and in return can depend upon her neighbours in times of economic crisis. An entrepreneurial woman may use her network of friends to sell small items like jewellery or jars of incense that she has made or prepared herself.

Thus, the women of Grand Yoff did not distinguish between the economic and the social, but saw the two as intricately linked and each as important for success in the other. They were thus reluctant to invest all of their loans in their economic activities, preferring instead to invest some of the money in their social relations, knowing that in the event of the failure of their economic activities, they could turn to these relations for financial assistance. Using any money they had to strengthen and extend their social networks while also bolstering their economic activities seemed to be the safest and most sensible strategy. Furthermore, putting aside money in some kind of savings account as Chodak advised, did not make any sense to the women. They repeatedly told Chodak ‘our relations are our bank’ (quoted in Ndione, 1992, p.18) – if they needed money they could always turn to friends and relatives to loan it to them. Indeed, the practice of ‘investing’ their money in *tontines* or in friends and relatives was in fact a form of saving because they could be sure that their investment would ‘pay out’ at some later stage. Putting money in a box at home or in an account at a bank thus seemed strange and illogical to most of the women of Grand Yoff.

Realising then that the women’s economic strategies were not irrational, Enda Chodak (which was at the time evolving into EGS) began to change the way in which it provided financial support to the women, listening more to their preferences and requirements. From the mid-1980s onwards savings and credit associations, called *caisses*,<sup>16</sup> were started in response to requests from women in Grand Yoff.<sup>17</sup> The first *caisse* brought together just

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<sup>16</sup> A *caisse* is literally a cash desk or cash box, but these *caisses* are really small, fairly informal banks. I will use the term *caisse* throughout.

<sup>17</sup> The discussion of the *caisses* draws on Ndione (1992, pp.111-146) and Ndione et al. (2001, pp.27-40) as well as on conversations with Aminata Ba, the current manageress of the Grand Yoff *caisse* (today called *La Mutuelle d’Epargne et de Credit des Femmes de Grand Yoff* – The Grand

over a hundred women broken down into thirteen groups according to profession (for example cloth-dyers, market women, tailors and fruit juice sellers). To start with, the members of the *caisse* each contributed a fixed amount, which was supplemented by a start-up loan from EGS. From then on the women were required to regularly contribute a certain amount to the *caisse* and this money accumulated in the form of savings for each contributor. The women were also allowed to take out low-interest loans from the *caisse*. The money contributed was money that would previously have been invested in *tontines* and the women's groups were 'naturally occurring' professional groups so the whole process was familiar to the women and built upon already existing practices. Meetings of the *caisse* groups did not only serve an economic function but also provided an opportunity for women to exchange information and ideas, and functioned as a mini-market where women sold various things to each other. A parallel literacy training initiative sprung up as the women wanted to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in order to be able to better participate in the *caisse* (EGS, 1996, p.23).

The *caisse* system evolved slowly, adapting in response to the complaints or suggestions of its members. An important adaptation was the introduction of *guichets*<sup>18</sup> situated in the local market. Realising that the *caisse* was being underutilised by the poorest women and that some women found it inconvenient to use the *caisse*, members of the *caisse* suggested that small amounts of money be collected daily at the market place. *Guichets*, which function as mini-*caisses*, were subsequently set up in market-places. They deal in smaller

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Yoff Women's Savings and Credit Association) and Aissatou Ndao, who works for the *caisse*. I spoke to Ndao on 17 May 2005 and Ba on 2 September 2005. Both interviews took place in Dakar.

<sup>18</sup> *Guichet* means a counter or a ticket office. These *guichets* are really just mini-paypoints for the bank. They may be focused on a particular person who moves around gathering contributions or they may be located in a single place (such as a table in the market place). A woman who manages the *guichet* is known as a *guichetière*.

amounts of money than do the *caisses*, thus catering to the needs of poorer women. In addition, they are generally more convenient to use than a centralised *caisse* as they are situated at the place where women work (in the case of market women) or where women shop. Women can deposit money and take out small loans at the *guichets* and only need to approach the *caisse* to take out larger loans. Most often, *guichets* are staffed by a woman who is well-integrated in the social networks of the location of the *guichet*. This woman is then able to use her social network to ensure that contributions are made and that loan repayments are timely. *Guichetière* Aissatou Ndao, whose *guichet* is situated in the main Grand Yoff food market, explains that during the day she frequently leaves the table which serves as the physical location of the *guichet* and wanders around the market enquiring about women who are late with their payments and providing financial advice. She claims to know all the women who use her *guichet* by name and says that she is always up to date with what is happening with her clients, an insight which presumably helps her to manage their affairs sensitively and effectively.

The first *caisse* gradually expanded through the establishment of more and more *guichets* while new *caisses* were also set up outside of Grand Yoff. There are currently more than fifteen such *caisses* and more than fifty *guichets*, with the members of each new *caisse* having been given training and advice by those in existing *caisses*. While each *caisse* operates independently, there is a network called RECEC (*Le Réseau des Caisses d'Épargne et de Crédit des Femmes* – the Network of Women's Savings and Credit Banks) which draws them all together. The *caisses* are now officially independent of EGS, which

has no say in their management, but they maintain close relations with EGS and with the larger network of which EGS forms part.<sup>19</sup>

Why did the *caisses* work while previous attempts to support women's economic activities and to encourage them to save had not? It seems that the answer lies in the way that the *caisse* built upon already existing strategies and practices and continually adapted to the women's needs. Chodak's early failings led the EGS staff members to try to 'enter into the logic' of Grand Yoff women to understand how they related to money. As these women did not distinguish between the economic and the social, any intervention aimed at assisting them economically which did not take into account their social networks was likely to fail. Ndione (1992, pp.111-145) writes of how each woman in Grand Yoff has a number of 'cash drawers' from which she can access money. Friends, relatives and *tontine* groups each provide a possible source of income but also require regular 'deposits'. By assisting in the establishment of the *caisse*, EGS was simply helping set up another available cash drawer. Like the other cash drawers, the *caisse* has both economic and social aspects, in that the members of the *caisse* are tied to each other socially and economically. Furthermore, the economic function of the *caisse* is performed in relation to social strategies – for example, the collection of loan repayments is managed effectively because the *guichetières* know the women who have taken out loans and can use social pressure to ensure that loans are repaid or sensitively reschedule loan repayments where necessary.

The *caisse* also functions in a way that recognises the women's reluctance to save money, or at least to save money in the way in which Chodak first envisaged. The *caisse* cannot

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<sup>19</sup> See Figure 1 for how RECEC is integrated into the EGS network.

survive if no women save money, but at some point it was decided not to make savings obligatory for membership of the *caisse* except for those for whom it is deemed financially viable. This decision is left to the discretion of the manager of each *caisse*. Thus, poorer women can access small loans without having savings. In addition, targeted savings schemes have been initiated whereby women can set aside money for a particular purpose, such as the purchase of a large sack of rice. A further difference between the *caisse* and some other forms of savings and credit provision is that the money in the *caisse* circulates continuously. In Grand Yoff and similar communities, money usually changes hands very quickly and the *caisse* helps to speed up this already rapid circulation of money.

Thus to return to the question of why the *caisse* succeeded, it could be argued that the *caisse* works where previous Enda Chodak initiatives did not because it builds upon and is complementary to the women's other eco-social strategies and does not try to supplant these strategies or fundamentally change the way in which women in Grand Yoff relate to money. EGS managed to adapt in response to its previous failings and to find a way in which it could improve the existing functioning of the Grand Yoff community rather than to try to introduce completely new ideas and ways of doing things. The *caisses* are in many ways simply large and complex *tontines* and this is at least one important reason for their success.

The shifts in the ways in which Enda Chodak/EGS tried to assist the women of Grand Yoff represent a more general shift in EGS's 'development' approach, away from initiating projects of its own and towards providing support for already existing popular initiatives.

The establishment of the *caisses* was one of the first clear successes for EGS and helped solidify its new approach.

#### **4.5 Enda Graf Sahel in/and Reflection on (Post-)Development**

My first contact with the work of Enda Graf Sahel came via a reading of the post-development literature. An extract from an EGS publication appears as a chapter in the *Post-Development Reader* (Rahnema with Bawtree, 1997), a key post-development text; a couple of short articles by Ndione are posted on Francophone websites related to post-development (see for example Ndione, 2002); and some references to EGS are made by post-development writer Serge Latouche (2004a; 2004b).

EGS has itself produced a range of different publications, including training manuals, programme/project reports, books and occasional papers. While some of these are of interest only to those working within EGS, or engaged in very similar work, a lot are of interest to the broader development studies community. Some of this literature falls quite easily into the category of post-development theory in that it echoes the concerns of post-development theorists and contains evidence, admittedly not always referenced, of exposure to and agreement with post-development sentiments.<sup>20</sup> However, I would hesitate to describe all EGS literature as post-development and would have even more reservations about describing the EGS approach to poverty relief and general community involvement as being explicitly post-development in nature. What I would say, however, is that EGS literature on development is enlightening and broadly relevant to those interested in issues

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<sup>20</sup> The EGS literature which can most easily be described as part of the body of post-development literature is Ndione et al. (1994), Part III of Ndione et al. (2001) and Ndione (2002).

raised by post-development theory and that *some* of what EGS does could be described as post-development practice, although EGS staff members themselves may not describe it this way.

Two of the publications which are most useful in relating EGS work to the post-development debate are two early sole-authored books by Emmanuel Ndione (1992; 1993). They both deal with the failure of Chodak's early initiatives, describing in detail why these failed and explaining how the Grand Yoff community responded to Enda Chodak's early approach. These books contain detailed descriptions of particular initiatives and their outcomes, but both books manage to be more than simple descriptive narratives as they include many helpful and insightful comments on development.

In contrast to the urban focus of these books, two other early EGS publications (Jacolin et al., 1991; De Leener et al., 1992) have a rural focus. Neither of these has as much analytical content as the two by Ndione, but their discussion of the way that EGS staff members intervened in response to problems like desertification complements some of Ndione's arguments. The first focuses on attempts by peasants in the Diobass region of Senegal to respond to desertification in partnership with researchers from EGS. The second is addressed to development practitioners and invites them to interrogate the ways in which they intervene in rural areas and how they interact with peasant farmers through a discussion of particular interventions in parts of rural Senegal.

In the mid-1990s, EGS published *Réinventer le présent: quelques jalons pour l'action* ('Reinventing the present: some pointers for action') (Ndione et al., 1994), which is the

publication from which the extract which appears in the *Post-Development Reader* is taken. This is a multiple-authored book which, unlike earlier EGS publications, does not focus on discussing particular development initiatives and their shortcomings, but rather provides a broad critique of general development practice which, it is argued, frequently contributes to, rather than alleviates poverty. As an alternative, it is suggested that those who would like to fight against poverty ought to find ways to support and validate the already existing strategies of the poor themselves, a theme which is taken up by a further two EGS titles. De Leener et al. (1999) and Ndione et al. (2001) build upon this approach, providing further critique of development and elaborating on alternative ways to respond to the problems of the Third World, including modifications to EGS's organisational structure and its evolving approach to action-research. Most recently, EGS has published *Changement politique et social* ('Political and Social Change')(De Leener et al., 2005), which provides a fairly abstract analysis of how such change occurs and how organisations like EGS can encourage its more desirable manifestations. The emphasis throughout is on addressing the root causes of problems such as poverty rather than simply alleviating the problems themselves.

EGS also released two *Cahiers de recherche populaire* ('Workbooks of popular research') (EGS 1996; EGS 2000) which group together short articles on several themes relating to its work. These provide shorter and more accessible discussions of EGS's work and are aimed at EGS staff, EGS's partners in the field and visitors interested in getting a glimpse into the workings of the organisation. Included are brief overviews of EGS projects and interviews with EGS personnel as well as with so-called 'peasant researchers'. While these *Cahiers* do not include much theorisation or in-depth reflection on development, they provide useful

overviews of the day-to-day practices of EGS and give the reader some idea of the kind of people working for and with the NGO.

All of this literature is, I believe, of interest to those exploring issues raised in the post-development debate. These publications, particularly those sole- or jointly-authored by Ndione, manage to draw general lessons of use to the broader development studies community out of the particular experiences of EGS. While the literature does not represent the views of all EGS employees, it does give a fairly good idea of the history and general orientation of the organisation.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

The failure of so many past development initiatives presents those concerned with poverty and injustice with a dilemma: how do we remain committed to the resolution of problems such as poverty and injustice without making the same mistakes as those of earlier well-meaning development practitioners? EGS continually lives with and tries to negotiate this dilemma. Its reflections on the reasons for the failure of its early initiatives and its attempts to overcome these early failings raise a number of interesting issues. The key difference between EGS's old approach and its new one, is that the old approach relied upon the expertise of EGS staff members, most of whom had a university education and had been strongly influenced by prevailing ideas about development, while the new approach draws upon and validates the strategies and ideas of the poor themselves. Indeed, the new approach blurs the boundaries between the staff and the supposed beneficiaries of EGS projects. EGS now functions as a network and both paid staff members and 'ordinary'

community members are drawn into this network and are able to influence its functioning. Frequently, these community members eventually become full-time employees within EGS.

This new approach is compatible with a broadly post-development position. EGS's critique of its past development practice shares many features of post-development theory and its new approach of building upon existing popular strategies rather than importing strategies from outside the poor community is broadly congruent with the suggested alternatives to development proposed in post-development theory. As such, EGS's experiences are of interest to those who seek to critically explore the possibilities and problems of the adoption of a post-development position. In the rest of the thesis, I shall use insights deriving from EGS experiences and ideas, in conjunction with post-development theory, to suggest some ways in which we, the relatively privileged, can learn from the failure of past development initiatives and try to find new ways in which to participate in struggles against poverty and injustice.

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **RETHINKING THE STRUGGLE**

In Chapter 3 I outlined three ways in which those who are not poor and oppressed may meaningfully and constructively contribute to struggles against poverty and oppression. In this chapter and the two that follow, I fill in the outlines by providing more detail about the possible roles that we, the relatively privileged, can play in responding to the suffering of distant others and in the light of the post-development debate. There is unavoidably some overlap between the three paths I will be sketching – indeed, there are by no means three distinct ways in which to respond ethically to the suffering of distant others – but the identification of three paths will facilitate the discussion by allowing for attention to be given to three different themes: those of rethinking what it is we seek to work for and against (this chapter); of supporting popular initiatives (Chapter 6); and of solidarity with distant others here at home (Chapter 7).

As some critics of post-development theory argue (see for example Dower, 1993), if we are to reject the conceptual framework informing development, we ought to propose an alternative framework. In this chapter, therefore, I attempt to do this by focusing on two concepts – ‘poverty’ and ‘justice’ – and redefining them in a way compatible with a post-development position. In doing so I draw not only on post-development literature and Enda Graf Sahel ideas, but also on Iris Marion Young’s (1990) discussion of justice which, while not dealing directly with development or post-development theory, is helpful for the arguments I put forward here.

One caveat needs to be made before continuing. This chapter and the two that follow all deal with possible ways in which the relatively privileged can contribute to struggles against poverty and oppression. However, while the two chapters that follow sketch out roles that are particular to relatively privileged people, the theme of this chapter has broader application. While privileged people have a role to play in sketching out an alternative conceptual framework to the one informing mainstream development practice, it is not exclusively privileged people who can play this role. A variety of actors can, in a variety of ways, work to shift the way in which concepts like poverty and justice are understood, the restricted focus of this chapter notwithstanding.

### **5.1    Playing with Words**

Post-development theory's interrogation of many of the assumptions informing development studies has been helpful in showing where these assumptions come from and why they are problematic. Now, as the post-development debate has abated somewhat, it should be possible to take a step forward by beginning to think less about how the lives of those in the Third World are misrepresented in the development literature and more about how the Third World, and particularly suffering in the Third World, can be better represented in this and related literature.

There are, however, several problems with this kind of project. Firstly, the urgency of the problems development purports to address makes any attempt to stand back and think about words, ideas and mindsets seem like immoral time-wasting. Focusing on concepts and representation may appear to amount to fiddling with words while the Third World

burns. What can be said in defence of those who ‘play with words’? Escobar’s defence would be to argue that ‘[d]iscourse is not [merely] the expression of thought; it is a practice, with conditions, rules and historical transformations’ (Escobar, 1995, p.216). A similar point is made by Franco (1998, p.278) who says:

... discussions over the use of words often seem like nit-picking; language seems to be irrelevant to ‘real’ struggles. Yet the power to interpret, and the active appropriation and invention of language, are crucial tools for emergent movements seeking visibility and recognition ....

In a recent EGS publication, Ndione and his co-authors argue along similar lines to Escobar and Franco, stressing that their re-examination of key concepts in development discourse is not motivated by ‘a desire to play with words’, but rather stems from their experiences which made them wonder about the consequences of the ways in which they thought and spoke about the communities with which they worked (Ndione et al., 2001, p.211). The EGS staff members were concerned that the use of concepts and discourses that they had brought from outside the Grand Yoff community, and used unreflexively when thinking and speaking about and to community members, had served to undermine the ways in which community members describe and explain their experiences. EGS argues that its subsequent reworking of words like ‘poverty’ is subversive – ‘by attacking the meaning of words we attack the power that produces them’ (Ndione et al., 2001, p.218) – and that the promotion of the ways in which marginalised people define concepts like ‘poverty’ is ‘a political act which attacks the bases of the legitimacy of dominant powers’ (Ndione et al., 2001, p.20). ‘Playing with words’ only seems unimportant if we fail to recognise the role words have in shaping the way in which we and those with whom we interact see and act in the world.

A second problem facing those trying to elaborate an alternative conceptual framework to the one informing mainstream development practice, is that it could be said that all that we are doing is replacing one set of concepts with another whereas, it could be argued, no single conceptual framework is universally applicable or legitimate. Thus, we should not even try to define poverty, inequality, injustice, oppression and the like because there is no universally acceptable way of defining any concept. This objection touches on a much broader issue regarding how to navigate a path between a dogmatic and insensitive universalism and a politically irresponsible relativism. On the one hand, we may wish to reject an inflexible and insensitive conceptual framework which forces different realities to be examined on the same operating table with the same tools; but on the other, we may rightfully be suspicious of a position that claims that every community or culture's experiences are so unique that a completely different and incommensurable set of concepts needs to be used to examine each community and culture. This issue will not be addressed here but will be returned to later when I discuss the general tension between avoiding insensitivity to difference and avoiding relativism.<sup>1</sup> At this point, it only needs to be said that I do not think it impossible to present general definitions of concepts such as poverty and injustice, although I do think that we ought to define such concepts in a flexible way that allows for application across a number of different contexts.

If we accept, then, that reflecting on words, discourse and representation is not an indulgence and that providing general definitions is not an impossibility, what exactly is it that those of us engaged in reworking concepts seek to do when we suggest that a particular concept ought not to be understood in one way but rather in another? Do we

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 6, Section 6.4.

really believe that our attempts to shift the meaning of concepts like poverty and injustice will have a noticeable effect on the way in which these concepts are used? In speaking about the importance of replacing one conceptual framework with another, we risk creating the impression that conceptual frameworks somehow precede the activities that draw upon them – that a group of thinkers somewhere hammered out a particular conceptual framework that development workers have been using ever since in a way analogous to a seamstress using a pattern to make a dress. This is, of course, not accurate – conceptual frameworks emerge slowly and evolve continually. If the general set of concepts that has guided development work thus far – concepts like ‘poverty’, ‘equality’, ‘modernity’, ‘dependency’ and, of course, ‘development’ itself – has evolved gradually, alternative conceptual frameworks will emerge just as gradually, notably as different people in different places reject certain concepts and redefine others. What I wish to do here is to make one small contribution towards redefining two concepts, ‘poverty’ and ‘injustice’, and to do so in a way that takes on board concerns expressed by various contributors to the post-development debate.

## **5.2 Rethinking Poverty**

One of the most obvious aims of development practice is the alleviation of poverty. Development is portrayed as a solution to the problem of poverty. Poverty seems such an obvious ill and the alleviation of poverty such a self-evident good, that questioning the legitimacy of the ‘war against poverty’, as have several post-development theorists (see especially Rahnema, 1992; Escobar, 1995, pp.21-54), seems outrageous and immoral. A quick reading of some of the post-development literature could lead one to believe that a

post-development position is one which doubts that poverty, however defined, really is much of a problem at all. Such a position would beggar belief. However, a more sympathetic reading shows that post-development critiques of the way in which poverty has been conceptualised in development theory and has been responded to in development practice, are not so much denials of the existence of a set of phenomena which could reasonably be called ‘poverty’, but criticisms of the way in which poverty has been approached in development studies and the way in which diverse situations, some of which are not correctly described as ‘poverty’, have been lumped together and problematised. What is needed then is a careful rethinking of which life situations ought to be described as situations of poverty and what ought to be done in response to these situations. What follows is an overview of several critiques of the notion of poverty followed by a discussion, drawing on Enda Graf Sahel’s reworking of the term ‘poverty’, of ways in which we could rethink poverty in the light of the post-development debate.

### 5.2.1 Poverty as the (Usually Material) Things ‘They’ Lack

Looking back on its early approach to poverty, Enda Graf Sahel reflects:

At that time we were quite satisfied with a very basic diagnosis of poverty. We thought that people were poor because they did not have what they should have ... because they did not know what they should know and because they did not do what they should do. To cure poverty, all that was needed was to provide useful explanations, to promote ‘awareness’, to train people up and to apply a few basic recipes. The transfer of means, funds, knowledge, resources and models seemed to be the only solution (De Leener et al., 1999, p.8).

This slightly sarcastic summary of EGS’s early approach neatly captures the typical way in which poverty is presented in the development literature. Poverty is a situation of need and poor people are those who lack particular things – typically food, shelter and other basic

material resources. Poverty can thus be solved by providing these resources or, if one is concerned about sustainability, by providing the means to attain them.

The appeal of this approach is obvious. It certainly does seem that there are many people who live in situations of extreme need and that what well-meaning outsiders ought to do is to help them acquire what they lack. What then are the problems with this approach? One criticism relates to its tendency to focus on the economic or material – poverty is for the most part understood as a lack of some or other set of material resources or simply as a lack of money. This is a problem both because focusing on poverty as material or economic need takes attention away from other important needs – for knowledge, respect or love, for example – and also because this way of viewing poverty is often insensitive to differences between those who lack certain material things. This is particularly the case when measures of poverty, such as GDP per capita, dollars per day or calorie intake, are constructed. Such measures lump together diverse groups of people with little consideration of the differences between them – the subsistence farmer, the urban shack-dweller, the street vendor and others all become those who live on less than £2 a day, for example. People's contexts and the effects these have on their perception of their situation are obscured – 'A poor person in Rio, Abidjan, Paris or New York – all are treated the same, all appear to be suffering from the same ill – they are those who do not have enough things ....' (Ndione et al., 2001, p.201).

But there is a deeper and less obvious problem with presenting poverty as primarily an economic problem related to the lack of particular resources. This is that viewing poverty in this way locates the problem 'over there' with the poor; as in some way intrinsic to the

poor or to poor regions. Poor countries, and poor regions within wealthier countries, are presented as areas which lack certain things while wealthier countries and regions are called upon to make up for these deficiencies. Take, for example, the following passage about the Colombian economy taken from an early example of development discourse:

Only through a generalized attack throughout the whole economy on education, health, housing, food and productivity can the vicious cycle of poverty, ignorance, ill health and low productivity be decisively broken (IBRD, 1950, p.xv)(cited in Escobar, 1995, p.25).

There is a problem, then, one which apparently has its origins in Colombia, operates in a ‘vicious cycle’, and requires difficult and long-term intervention, probably from the outside. While this passage is from the early 1950s, and its presentation of poverty more characteristic of modernisation theory than other forms of development thinking, it was not unknown in other areas of development studies. Consider, for example, a more recent collection of liberal and Marxist accounts of justice and development, in which ‘underdevelopment’ is defined in the introduction as:

a number of mutually reinforcing evils ... such as high rates of infant mortality and morbidity, low rates of productivity, poor provision of health care and of educational opportunities, illiteracy, and (centrally) poverty (Attfield and Wilkins, 1992, p.1).

The development literature typically presents us with regions in the world which lack certain things and regions which have the resources and, importantly, the expertise to help address this lack. The ‘developing’ world is deficient and the ‘developed’ world can help it slowly acquire what it is missing so that it can overcome its deficiencies.

Although the problem with this way of presenting poverty is perhaps not immediately evident, critics such as Escobar (1995) and Yapa (1996; 2002a) argue that such a depiction of poverty is misleading and pernicious. Yapa (1996, p.712) says:

By viewing the poor (the object) as problem, the nonpoor (the subject) are automatically situated in the realm of the nonproblem. The nonpoor subject thus becomes the source of intellect, analysis, policy, resources, and solution.

He goes on to dispute this way of presenting the poor, arguing that the causes of poverty are complex and that many of these causes originate outside poor communities or countries. Dependency theorists make a similar point when they insist that the underdevelopment of some regions must be seen as related to, and largely caused by, the development of other regions and by the capitalist economic system more generally. Yapa's point is slightly different, however, in that he stresses the complexity of the causal relations from which poverty arises and is reluctant to point to one determining cause of poverty or 'underdevelopment' as do many dependency and Marxist analyses (see Yapa, 1996, p.718; 2002a, p.35). We ought to recognise, argues Yapa, that poverty arises within a complex 'nexus of relations' in which economic, political, ecological, cultural, technical, intellectual and other factors all play a role. The phenomena we label 'poverty' do not just spontaneously arise, but rather come about within this nexus of relations, so that their causes may lie outside the 'poverty sector'. When we present poverty as something 'they' suffer from, and 'we' can help alleviate, we obscure the ways in which our privilege and wealth are related to their poverty. Furthermore, when we present poverty as chiefly an economic problem that requires technical economic solutions, we draw attention away from the many political causes of the deprivation experienced by the poor. And here I do not mean to refer so much to the possible internal governance-related political causes of such problems, many of which have been receiving attention with the recent focus on

political conditionalities for aid and on ‘good governance’, but rather to ways in which the complex relations of power between different, and often geographically distant, groups of people bring about situations in which some people are unable to live even minimally decent and meaningful lives.

Consider some of the most prominent ways in which poverty has been tackled over the last couple of decades. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have promoted Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and, later, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) as their favoured ways of responding to poverty. These programmes suggest that the solution to poverty is a technical one involving changes in macroeconomic policy, rather than a political one involving radical shifts in national and international power relations.<sup>2</sup> The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have a less narrow approach to defining and alleviating poverty than that of the World Bank and IMF, but reduce poverty alleviation to the achievement of certain measurable goals, only one of which overtly recognises the relationship between poverty and global economic and political structures.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the MDGs involve individual countries making commitments to achieve certain poverty-related targets within their borders by 2015, a country-focused approach which can function to obscure the ways in which the relations and structures which bring about poverty are not confined within national borders.

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<sup>2</sup> Proponents of SAPs and PRSPs may claim that the participatory element of PRSPs and the governance reforms which formed part of SAPs did help shift national power relations; however, the shifts involved are not as radical as those that would be proposed by Yapa, Escobar and other post-development thinkers.

<sup>3</sup> The list of MDGs is available at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>. One of the eight Millennium Development Goals is ‘Develop a Global Partnership for Development’ and this goal does recognise that current trade practices and Third World debt need to be addressed if poverty is to be reduced (see United Nations, 2005).

To summarise, then, while it is indisputably true that some people live in situations of involuntary and crushing deprivation, a concern with ‘poverty’ and a stated commitment to its alleviation are often informed by misleading and deeply problematic ways of understanding what poverty is and how it comes about. Much development discourse has approached poverty in a way that is econocentric, insensitive to difference and which obscures the power relations which bring about or deepen such poverty. While a concern with poverty, or at least some conceptualisation of it, is surely a necessary component of any discussion of the future prospects of the so-called Third World, it is helpful to try to continue to rethink poverty so as to avoid these problems.

### 5.2.2 Enda Graf Sahel’s Faces of Poverty and Mechanisms of Deprivation

As Chapter 4 showed, EGS staff who previously saw poverty as a problem the poor had to struggle with and that they, the noble, well-intentioned developers, could solve, eventually realised that their approach to poverty alleviation had not been very effective. Indeed, they even pondered the possibility that their approach had in some way actually reinforced people’s suffering:

Wolves put on sheep’s clothing to better devour their victims. During many years, had we at Enda, without realising it, become allies of the wolves? Did we not contribute to diffusing models of organisation, ways of thinking and values which led to the further dispossession of those we identified as poor and who we thought we were helping? (Enda Graf Sahel, 2001, p.210).

By identifying poverty as a lack of certain mainly material things, and by viewing solutions from the outside as the best way to address this lack, EGS was contributing to the depoliticisation of the deprivation people were experiencing and was undermining poor

people's own ways of addressing their situation.<sup>4</sup> Recognising this, EGS set about rethinking its approach to poverty by broadening the concept so as to avoid an inappropriately econocentric approach and by focusing on what EGS calls the 'mechanisms of impoverishment' rather than on poverty in isolation of the complex mechanisms that cause it.

In broadening the concept of poverty, EGS identifies several 'faces of poverty', stressing that material or economic poverty is just one form of poverty and that the other forms ought to receive more attention. These different faces of poverty have been elaborated upon in two EGS publications (see De Leener et al., 1999, pp.14-15; Ndione et al., 2001, pp.202-208), and seem to have been discussed fairly broadly within EGS, judging from discussions of poverty by some EGS staff which mirrored almost exactly that outlined in these publications. EGS's conceptualisation of poverty is given in catchy, evocative terms rather than in careful, academic language, but I believe it provides a useful way of rethinking poverty, not only in public and NGO debates, but also in academic discussions. I thus present a summary of EGS's faces of poverty here.<sup>5</sup>

*Economic Poverty* – 'I am poor because I have no money, because I possess nothing'

The inability to meet the needs of oneself and one's dependants and the reduction of one's life to a struggle to survive is clearly one dimension of poverty. However, because this dimension receives so much attention in dominant discussions of poverty, we ought to

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<sup>4</sup> EGS was contributing to the depoliticisation of the poor in that they treated poverty as something that emerges more or less spontaneously in some regions of the world, rather than as a consequence of inequitable relations between countries and regions within countries.

<sup>5</sup> What follows is my adaptation of the discussion of poverty in the two texts mentioned above, which is supplemented by information collected during interviews with EGS staff (particularly Babacar Touré). The sub-headings are loosely based on headings used in one of the texts (Ndione et al., 2001, pp.202-208).

guard against viewing the absence of money as such an important factor when examining poverty. In EGS's early income-generation initiatives in Grand Yoff, people were grouped together according to their levels of economic deprivation and EGS tried to exclude relatively wealthy community members from benefiting from these initiatives. This approach failed as the people of Grand Yoff did not want to be grouped in this way and because this approach focused only on money and activities which could generate money, without paying sufficient attention to how the people of Grand Yoff related to each other and what they considered to be the criteria determining who is and who is not poor. Today, EGS argues that while economic deprivation is certainly one face of poverty, we should avoid treating the lack of money as the key feature of poverty.

*Social or Relational Poverty* – 'I am poor because I have nobody'

EGS relates poverty to the Wolof notion of the poor person as a social orphan – there is a saying in Wolof that 'to be poor is not to lack clothing, rather the truly poor person is the one who has nobody' (Ndione, 1993, p.174). People are poor when they find themselves outside or on the fringes of social networks. While they are part of a social network, they are able to access what they need to live as it is within this network that they are likely to find work or other means of generating income or producing needed goods; and it is this network that will feed and house them in the case of destitution. Social networks are important for one's emotional and psychological well-being, but, as explained in Chapter 4, in places like Grand Yoff, they are also important for one's economic survival. Thus being excluded from social networks is a form of poverty itself and is also related to economic poverty.

*Cultural, Semantic and Epistemic Poverty* – ‘I am poor because I cannot relate to anything and because I have lost my words to talk about things’

Poverty is also a situation in which people’s knowledge and know-how have been devalorised and their ability to research and improve their situation has been undermined. Vernacular ways of expression are slowly eroded by ‘modern’ ways of seeing the world and alternative ways of approaching various problems do not emerge because the semantic and epistemic systems that could give rise to such alternatives lie in tatters. EGS relates this to the problem of school dropouts in Senegal: these ‘weakly scholarised’ young people are unable to find work in the formal sector because they have not completed school, but their experience of school makes them regard the way of life of their ancestors with distaste and the years spent in school prevent them from learning the skills needed to survive in the subsistence or popular economies. In the end they find themselves disqualified from the modes of living of previous generations, but unable to participate in the ‘modern’ way of life to which they aspire.

*Political Poverty* – ‘I am poor because I am unable to determine the rules of the game’

Another form of poverty is the inability to participate in shaping the norms and practices of society. Many people have abandoned their role in shaping society, believing themselves to be incapable of knowing what is best. This kind of poverty often follows from the previous one – once one has become convinced that one’s ancestors’ way of living in, and talking about, the world is invalid or obsolete, one is encouraged to surrender one’s say in how society is governed and what norms and practices are entrenched. Poor people come to regard themselves as incapable of contributing meaningfully to society and see their

deprivation as a result of their own bad luck or inferiority rather than as the result of problematic power relations.

EGS sees these dimensions of poverty as interrelated but does not see any one as determining all the others. It is thus not economic poverty, or indeed any of the others, that is the key dimension of poverty that should be prioritised. Rather, we ought to recognise these various faces of poverty and work to expose the ways in which they arise and to address each of them.

It should be acknowledged that EGS's argument that poverty is multi-dimensional is hardly new or unique. The multi-dimensionality of poverty has been highlighted by many other writers on development (see for example Naryan et al., 2000; Whelan and Whelan, 1995). The fact that poverty is more than just deprivation of income is also stressed by one of the most widely read writers on poverty, Robert Chambers (1994; 1995; 1997), who speaks of there being a 'web of poverty' which brings together 12 interrelated and mutually reinforcing dimensions of poverty (see Chambers, 2006). Indeed, recognition of the multi-dimensionality of poverty has even worked its way into the discourse of the International Monetary Fund, which lists one of the five principles underlying the PRSP approach as being the principle that poverty reduction ought to be 'comprehensive in recognising the multi-dimensional nature of poverty' (IMF, 2005). Thus, EGS is hardly ground-breaking in its recognition that poverty is more than just lack of income. However, EGS's discussion of the faces of poverty places emphasis on dimensions of poverty that do not receive attention in the broader literature, most notably on the semantic and epistemic dimensions of poverty. Even Chambers (2006), who identifies as many as 12 dimensions of poverty, does

not include a dimension along these lines. Thus, EGS's discussion of the multi-dimensional nature of poverty, while not unique, does have something to add to broader discussions on poverty.

Recognising the many faces of poverty is one way to counter the econocentrism of many approaches to poverty, but does not address the concern, expressed by Yapa among others, that poverty is typically, and wrongfully, presented as a problem that arises 'over there' among the poor, and which has nothing to do with those of us who are not poor except perhaps that it calls upon us to respond compassionately. EGS, like Yapa, is uncomfortable with the idea that poverty is something 'they' have and 'we' can solve. EGS staff question both the assumption that poverty has its origins in the poor community or country and that the solutions are to be found outside this community or country. Breaking with their earlier approach, the authors of a recent EGS publication assert that '[a]s far we are concerned, we do not fight against poverty, but against everything that establishes it in our lives' (De Leener, 1999, p.15). They argue that it is better to focus on the mechanisms of impoverishment (*mécanismes d'appauvrissement*) than on the phenomena which these mechanisms bring about. If, for example, we concern ourselves with a poor family's inadequate housing, we may be led to focus upon ways to secure them a better house – an essentially technical solution – rather than examining the processes that lead them, and others in similar situations, to be without adequate housing – an examination that is likely to bring a number of socio-political factors to light. Rather than only examining and working against poverty itself, we should seek to identify and oppose the mechanisms that create it.

EGS tries to provide pointers regarding what is meant by ‘mechanisms of impoverishment’.<sup>6</sup> Commodification is one such mechanism: more and more things seem to acquire a market value and are valued in relation to their financial worth rather than any other quality. Another mechanism is the instrumentalisation of people: people are brought into systems of organisation where their value is tied to their role as producers or reproducers within the system and where they are unable to influence the general direction of the society of which they are a part, being able only to play their assigned role within a system they are little able to influence. This instrumentalisation can be clearly seen in situations where decisions made by powerful bodies like the World Trade Organisation (WTO) or the IMF impact upon poor people’s ability to earn a living, but these poor people have few opportunities to influence the decisions made by these bodies. Such people seem to become instruments in an economic system they have little power to change.

The reduction of problems to technical or economic questions is, according to EGS, a further mechanism of impoverishment. Technical solutions appear apolitical but, argues EGS, when we pretend to be talking only of technique we ‘automatically swallow’ a whole political system and we present the political debate as if it has been completely resolved (De Leener et al., 1999, p.16). Related to this mechanism is increased specialisation and focus on ‘expertise’: problems are broken down into various categories, each of which can only be attended to by some or other specialist – an agronomist, a doctor, a judge, a priest – thereby preventing ‘ordinary’ people from participating in shaping society and indeed from having a broad and general picture of the world in which they live.

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<sup>6</sup> The comments that follow are based on discussions of these mechanisms provided in two EGS texts (Ndione et al., 1994, pp.21-23; De Leener et al., 1999, pp.15-19), but some illustrations and explanations are my own.

EGS also describes ‘internalised domination’ as a mechanism of impoverishment. This is the process whereby people are dissuaded from reflecting on their own lives and situations and become dependent on explanatory systems and suggested solutions provided by others, typically by elites in their own society or by outsiders. A related mechanism of impoverishment is what EGS calls ‘impoverishing dissatisfaction’ – as people are exposed to and encouraged to emulate the consumption patterns of local elites and wealthy people outside their countries, they become dissatisfied with what they previously perceived to be satisfactory living conditions.

In identifying these mechanisms of impoverishment, EGS seeks to emphasise that rather than being swept up by a preoccupation with the phenomena associated with poverty, we ought to take a step back and examine the history of how these problems came about. Doing so is likely to reveal all kinds of problematic power relations and difficult socio-cultural contexts which bring about or exacerbate situations of deprivation. Drawing attention to these may be uncomfortable and risky as it involves questioning power relations and as it reveals to what extent ‘we’, the non-poor, are implicated in, and complicit with, relations and structures which cause suffering in other people’s lives.

### **5.3 Rethinking Inequ(al)ity and Injustice**

If there is another problem that has received as much attention as poverty in development writing, it is the problem of inequality. The fact that there is so much inequality in terms of wealth, education, life expectancy and other related aspects of life has caught the attention

and provoked the indignation of many and has been the motivation for much development work. However, the notion of equality as unambiguously desirable sits uneasily with some post-development thinkers; they, like many contemporary social theorists, are uncomfortable with approaches which seem to deny or obliterate difference and are concerned with what they see as the increased homogenisation of the world. Rather, argue many contemporary thinkers, difference ought to be recognised and some kinds – for example differences in way of dress or food preparation - celebrated. From this perspective equality, with its connotations of sameness, is not such an unequivocally good thing. Does this mean that the desire for equity – ‘fairness, impartiality, evenhandedness’<sup>7</sup> – and justice, which are the motivation for much development thinking and practice, must be viewed with suspicion by anyone opposed to processes of homogenisation? If not, how can those who wish to be sensitive to difference think about equity and justice? In the rest of the chapter, I will try to show how it is possible to think of equity and justice while distancing oneself somewhat from approaches that seem to advocate, or at least not question, sameness.

Equality is one of the terms selected for scrutiny in Sachs’ (1992) *Development Dictionary*, a volume in which critical assessments of a number of key terms in development discourse are provided. Douglas Lummis (1992, pp.38-52), the author of the chapter on equality, cautions that, unlike some of the other terms in the book, equality is neither a neologism nor a word that ‘can be declared wholly toxic’. Rather it is a word with a long history that has, in some more recent discussions, been used in a way that makes contributors to the

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<sup>7</sup> As defined in the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993). The same dictionary defines ‘equality’ as ‘The condition of being equal in quantity, magnitude, value, intensity, etc ... The condition of having equal rank, power, excellence, etc, with others’. Obviously the two terms are similar in meaning, but ‘equity’ somewhat avoids the connotation of sameness that is associated with ‘equality’.

*Development Dictionary* and other post-development theorists uncomfortable. The problem that Lummis has with recent uses of 'equality' is that, rather than emphasising fairness, the term is often used in a way that assumes that all people can and should participate in a global capitalist economic system and should ideally achieve the standard of living that has been achieved by those in the 'developed' countries. Achieving greater global equality thus comes to mean universal adoption of this system and universal achievement of the 'developed' way of life. Lummis does not believe it to be good or inevitable that all be drawn into a single economic system; nor does he believe that the 'developed' way of life is universally attainable. Moreover, he argues that contemporary global economic relations generate inequality even as participation in such relations is portrayed in much development literature as the path to equality. We should, Lummis believes, guard against notions of equality that, in assuming 'that everyone in the world is or ought to be playing the same game' (1992, p.45), are also insensitive to difference; and those that 'pretend to offer to *all*, a form of affluence that presupposes the relative poverty of *some*' (1992, p.47, emphasis in the original).

This position favoured by Lummis, which is more or less representative of much post-development theory, is not one that dismisses concerns with fairness and justice, but is one that cautions against allowing a concern for equality to blind us to the possibility that people may not all want to live what some define as a desirable way of life, and that the way of life held up as the end of development, the 'developed' way of life, is not a realistic goal for the whole of humanity. We need, then, to think of ways in which we can bring about greater justice while abandoning approaches which assume this way of life to be desirable and possible for all. In the rest of this discussion, therefore, I will focus attention

on justice rather than on equality or equity, because it seems to me that what is at issue in discussions about equality or equity is, at its most basic, a concern with justice. In pointing out and lamenting the great and ever-increasing inequalities in wealth and opportunity in our world, we are crying out for greater justice.

In what follows I discuss Young's (1990) conception of justice, showing how it is helpful in rethinking justice in a way that takes on board the concern of Lummis and others with equality, without giving up the desire for fairness that informs many calls for greater equality. Throughout, I assume that it is meaningful to talk about justice on an international scale, that the existence of great inequalities between people is unjust and that the persistence of extreme poverty implies injustice.<sup>8</sup>

### 5.3.1 Injustice as Oppression and Domination

Young's seminal work *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990) challenges contemporary approaches to justice and proposes an alternative. The focus of the book is on justice in Western welfare capitalist societies, and particularly in the United States of America, but her discussion of justice is relevant to other debates including debates about how to rethink justice in the light of post-development theory. Her attempts to broaden the scope of justice and to approach justice in a way that is sensitive to difference are particularly helpful. While I believe there are a few important problems with aspects of her book, particularly with her unwillingness to call her approach a *theory* of justice and with

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<sup>8</sup> For defences of such assumptions, see Belsey (1992), Nielsen (1992) and Pogge (1999, 2005).

the 'alternative vision' of social life she provides, I believe the basic point she makes, and which I summarise below, is correct and insightful.<sup>9</sup>

Young begins by demonstrating the dominance of the distributive paradigm of justice in contemporary discourse. This paradigm defines social justice as 'the morally proper distribution of social benefits and burdens among society's members' (Young, 1990, p.16). The focus tends to be on the distribution of material goods although reference may also be made to the distribution of non-material goods such as power, rights, respect and opportunity. Young (1990, p.17) argues that this understanding of justice 'ensnares philosophical thinking' such that contemporary theorists of justice, whether liberal, socialist or Marxist, assume that justice is principally or exclusively about distribution. Young believes this assumption to be unfortunate as a focus on distribution distracts us from other important concerns. The distributive paradigm 'inappropriately restricts the scope of justice, because it fails to bring social structures and institutional contexts under evaluation' (Young 1990, p.20). While much attention is paid to the end-state pattern of distribution, these social structures and institutional contexts are at least partially responsible for the skewed distribution and are also in and of themselves relevant to debates about justice and thus ought to receive more attention.

Young (1990, pp.24-30) acknowledges that attempts have been made to extend the notion of distributive justice to the field of non-material goods. Prominent theorists of justice such as John Rawls and David Miller attempt to accommodate less tangible goods such as power, rights, self-respect and opportunity within the distributive paradigm. In order for

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<sup>9</sup> For useful comments on some of the strengths and weaknesses of Young's arguments, see Smith (1994, pp.103-107).

these to be incorporated into a distributive framework they must be treated as if they are 'things' that can be possessed such that the end-state pattern of their distribution can be examined. It is thus necessary to find ways to measure how much power or self-respect or how many opportunities particular individuals or groups have so that their distribution can be brought under scrutiny. While simply extending the distributive paradigm in this way may seem to address concerns that this paradigm over-emphasises the material, Young argues that this extended distributive paradigm is still problematic because non-material goods cannot properly be understood as 'things' that can be distributed. Aspects of social life such as power, self-respect and opportunity are better understood as having to do with relations between people than as being possessions. Furthermore, the distributive paradigm, even when extended to include the non-material, concentrates attention on the end-state pattern of distribution to the neglect of a focus on the processes, relations and contexts from which this pattern results. The causes of maldistribution are thus obscured.

To clarify her objections, Young shows why she believes it to be unhelpful to treat power, rights, opportunities, self-respect and the like as possessions. Rights, for example, are 'institutionally defined rules specifying what people can do in relation to one another' (Young, 1990, p.25) and thus have more to do with doing than having. Likewise, while some opportunities may be meaningfully understood as things that some people have and others do not, overall, the notion of opportunity has to do with 'a condition of enablement, which usually involves a configuration of social rules and social relations' (Young, 1990, p.26) and is not properly understood as something some have and others do not. Similarly, self-respect 'cannot be parcelled out of some stash' (Young, 1990, p.27), but is rather a continually shifting attitude that people have towards themselves and their prospects and

which is continually altered as people relate to one another. Young gives particular attention to the inappropriateness of understanding power as something to be possessed and distributed (pp.30-33); and, drawing on Foucault, argues that power is not ‘some kind of stuff that can be traded, exchanged and distributed’ (p.31), but something that refers to relations between people. To see it otherwise obscures the way in which power operates in particular structural contexts.

If justice cannot be understood only in terms of the distribution of material things, and if the non-material cannot properly be understood as ‘things’ that can be distributed, then we must conclude that the distributive paradigm is an inadequate way of approaching the question of justice. The scope of justice extends further than distributive issues. Young (1990, p.38) suggests that a more appropriate way to approach justice is to begin by defining injustice as oppression and domination and to define both of these very broadly:

Oppression consists in systematic institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings, or institutionalized social processes which inhibit people’s ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen. ... Domination consists in institutional conditions which inhibit or prevent people from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of their actions. Persons live within structures of domination if other persons or groups can determine without reciprocation the conditions of their action, either directly or by virtue of the structural consequences of their actions.

To further elaborate on the concept of oppression Young (1990, pp.39-65) identifies and discusses ‘five faces of oppression’: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. When we understand injustice as oppression and domination, topics which cannot comfortably be accommodated within the distributive paradigm, such as decision-making structures and questions of power and culture, can be more adequately addressed. Justice then ‘should not only refer to distribution but also to the institutional

conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation' (Young, 1990, p.39). Young does not think that we should not concern ourselves at all with distribution, but argues that a focus on oppression and domination ought to be the starting point from which we should begin to look at justice (Young, 1990, p.16). I should stress here that her approach does not imply that the distribution of goods is irrelevant to justice, nor that it should receive scant attention, but simply that a concern with eliminating oppression and domination ought to be prioritised over a concern with improving distribution. Furthermore, because much, although not all, maldistribution is a direct or indirect result of some or other form of oppression or domination, by working to transform these relations we are in any case likely to greatly improve the distribution of many goods. This approach is also informed by a more appropriate understanding of what people are in that it recognises that '[i]ndividuals are not primarily receivers of goods or carriers of properties, but actors with meanings and purposes, who act with, against, or in relation to one another' (Young, 1990, p.28).

Young (1990, pp.39-42) cautions that by 'oppression' she does not mean to refer only to situations that result from the explicit intentions of tyrannical oppressors. The term 'oppression' may bring to mind the suffering experienced by those living in some form of unambiguously tyrannical regime, but this is only one possible form of oppression. Oppression, as she conceives it, can be structural and result from 'unquestioned norms, habits and symbols' and the assumptions underlying many of the quotidian practices of 'well-intentioned liberal society'. Thus we can speak of oppression and of oppressed groups without necessarily having to finger a corresponding specific oppressor or

oppressive group, or at least, without having to identify a person or group of people who set out deliberately and consciously to oppress.

Young believes that her proposed way of approaching justice is more compatible with contemporary concerns about the politics of difference than is the distributive paradigm of justice. Those concerned with the politics of difference criticise approaches which seek to eliminate difference or to make it irrelevant, arguing that difference, or at least some differences, ought to be sustained and even celebrated. Young contrasts the assimilationist ideal which assumes that treating people fairly entails subjecting all to the same rules, principles and standards, with a politics of difference which argues that if all groups are to be included and enabled to fairly participate in society, oppressed and disadvantaged groups may require preferential treatment (Young, 1990, pp.156-158). While the assimilationist ideal tries to bring excluded and marginalised groups into the mainstream, it does not critically engage with the mainstream such that 'assimilation always implies coming into the game after it is already begun, after the rules and standards have already been set' (Young, 1990, p.164). Like the assimilationist ideal, the distributive paradigm of justice seeks to eliminate difference or make it irrelevant. It aims at a more equal distribution that treats different individuals and groups as if they were the same. Understanding injustice as oppression and domination, on the other hand, is less hostile to difference as it allows for different groups to be treated differently with the aim being to ensure that none experience oppression, not that all have an equal, or more equal share of certain goods.

A further problem with the distributive paradigm, according to Young (1990, pp.70-76), is that it has a depoliticising effect. By focusing on distribution to the neglect of a focus on the contexts in which maldistribution arises, current structural and institutional arrangements are treated as natural or necessary. This paradigm invites us to think of ways to improve the end-state pattern of distribution rather than to reflect on the processes, relations and structures from which patterns of distribution arise. In the welfare state, which is Young's focus, this means that while various resources are redistributed such that the exploited classes have a fairer share of the resources than they would have in other capitalist systems, the division of labour and various exploitative practices remain more or less intact and unquestioned. In this way an exploitative class system is perpetuated while some of its effects are mitigated thus making the unjustness of the system less obvious. Public discussion tends to focus upon often technical issues regarding how to improve distributive policies while underlying questions of power are obscured.

Although much of *Justice and the Politics of Difference* relates Young's proposed approach to justice to political life in the USA, Young includes a very brief epilogue where she makes a few comments on justice in the rest of the world both within and between countries. Here she says that she believes that her claim that injustice should be approached with reference to oppression and domination holds in other social contexts as well, although many of her examples and illustrations do not. It does indeed seem that her discussion is of great relevance to broader debates about justice and to the issues under investigation here. Contemporary discussions of development for the most part assume the

distributive paradigm.<sup>10</sup> Within development studies much has been written about the injustice of the current global distribution of goods with attention being drawn to the ever growing gap between wealthy and poorer nations and between the wealthy and the poor within various countries. Development is presented as a way of reducing this gap, typically by improving the position of the poor, but also through some form of redistribution such as through increased foreign aid. The promotion of development, it is assumed, will result in the reduction of poverty and thereby gradually reduce the chasm between the rich and the poor. The transfer of aid from the wealthy to the poor will speed this up both through redistributing resources and through further spurring on development and thus reducing poverty. As the lifestyles of the poor slowly become more like those of the rich, greater justice will thus be achieved.<sup>11</sup>

The most usual way in which development is related to justice is thus clearly an approach which works within the distributive paradigm of justice, seeing justice as being primarily about a fairer distribution of goods. Some aspects of the approach have come under considerable scrutiny. Critical development theorists have shown that many development interventions have not in fact reduced levels of poverty so that the ‘development intervention equals reduced poverty’ equation cannot be assumed (see for example De Rivero, 2001). Other theorists have questioned the value of foreign aid, showing that such aid does not truly entail a significant redistribution of resources, both because much aid ultimately returns to the donor country and because aid is often given in misguided or

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<sup>10</sup> While many simply assume it, others explicitly position their discussions of development within this framework. A good example of a clear and carefully argued defence of development as a means to increase justice, understood within a distributive framework, is that by Corbridge (1994).

<sup>11</sup> Versions of this discourse are presented in various prominent texts on development but the UNDP’s Human Development Reports perhaps provide the best and most prominent example of this kind of approach to the question of development and justice.

cynical ways with the result that it often does not lead to poverty reduction at all (see Gronemeyer, 1992; Killick, 2005; Maren, 1997; Ovaska, 2003; Riddell, 1999; Sogge, 1996). I do not wish to engage with these well-rehearsed debates here. Rather, following Young, I would like to question another aspect of the approach to development summarised above – that even if foreign aid does promote something deserving of the name development and this development does lead to a fairer distribution of resources, should our attempts to bring about greater justice focus upon the achievement of a better distribution of resources? If Young is correct, and I believe she is, then a focus on the elimination of oppression and domination is preferable as, ultimately, their elimination would result in a fairer distribution of resources; and, by choosing this focus, we are able to be sensitive to difference and to pay attention to the structures and contexts which cause maldistribution and which are undesirable for reasons over and above their effects on distribution.

The post-development critique of development criticises mainstream development theory's insensitivity to difference and shifts attention away from the material towards questions of discourse, culture, power and knowledge. Implicitly, then, a post-development position is one that cannot comfortably work with the definition of justice provided by the distributive paradigm. If we are to take on board the post-development critique of development while maintaining a concern for justice, we need to go beyond the standard way in which questions of justice have been approached in development texts. And Young's discussion is helpful here. Following her, it can be argued that justice requires more than just a fairer distribution of goods between wealthier and poorer parts of the world. A situation in which the 'underdeveloped' continue to experience exploitation, denigration and oppression – all

broadly defined – but where they receive greater aid flows, debt cancellation and more generous loans is still nowhere near a just situation. Furthermore, given the diversity of ways of life in the world, it cannot be assumed that the same goods are required in the same quantities by all people – for example, different climates mean different clothing needs, rural settings entail different needs to urban setting. Also, the distributive paradigm of justice and most approaches to development focus upon end-states (the possession of particular goods and the acquisition of the ‘developed’ way of life) to the detriment of a focus on the processes and contexts which lead to the end-states. Even where the end-state seems at first glance to be desirable, an analysis of the processes and contexts related to the realisation of this end-state may affect our perception of its desirability. As discussed earlier, the exploitation and environmental degradation which appear to be necessary for the achievement and maintenance of the ‘developed’ way of life, make it seem less desirable – the process through which this way of life comes about thus calls into question its desirability.<sup>12</sup> If we are to adopt a post-development position without taking on a ‘Pontius Pilate politics’ (Kiely, 1999) which ‘washes its hands’ of the plight of the poor, we need to rethink what we mean by justice, and Young’s concern with oppression and domination is a good starting point.

### 5.3.2 Oppression, Nandy’s Second Colonialism and EGS’s Internalised Domination

If injustice can best be defined as oppression and domination, how are we to elaborate on the meaning of oppression and domination? Young does this by identifying ‘five faces of oppression’ and describing each in some detail, but gives less attention to domination as it

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<sup>12</sup> See Sections 2.5.5 and 2.9.

seems that her definition of oppression is broad enough for domination to be subsumed by it.<sup>13</sup> Her discussion, however, focuses on the not so obvious ways in which groups in the West, and particularly in the USA, are oppressed. Much of this discussion is not very helpful for those who, like myself, are concerned with the Third World. What are the obvious and not so obvious ways in which Third World citizens are oppressed? It is the not so obvious ways in particular that require elaboration, as it is these that are typically overlooked in standard development discourse. It is these, then, that I would like to look at briefly in this section. Ashis Nandy's discussion of what he calls 'the second colonialism', and aspects of EGS notions of cultural, symbolic, semantic and epistemic poverty, and 'internalised domination', are helpful here.

In *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (1983), Nandy draws attention to what he calls 'the second colonialism'. Contemporary reflections on colonialism portray it as having been oppressive in that it involved the physical conquering and control of people and territories, the subjugation, ill-treatment and murder of indigenous inhabitants and the use and expropriation of the resources of the colony for the benefit of the colonizing power. That such practices are oppressive is fairly uncontroversial today, but Nandy wants to draw our attention to another way in which colonialism was oppressive when he speaks of a 'second colonialism' which 'colonizes minds in addition to bodies and ... releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all' (Nandy, 1983, p.xi). Opposing this second colonialism is more complex than opposing the first:

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, I am not sure why she initially makes reference to both when it seems that a focus on oppression, broadly defined, suffices. Nevertheless, while I have held to her practice of referring to both in the previous section, I will speak mainly of oppression here, even while assuming that domination is a form of oppression.

... colonialism never seems to end with political freedom. As a state of mind, colonialism is an indigenous process released by external forces. Its sources lie deep in the minds of the rulers and the ruled. Perhaps that which begins in the minds of men must also end in the minds of men (Nandy, 1983, p.3).

According to Nandy (1983, p.xiii), much opposition to colonialism is conducted within the constraints and psychological limits created by the colonialists – there is an attempt ‘to defeat the West on the strength of one’s acquired Westernness’. Opponents of colonialism find themselves using the language and ideologies of their oppressors in order to secure their liberation. They set out to demonstrate their ability to rule according to the mechanisms preferred by their oppressors.

Nandy relates this kind of opposition, which simultaneously opposes and legitimates its oppressor, to the process psychologists call ‘identification with the aggressor’, and discusses how colonial ways of seeing and being in the world were legitimised, even by opponents of colonialism. Nandy reveals the contradiction in both admiring the oppressors – for their power, their achievements, their ideas and their ability to dominate – and at the same time opposing them. This kind of opposition is not so much opposition to oppression in and of itself, but opposition to a particular set of oppressors and easily leads to the emergence of similarly oppressive structures once the colonialists leave. Many opponents to colonialism did not so much fight to get rid of the colonial type of rule and the techniques and ideologies favoured by colonialists, as to get rid of a particular set of colonialists. Thus while one form of colonialism has, for the most part, been defeated and delegitimised, this ‘second colonialism’ which entails the admiration of the (former) colonialists and a desire to emulate them in many ways, has been more difficult to identify

and confront. As long as the oppressed admire their (former) colonisers, the perpetuation of oppression is secured.

Enda Graf Sahel's discussion of 'internalised domination' (see De Leener et al., 1999, p.17), as outlined earlier, makes a similar point. Here, and also in their discussion of some of the faces of poverty, EGS stresses that when people begin to rely on ways of explaining the world which originate outside their own community – typically from more powerful communities – they risk becoming politically and socially impotent. Rather than reflecting upon their situation and trying to find ways to resolve problematic aspects of their situation, they turn to the explanations and solutions suggested by more dominant groups, explanations that tend to implicitly endorse the latter's position of dominance. Poor people's marginalisation and exclusion from dominant local and global economic and political systems gradually becomes self-exclusion as such people accept and validate the way in which dominant groups represent the world (Ndione et al., 1994, p.23). In this way the oppressed begin to contribute towards their own oppression. The oppression of Third World peoples has thus not only occurred through standard colonial and neo-colonial practices, but also through the denigration of their ways of interpreting and living in the world, such that many Third World people now identify with the value systems and lifestyles of those who oppress them and of those whose lives of privilege are made possible by relations which ultimately result in the oppression of Third World non-elites. For Nandy, and many at EGS, it seems that oppression can only be resisted if this 'second colonialism' or 'internalised domination' is recognised and confronted.

A further relevant point made by Nandy with regard to oppression is that oppressive systems are not only problematic for those who are oppressed, but that ultimately oppressors also need liberation from such systems. Drawing on Gandhi, he talks about the 'degradation of the colonizer' (Nandy, 1983, p.xv), arguing that oppressors are in fact 'camouflaged victims' in that their situation is one which reflects 'an advanced stage of psychosocial decay'. Furthermore, Nandy argues that '[a]ll theories of salvation, secular or non-secular, which fail to understand this degradation of the colonizer are theories which indirectly admit the superiority of the oppressors and collaborate with them' (Nandy, 1983, p.xv). His point here is that as long as we regard the oppressors' way of life as unambiguously superior and desirable, our opposition to oppression is compromised. If we believe that oppressors live unequivocally desirable lives we ought, logically, to want to be oppressors and thus while we may oppose our own oppression, we may not oppose oppression itself. However, Nandy does not believe that oppressors' lives are unambiguously desirable. He argues that a culture that is oppressive is a culture that not only oppresses other cultures but also one that oppresses aspects of itself. Thus '[t]he tragedy of colonialism was also the tragedy of the younger sons, the women and all "the etceteras-and-so-forths" of Britain [and other colonizing powers]' (Nandy, 1983, p.32). On an individual level too, the oppressor must repress aspects of him or herself in order to be able to be an effective oppressor. Once we have come to recognise the undesirability not only of being oppressed, but of the worldview, values and ideals of the oppressor, and, indeed, the experience of being an oppressor, we are better equipped to fight not just particular sets of oppressors, but oppression itself.

Following Young, then, it can be argued that achieving justice involves opposing oppression rather than simply improving distribution. And, following Nandy and EGS, we can add that opposing oppression is not simply opposing the oppressor, but critically engaging with, and opposing ways of seeing and living in the world that allow for, oppression. This is not of course to say that fighting oppression in the Third World only involves fighting what Nandy calls ‘the second colonialism’ or EGS ‘internalised domination’. There are many other more obvious forms of oppression – physical domination, neo-colonial trade practices, manipulative diplomacy, actual physical colonisation and the like – that also need to be opposed, but the insidious and elusive forms of oppression described by Nandy and EGS require particular attention because they are not as obvious and are, arguably, more difficult to confront.

### 5.3.3 Justice and the Environment

Environmental issues have received much attention in recent discussions of development. In mainstream development studies awareness of the environmental constraints threatening further development is the motivation behind calls for so-called ‘sustainable development’. On the fringes of development studies, post-development writers such as Wolfgang Sachs and ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva argue that something more radical than sustainable development, as currently conceived, is needed. In discussing this issue, Sachs (1999; 2002) highlights the question of justice, arguing that the notion of justice informing sustainable development discourse is a flawed one. He points out that the sustainable development approach places more importance on ‘justice in time’ than on ‘justice in social space’ (Sachs, 1999, pp.159-160). While we are encouraged to take into account the

needs of future generations when determining present resource use, and thus to behave justly towards our descendants, less emphasis is placed on the way in which the 'needs' of certain people – those Sachs (1999, p.160) calls 'the global consumer class' – impinge upon the ability of other classes to meet their needs. In this way sustainable development discourse neglects 'justice in social space' issues.

Another problem Sachs identifies with the contemporary understanding of justice informing development debates is that it is one that relies on the 'famous metaphor of the growing cake' (Sachs, 1999, p.165). This metaphor is used to argue that justice will be achieved through increasing economic growth, thereby allowing everyone to have a larger share of an ever-growing cake without diminishing anyone's portion. Justice is thus achieved without redistribution. However, increasing awareness of the environmental constraints placed on economic growth has increased scepticism about the idea that justice can be achieved through infinite economic growth. It seems, then, that a new conception of justice is needed, and Sachs' suggested alternative is one that stresses the importance of increased redistribution from the 'global consumer class' to the rest of the world. Justice will be achieved, argues Sachs (2002, p.15), through the reduction of the 'ecological footprint' of this consumer class and the emergence of a fairer resource usage.

Sachs draws our attention to an aspect of justice not given much attention in the discussions discussed earlier – the question of how ecological limits undermine the conception of justice informing much contemporary development discourse. In proposing a solution he does not question what Young calls the distributive paradigm of justice, but rather makes proposals that fit comfortably within this paradigm, arguing that what is

needed is a fairer distribution of resources, something which can only be achieved when the poor's 'lack of rights, entitlements, salaries and political leverage' (Sachs, 2002, p.15) is addressed.

While my earlier discussion on justice says nothing to contradict this, it is worth looking at how the question of the environment, and of the distribution of resource usage, could be addressed in the light of Young's critique of the distributive paradigm. Clearly, environmental questions touch on a number of important distributive issues. But are there also aspects of the debate about the environment which can be better understood in terms of oppression?<sup>14</sup> David Harvey (1992), who is sympathetic to Young's approach to justice, seeks to add an environmental dimension to her approach to justice by adding a sixth face of oppression (concerned with the environment) to the five she identifies. He argues that justice requires the recognition that 'the necessary ecological consequences of all social projects have impacts on future generations as well as upon distant peoples' (Harvey, 1992, p.600) and that a consideration of these consequences should inform our current actions. While Harvey, unlike some radical environmentalists, resists the idea that nature itself can be oppressed, his addition to Young's approach is one that enriches it by including environmental concerns. When thinking of justice and the environment, we ought to think not only of just distributions of environmental resources, but also of the way in which unfair resource usage can be oppressive of disadvantaged groups and future generations.

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<sup>14</sup> It should not be forgotten here that Young's (and my) proposed approach to justice is not hostile to the question of distribution. The point Young makes is not that distribution does not matter, but that an overemphasis of, and preoccupation with, distributive issues is unhelpful.

#### **5.4 The Rough Outlines of a Post-Development Project**

After being subjected to almost two decades of persistent criticism, ‘development’ – that vague yet enchanting idea which inspired so many diverse attempts to improve our world – has been picked at and deconstructed to such an extent that it seems to have been reduced to a pile of noble but misguided intentions and ambitious but ultimately foolish plans. While much seems worth salvaging, particularly the commitment of advocates of development to defeating poverty and fighting for a more just and equitable world, the form which these commitments took clearly needs to be rethought. In this chapter, I have tried to bring together some contemporary discussions on poverty and justice in order to suggest ways in which we can outline anew what we mean by poverty and injustice, and thereby provide a robust conceptual framework that can assist in finding new ways to improve our world. Poverty, it has been suggested, is a multi-faceted situation of deprivation and dispossession which is best addressed through a careful and courageous analysis of the relations and contexts in which it arises. Injustice is primarily a situation of oppression, and discussions of injustice in the Third World need to include an analysis of the way in which certain groups have been dispossessed, or have given up their way of explaining and interpreting the world, and have looked with a mixture of admiration and resentment at their oppressors and at the way of life made possible by oppression. Defining poverty and injustice in this way prevents us, the non-poor, from being complacent – indeed, we may find these definitions threatening in that they disrupt our picture of ourselves as compassionate helpers or innocent bystanders, and force us to recognise the possibility that we are complicit in the complex processes and relations which cause some to experience deprivation and oppression. We may oppose poverty, all the while shoring up

one or more of the mechanisms of impoverishment, and we may campaign sincerely for equality while not recognising the oppressive consequences of the ways in which we participate, often unintentionally, in relations which privilege us and disadvantage others.

If we are to keep alive some of the emancipatory zeal informing development, while casting off the many problematic aspects of past development theory and practice, we can be helped by thinking of poverty and injustice in the ways outlined above. Working with these redefinitions of poverty and injustice, we can begin to think about what a post-development project would entail, what it would oppose and what it would seek to establish. Such a project would, like previous development initiatives, oppose poverty but would seek to define poverty in a broader and more complex way, focusing more on the mechanisms that bring about impoverishment than on the situation of poverty itself. This project would, like earlier development work, seek to establish a more just world but would regard this quest as primarily a fight against oppression rather than an attempt to regulate the distribution of benefits and burdens. These conceptual reworkings caution against the reduction of the problems of the Third World to the economic or technical sphere and insist upon seeing poverty and injustice as related to questions of power. As such the post-development project being proposed here is a profoundly political one.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUPPORTING POPULAR INITIATIVES

The more practically orientated person's response to the previous chapter is likely to be something along the lines of 'Rethinking concepts is all very well, but what can we actually *do* in response to the suffering of distant others?' This chapter thus shifts focus from concepts towards practice by examining the contribution that the relatively privileged are able to bring to popular struggles against poverty and injustice. I begin by defending the idea of supporting popular initiatives. What arguments can be given for saying that we should support the already existing initiatives of less privileged people rather than introducing our own initiatives? This is followed by a discussion of some of the types of support that we may offer such initiatives and then by an examination of the possibilities opened up by network forms of political organisation. Do such forms of organisation facilitate the support of popular initiatives and if so in what ways? After examining a key problem with the notion of supporting the local or popular – that of the tension between the desire to be sensitive to difference and the desire to avoid relativism – the chapter concludes by sketching the broad outlines of something that could be called 'post-development practice'. Throughout, the chapter draws mainly on the experiences of Enda Graf Sahel,<sup>1</sup> although references are also made to post-development literature and to literature on the so-called new social movements and on network forms of organisation within such movements.

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I will use 'Enda Graf Sahel' or 'EGS' to refer both to the organisation's earlier (Chodak) and later (EGS) experiences (see Chapter 4).

## **6.1 Why Support Popular Initiatives?**

Some kind of ‘post-development practice’ has to be identified if the diverse and sometimes poorly expressed insights deriving from post-development theory are to be harnessed in a bid to chart a path past ‘the impasse in development’ and towards new ways of addressing old, but no less worrying, problems like poverty, exploitation and oppression. By ‘post-development practice’ I mean nothing more than ways of responding to many of the issues traditionally highlighted in development studies in a manner that takes into account the post-development critique of development. One of the least problematic paths is to support popular initiatives, an approach which is compatible with two key features of post-development thinking: a concern with sensitivity to difference and an unwillingness to accept without question the authority of the ‘expert’. Towards the end of his controversial critique of development, Escobar (1995, pp.222-223) tries to address ‘the question of alternatives’, suggesting that we begin by ‘look[ing] for alternative practices in the resistance grassroots groups present to dominant interventions’, and that possible future paths will best be worked out through an examination of ‘the specific manifestations of such alternatives in concrete local settings’. Writing almost a decade later, he says that social movements, particularly those that are based locally but are part of broader trans-local networks, ‘represent the best hope for reworking imperial globality and global coloniality in ways that make imagining after the Third World, and beyond modernity, a viable project’ (Escobar, 2004a, p.207). For Escobar, and many other post-development theorists, ways forward are thus to be found in the already existing practices of groups and movements outside or on the margins of the ‘developed’ world.

Optimism about the local and about new social movements is not unique to post-development theory: these movements are receiving a fair amount of attention in broader contemporary social analysis.<sup>2</sup> One example is the interest, both optimistic and more sceptical, in the recently created World Social Forum (WSF), which brings together NGOs and social movements from all over the world. Disillusionment with those groups and institutions that were, according to traditional left theory, supposed to bring about progressive change – trade unions, national liberation movements, the working class, labour parties and ultimately also the state – has encouraged more interest in small local initiatives and in locally-based movements and NGOs, as well as in the emerging frameworks for cooperation between all three of these.<sup>3</sup> Those who, like post-development thinkers, are sceptical about the abilities of ‘experts’ and the effectiveness of global agreements and institutions aimed at advancing ‘development’, are looking towards smaller, grassroots movements, and, relatedly, local practice and knowledge, in the hope that these may open up new ways of responding to poverty and injustice.

Another reason for supporting local movements and initiatives, rather than introducing initiatives from outside poor communities, relates simply to the ineffectiveness of so many outside projects. Chapter 4 touched on Enda Graf Sahel’s early days and the failure of most of its early projects. These projects failed partly because they were based on ideas and

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of discussions about new social movements, see Cohen and Rai (2000); for an example of interest in new social movements in the West, see Dalton and Kuechler (1990) or Eder (1993); and for a discussion of new social movements in the South, see Wignaraja (1993).

<sup>3</sup> For comments on how disillusionment with traditional leftist organisations has led to interest in, and optimism about, these movements see Amin (1993, pp.76-78); Escobar (2001, pp.223-224); Löwy (2004, p.21); Rioufol (2004, pp.551,556); Wainwright (2004, pp.xii-xix); and Waterman (2004, pp.58-60). It should be acknowledged, however, that some on the traditional left are radically opposed to these new social movements, seeing them as deviating from the path of more important anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggles – see for example comments by the International Liaison Committee for a Workers’ International (2004) and James (2004).

practices – often inspired by EGS staff university training – that many in the community found to be unfamiliar and sometimes illogical or offensive.

Two Enda Graf Sahel publications (Ndione, 1992; Ndione, 1993) speak of these problems in great detail. One of the initiatives which forced EGS staff members to acknowledge the inefficacy of insisting on their way of doing things was a market gardening initiative they began on the outskirts of Dakar (see Ndione, 1993, pp.47-61). EGS had a small parcel of land and thought it a good idea to put together a group of men who could, with the assistance of a loan from EGS, farm the land and share the profits they made from selling the produce. The first few groups taking up the challenge did not last long and either left dissatisfied with the initiative or were chased from the land when EGS realised that the loans given for the project had been misappropriated. Finally, a group of young men who were all recent migrants from a Sérère<sup>4</sup> village seemed to settle into the initiative working along the lines preferred by EGS. EGS wanted the group to function in an egalitarian way and to save any profits that were made such that the project would be sustainable. Money from the sale of vegetables went into an account that was administered by EGS staff members with the group to prevent the kinds of problems they had had with previous groups. However, after a couple of years, EGS began to be suspicious. The profits that the group were making seemed so minimal that it was not clear how they were managing to survive. Once the group had paid back the loan given by EGS they had so little money left in the account that the continuation of the project seemed pointless to the EGS team yet the young men seemed happy with the initiative. On further investigation, EGS discovered that not all payments for produce had been made through the account and so that the group had

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Sérère’ refers to one of Senegal’s largest ethnic groups and to the language spoken by this group.

managed to get access to revenue that EGS had not seen. This money had been managed by the eldest member of the group at his discretion rather than being managed in the egalitarian and democratic manner insisted upon by EGS. The group had hidden this money from EGS because, while they did not want to anger their donors, they did not want to use the money in the way EGS thought best – that is, to save it and to make all decisions about it democratically. While they presented a ‘front’ of being a democratically organised group, they were in fact organised in line with the structures typical in the village from which they had all come. The oldest man acted as a ‘father’ to the group: he provided them with food, cigarettes and some money and his wife cooked for them and did their laundry. If they had particular needs they could approach him and ask for extra help. They appeared happy with this arrangement which not only met their material needs but also seemed to give them a sort of ‘protective psycho-cultural shell’ by providing familiarity in what was for most of the group an unfamiliar urban environment (Ndione, 1993, p.61).

EGS was in a difficult position – the EGS staff members were genuinely convinced of the goodness of egalitarian, democratic ways of organising and yet the groups they tried to form repeatedly failed and, when one finally appeared to function better, they realised that it did not function democratically at all. Commenting on this, Ndione (1993, p.47) notes:

While we thought we were doing a good thing in proposing egalitarian models of organisation and thought that this type of organisation would improve understanding and cooperation among young people, the members of the association reacted negatively and closed in upon themselves presenting a common front against us. We were confronted with an important question: should we privilege efficacy and in so doing renounce our system of values and support an organisation which appeared to be functioning to the benefit of a small minority? By gradually bringing our practice, with which we identified strongly, into question, our whole personality was threatened.

It was experiences like this that led the EGS staff members to realise that if they were to be effective, they needed to build upon community members’ own ways of functioning, rather

than always imposing their own ideas, many of which were strongly influenced by their (sometimes overseas) university education. One of the members of EGS (quoted in Ndione, 1993, p.59) commented:

... we need to redefine our role as development workers. We cannot blindly seek to make people take on our ideas, but we must rather learn from them ... We must constantly interrogate ourselves, bringing into question the kind of relations we have with the population. To me, it seems that we need to work from what already exists, and not try to make a clean slate in order to build something else.

This tension between the desire to be effective and the desire to promote dearly-held values raises a number of issues, some of which will be discussed later.<sup>5</sup> What is important to note here is that for those actively working in poor communities a reason to favour supporting popular initiatives rather than initiating projects oneself may simply be that this approach is more effective; that importing outside models just does not work, or does not work well enough.

There is an important objection that should be addressed when arguing that supporting popular initiatives is preferable to initiating projects ourselves. By supporting such initiatives we are acknowledging that poor and oppressed people are already working towards their own emancipation and that their own ways of going about this may be more effective than initiatives we can bring from outside. But if we acknowledge all this, we need to ask whether outsiders should get involved in the struggles of poor and oppressed people at all. Why not just let them get on with it or else, perhaps, limit our involvement to cheering them on from the sidelines? My first response to this kind of objection is to

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<sup>5</sup> This tension between efficacy and remaining true to one's principles is related to broader questions about responding to difference. How could EGS accept that many of the ways in which the people acted were rational and effective while not dismissing values that the EGS staff members were convinced were important? On the one hand, they had to be sensitive to difference; on the other, they wanted to maintain some core values. I will discuss this sort of tension in Section 6.4.

acknowledge that it holds much truth and that it is a shrewd comment on the romanticisation of peasants and other 'underdeveloped' groups by some post-development theorists. Some post-development work, with all its stress on the capabilities and wisdom of 'the social majorities', suggests that 'we', the privileged, really have very little to offer such peoples at all. While I am not convinced of this, I do think that before we make any attempt to 'help' the poor and oppressed, we ought to acknowledge that many such communities are indeed actively and effectively responding to their situations and that we may well have little or no role to play in many of their struggles. Ferguson (1990, p.281) speaks of the presumptuousness of assuming that 'we' are the ones that are able to suggest what 'they' should do to improve their situation by saying that 'the only general answer to the question "What should they do?" is: "They are doing it!"'. This is not a naïve profession of belief in the superior abilities and knowledge of the poor, but rather an acknowledgement that those who know a situation well are most often, although certainly not always, more capable of responding to it than are outsiders to that situation. Ferguson goes on to say that we – and his 'we' is the narrow 'we scholars and intellectuals working in or concerned about the Third World' (Ferguson, 1990, pp.282-283) – may have some role to play in these communities, but that we must admit that our skills and knowledge may not always be relevant or useful and, further, that 'the nature of our intellectual activity itself' (Ferguson, 1990, p.287) may need to be transformed if we are to play any useful role.

That said, there may be things that we who are not poor and oppressed can bring to the struggles of poor and oppressed people, although if we let them decide on what it is they would like us to bring, we may often be quite disappointed at what it is that they seek from

us. Once again, EGS's experiences are instructive. EGS staff realised, firstly, that the people of Grand Yoff often wanted things from them that they were not all that keen to provide and did not want what they thought the people ought to want; and secondly, that if EGS was to play a meaningful role in the community, its staff had to think carefully about why they were involved in the community and how they could be more relevant. EGS staff found to their disappointment that the Grand Yoff community did not always want their advice about health care, nutrition and how to save money. Grand Yoff inhabitants seemed more interested in flexible loan provision and in incorporating EGS staff members into their social networks, enabling them to then access many of the relatively powerful and high-status people who were part of the broader social networks of EGS and its staff. Although EGS could have insisted on imposing its will on the community, and refused to be drawn into community networks, its staff members opted instead to adapt their approach in line with community preferences.

Part of this process of adaptation was a recognition that EGS staff members themselves were actors with interests in the community and not a sort of neutral hand of benevolence extending into the community to assist here and there. The people of Grand Yoff were sceptical of the notion of a disinterested outsider who was there to help the community but did not stand to gain anything in return (see Ndione, 1993, p.192). They assumed that EGS was active in the community because it stood to benefit from its intervention and thus did not feel that they ought to be grateful to EGS staff just because they were there. Gradually, the EGS team had to recognise that this assessment was more or less correct – that they did get something out of being in the community even if what they got was often intangible. After they had been in Grand Yoff for some time, a group of high profile citizens from one

of the relatively well-off areas of Grand Yoff approached them with a request for financial assistance to help them realise their dream of installing a sophisticated mains drainage system in their area. EGS responded positively. However, even though the project was successful, EGS staff felt some unease about their participation, a sentiment which, on further reflection, they attributed to their discomfiture at not being the initiators of the project and a worry that the success of the mains drainage project would both overshadow and render obsolete EGS's more prosaic solution to the lack of used water drainage systems in Grand Yoff, which was to help the community construct simple drainage sumps. The feeling of being robbed of the prestige of being the initiators of projects to improve the community forced EGS staff to recognise that they did not provide their services to Grand Yoff 'for free', even if their payment was largely a symbolic one. Furthermore, their work in the community also brought more tangible benefits, such as hands-on experience, which could help them get better-paid jobs and about which they could later write and publish.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, we need to admit that our help may not be needed, that the ways in which we can help poor communities may be very different to what we had imagined and that we are getting involved in such communities because of some interest we have in this involvement. However, it seems reasonable to suppose that once we have acknowledged these things we may well be able to play a helpful role in increasing the effectiveness of people's battles against that which oppresses them.

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<sup>6</sup> This notion of staff benefiting from their work in the community is discussed in *Dakar: une société en grappe* (Ndione, 1993) – see particularly the preface by Desjeux (1993, pp.12-14) and Chapter 7.

Another defence that can be given against those who wonder if we had better not just let the poor and oppressed get on with their own emancipation, relates to the interconnectedness of the lives of the privileged and the poor. Collier (1992, pp.86-87) argues that while the people of, for example, England and India in 1600 had little obligation to each other, the economic and ecological interdependence brought about by contemporary trade and other relations means that we live in a 'shared world' and that certain obligations arise from this fact.<sup>7</sup> Our lives are not separate from each other and so our choice is not really a choice of whether to ignore these distant others, cheer on their emancipatory attempts from a distance, or to go in and get involved; rather, we are already involved in their lives and the ethical thing to do is to explore how our lives are interconnected and to seek to discover ways in which we can improve the relations, geographically distant or closer, direct or mediated, between ourselves and those who suffer poverty and oppression. Leaving the poor to fight their own battles is inadequate as it is a position that refuses to recognise that these battles have something to do with us and that we are always, in myriad complex ways, taking sides either with or against various groups of distant others. Even if we choose not to get involved in particular, locally based struggles, we may well form part of the complex causal chains that make these struggles necessary, and the success of these struggles may only be possible if aspects of our lives change too. We are thus already involved and being so more explicitly is a way to acknowledge this and to take seriously the consequences of our positioning in an increasingly complex and ever-expanding mesh of economic and political relations

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<sup>7</sup> I referred earlier (see Section 3.2) to similar arguments made by Stuart Corbridge (1998b, p.44) who also stresses that the interrelatedness of our lives means that we cannot see 'their' situation as having nothing to do with 'ours'.

stretching across our world. Providing what support we can to popular initiatives is a promising type of involvement.

Before continuing, I ought to acknowledge that the distinction between popular or grassroots initiatives and ‘outsider’ initiatives is hardly clear cut, meaning that it is not always clear when one is supporting popular initiatives and when one is introducing some kind of ‘outside’ initiative. While some initiatives may clearly be one or the other, many fall somewhere in-between. When, as will be discussed further on, some university-educated members of the Noon-speaking community in Fandène, Senegal begin a Noon literacy initiative this could be called a local initiative, given that it is initiated by people in the affected community; but because the initiators are relatively privileged and have spent time outside of the community while pursuing their studies, some may argue that this is an ‘outsider’ initiative. It seems to fall somewhere between the two. Furthermore, the presence of privileged outsiders within a poor community may affect people’s decisions about how to respond to their situation and the support of such outsiders may shift local initiatives in new directions. Any support ‘we’ provide for ‘their’ initiatives will inevitably change those initiatives in some way. Evidently, there are many grey areas that must be acknowledged if one is to contrast ‘supporting popular initiatives’ with introducing initiatives from outside; however, I do not think such grey areas negate the basic point that initiatives that are at least to some extent rooted in communities’ own attempts to address their situation seem to be more appropriate and effective than are initiatives motivated primarily by the concerns or assessments of those with little connection to the community involved.

## **6.2 What 'We' Can Bring in Support of Popular Initiatives**

Once Enda Graf Sahel had moved away from its initial approach of setting up initiatives and trying to secure the participation of community members, EGS staff members had to find a way to make their new approach, which they describe as being one of 'accompanying popular dynamics' (Ndione et al., 2001, p.26), work effectively. What does 'accompanying' really entail? An overview of their more recent activities and their reflections on these activities reveals some ways in which privileged 'outsiders' can play a role in supporting popular initiatives. One of the most important roles that EGS plays is that of putting different community groups in contact with each other and facilitating on-going contact between them. As an NGO working throughout Senegal, EGS is ideally positioned to put different local organisations with similar needs in touch so that they can provide each other with support and can learn from each other's experiences. EGS is able to use its broad geographical coverage and ability to communicate with people far away via telephone, the internet, etc., to facilitate greater contact between community groups who can then go on to support each other in different ways.

An example of a network initiated and supported by EGS is the VAF (*valorisation des activités des femmes* or valorisation of women's activities) network. This large network brings together a number of smaller regional and occupational networks and consists of a total number of around fifty women's groups.<sup>8</sup> Most of these groups were already associated with EGS when it was decided to establish VAF in 2003 as a broad network for

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<sup>8</sup> This discussion of the functioning of VAF is based on participation in VAF events, an interview with H el ene Diouf and a joint interview with Yacine Diagne and Constance Tine. Diagne coordinates the VAF network, while Diouf and Tine are coordinators of organisations which form part of the network. The interviews took place in Dakar in July and August of 2005.

all women's groups affiliated with EGS. The VAF network allows women to better coordinate their activities and to learn from each other's experiences. They are also able to trade goods and skills – for example rural women farmers provide urban women who make fruit juices and jams with their surplus fruit in exchange for products the urban women are able to provide. EGS also provides some training for the women, such as in methods to improve their processing of local agricultural products. In addition, the VAF network helps the women's groups to find new partners as they can refer each other to further partners who can potentially provide technical or financial support.

The provision of funding is one of the most important roles played by EGS and is an important way in which outsiders can support popular initiatives. Small, locally-based initiatives are often unable to access funding because they are unaware of what funding exists, unable to write effective funding proposals or do not meet the requirements of donors. EGS, with its many contacts and high number of educated employees, can be helpful here. For example, during my time at EGS, when some staff members became aware of funding available for the promotion of informal professional training, EGS's vice-coordinator and one of the members of an artisan network affiliated with EGS arranged a meeting for several role-players in informal professional training, such as those supervising apprenticeships in artisan studios and those involved in teaching dyeing and fruit-juice making. They informed these people of the available funding and discussed what could be done with such funding. Furthermore, an EGS staff member who knew the chairperson of the funding committee responsible for allocating this funding was called upon to prepare a proposal on behalf of VAF and the artisan network for submission to the funding committee. A successful proposal would mean that several people within the artisan and

women's networks would have access to money that, alone and outside of the EGS network, they would be most unlikely to be able to access.<sup>9</sup> NGOs like EGS are generally better able to attract donor attention than are small community organisations; putting such influence at the service of local groups and individuals in a manner designed to improve their access to strategic information and funding is an important way in which the EGSs of this world, and those similarly positioned to them, can support popular initiatives.

These suggested ways of supporting popular initiatives are fairly passive in that they mainly involve responding to people's requests for funding, training or 'contacts'. However, there is a less passive way in which outsiders can support local initiatives. They can expose people to ideas and information which they would not otherwise be aware of and thereby provide a different 'take' on situations. In my discussions with EGS staff it became clear that one of the things they thought they could do was to challenge local approaches by presenting local organisations and informal local groupings with information they were unaware of and by drawing the attention of people in these groups to the extra-local causes and effects of their situations and to the possible implications that localised attempts to address particular situations may have on distant others.<sup>10</sup> EGS's ability to get in touch with a variety of stakeholders, including agriculturalists, town planners, neighbouring communities and so on, enables it to point out possibilities that each individual stakeholder may not have otherwise considered. An example of this is a research project in which EGS is involved called *Écocité* which examines the impact that growing cities have on the areas surrounding them and encourages dialogue between urban

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<sup>9</sup> These comments are based on my observations at the meeting, which took place in July 2005. I am not sure if the funding proposal, which had yet to be drawn up, was successful.

<sup>10</sup> Discussions with Babacar Touré (vice coordinator of Enda Graf Sahel) and André Wade (coordinator of Enda Graim) were especially helpful here. Touré was interviewed in Dakar and Wade in Thiès. Both interviews took place in June 2005.

dwellers and peri-urban and rural dwellers in the areas around cities.<sup>11</sup> The Senegalese branch of this research project has thus far focused particularly on the cities of Thiès and Mboro in Western Senegal, facilitating communication and cooperation between inhabitants of these cities and inhabitants of nearby villages. In this way, both urban and rural-dwellers become more aware of their interdependencies and of how the evolution of cities affects the surrounding rural areas. The project aims to find ways to improve rural/urban relations in Senegal.<sup>12</sup>

A related role played by EGS involves making the communities with which it works look upon their own strategies and belief systems differently. As a result of years of colonialism, neo-colonialism and other forms of domination, many of the communities with which EGS works have had their beliefs and ways of life disparaged. Development projects too are not innocent in this respect, often unintentionally encouraging people to see themselves as incapable of solving their own problems and presenting models and techniques from outside as solutions to these problems. EGS believes that it has a role to play in revalorising poor people's own strategies, knowledge and beliefs. Because many disadvantaged communities have had their world views denigrated, it may be difficult for them to reject values and ideals which have effectively been imposed on them and to reassert their own way of seeing the world. EGS sees its role as the facilitation of the reassertion of denigrated worldviews and value systems but also, and just as importantly, the questioning of dominant worldviews and value systems (Ndione et al., 1994, pp.55-56). EGS staff members can help local populations to look upon themselves and their

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<sup>11</sup> These comments are based on an interview with Victor Tiné (30 June 2005), a researcher involved in this project, and on Enda Graf Sahel's 2004 annual report. The interview took place in Thiès.

<sup>12</sup> Further information about this project is available at [www.ecocite.org/index.html](http://www.ecocite.org/index.html).

communities differently, and to ‘emancipate themselves from the burden of received models’ by questioning these models and the assumptions and power relations which undergird them (Ndione et al., 2001, p.297).

This last role is perhaps one of the hardest to delineate in practice. How does one really go about revalorising denigrated value systems? What would an initiative aimed at the revalorisation of disparaged ways of seeing the world actually involve? Without having an initiative explicitly aimed at such revalorisation, there are several ways in which EGS plays this role. An example is an initiative of Enda Graim<sup>13</sup> designed to promote the Noon language which is spoken by some of the communities living in the region of Thiès.<sup>14</sup> Until recently, this language was not recognised as one of Senegal’s national languages and was only a spoken language. Several of the Enda Graim staff members, who come from the Noon community and work within the broader multilingual community in the city of Thiès and the nearby region of Fandène, began advocating a greater recognition of the Noon language. As a direct result of the combined pressure of this and other language advocacy groups, Noon has now been recognised as a national language. In addition to this advocacy work, Enda Graim has begun literacy classes in Noon. Basic literacy training for Noon-speaking adults who cannot read and write is provided, as well as special Noon literacy training for literate people who want to learn how to read and write in Noon. Radio broadcasts in Noon have also been arranged. Providing Noon literacy training obviously brings similar benefits to general literacy training, but Charles Wade of Enda Graim stresses that these initiatives to promote the Noon language are particularly valuable in

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Graim’ stands for *Groupe de Recherches d’Appui aux Initiatives Mutualistes* – Research Group for the Support of Associative Initiatives. Enda Graim is based in Thiès.

<sup>14</sup> Comments on the Noon language programme draw on an interview with Charles Wade of Enda Graim which took place in Thiès on 30 June 2005. Further information comes from Enda Graf’s 2004 annual report (EGS, 2005a).

terms of the revalorisation of the cultural heritage of the Noon people. For the 35 000 or so Noon speakers who used to feel little or no pride in their language and wider culture, the promotion and popularisation of their language has stimulated a re-assessment of the value of their cultural heritage.

There is no simple way to work out how those who are not poor and oppressed may be able to play a sincere and valuable role in the battles of those who are, but Enda Graf Sahel's recent attempts to 'accompany popular dynamics' suggest some ways in which more privileged people may play some role in supporting the initiatives of those less privileged. In the section above I have shown how the relatively privileged may be able to facilitate contact between different groups, to provide funding and training, to expose people to different ways of seeing things and to information of which they were not previously aware, and also to help people view their own communities and their own knowledge and strategies in a more positive light. None of these approaches is without its problems, however. The way in which organisations like EGS act as intermediaries, or 'development brokers' (Blundo, 1995; Olivier de Sardan and Bierschenk, 1993), in the provision of funding is one strategy that is clearly fraught with many problems. For example, by playing such a role EGS is put into a position where it can co-opt local groups through providing them with money. In its role as a channel for funding, it is likely to gain, both financially and in terms of prestige and influence, and these gains may not always be used for the benefit of the wider community. Likewise, EGS's strategy of supporting popular initiatives by revalorising local knowledges and languages also brings with it problems: when the privileged French-speaking Enda Graim staff members encourage Noon speakers to be proud of their language and, indirectly, discourage them from seeking out opportunities to

learn French, are they not excluding these Noon speakers from accessing certain privileged spaces, such as universities, which they, as French-speakers, can easily access? Is there not something odd about those who have acquired some ‘non-local’ knowledge through their university education, going back and encouraging the communities from which they come to value local knowledge and traditions above all else? Clearly, EGS’s attempts at ‘accompanying popular dynamics’ are fraught with difficulties, but its experiences do point to some possible, if difficult and sometimes problematic, ways in which relatively privileged people can be involved in the struggles of the poor and oppressed.

### **6.3 Network Structures and the Support of Popular Initiatives**

In introducing Enda Graf Sahel in Chapter 4, I spoke of how the organisation evolved from being a community development organisation to being ‘a network of actors in movement’ (EGS, 2004a). In the section that immediately precedes this one, I have shown some of the kinds of assistance EGS is able to provide to the popular organisations and broader communities with which it works. What I have not yet done is discuss the way in which the organisational structure of EGS is relevant if we are to properly understand how it is able to support popular initiatives. Its network structure facilitates the provision of support in several ways: firstly, the EGS network extends community networks and introduces people with greatly varying skills and perspectives into these networks; secondly, the network structure permits extensive cooperation while still allowing for a diversity of approaches and modes of functioning; and thirdly, it serves to blur the ‘us’/‘them’ distinction to which I have given attention earlier.

### 6.3.1 EGS's Evolution into a Network

EGS's adoption of a network structure has already been discussed briefly in Chapter 4, but the process whereby it evolved into a network is worth revisiting briefly here in order to provide a clearer idea of what network functioning really entails. Looking back now and reading through the EGS documents in chronological order reveals how its evolution towards a network form of functioning began with an awareness of the Grand Yoff community's own network-like functioning. When the first EGS staff members arrived in Grand Yoff, they implicitly believed that the community was relatively disorganised. Development workers, they had been taught, had to go into communities and set up 'self-development associations' (Ndione, 1993, p.186) to improve cooperation within the community. Gradually, they realised that the people of Grand Yoff were already organised along the lines of what Ndione (1993) calls *grappes* (clusters) and that they wanted to draw EGS into these clusters. This was contrary to what the EGS staff believed about development work: they thought that they, the development workers, ought to help set up groups but remain detached from them and eventually withdraw completely so that the groups could function autonomously. They speak of their frustration when on initiating a poultry farming group, the leader of the group seemed to insist on considering them as friends or family and on trying to draw them into her social network. Their training had led them to believe that they needed to remain distant to ensure the sustainability and autonomy of the group, but the woman leading the group seemed to do everything to prevent this, always treating the EGS staff members as friends or family members rather than as development workers (Ndione, 1993, p.67). Eventually, EGS came to recognise the importance of Grand Yoff's networks and allowed itself to be drawn into these networks.

EGS realised, however, that being drawn into such networks was very risky. Ndione (1993, p.186) uses an analogy of a billiard table to explain how EGS staff understanding of their role changed. Initially they had imagined themselves to be something like the cue which comes, from outside, and deftly knocks the balls across the table, changing the community according to carefully thought-out strategies. As they were drawn into the community and its functioning network they realised that they were more like one of the many balls on the billiard table – ‘set in motion from the outside, ricocheting off the cushion of the table and able, with a bit of luck, to make a couple of other balls move though not necessarily in the intended direction’ (Ndione, 1993, p.186). As the development workers became an element of the Grand Yoff community, they opened themselves up to being manipulated by the community and to having their intentions pushed and pulled off their initial course. However, as mentioned earlier, having any relevance and effect at all meant taking part in the community’s initiatives and being drawn into their organisational structures.

After recognising that the communities with whom they worked functioned as social networks which they ought to allow themselves to be drawn into, it was a while before EGS staff began to describe EGS itself as a network. EGS’s 1999 publication (see De Leener et al., 1999) discusses how EGS sought to support networks of popular organisations, but nowhere describes EGS as a network. A year or two later, EGS speaks of how it has been able to facilitate the emergence of new networks of popular organisations (see EGS, 2000, p.59) and how it has come to function more and more like a ‘polycentric forum’ (see Ndione et al., 2001, pp.259-273). And then, a few years ago, the EGS staff began to use the term ‘*réseau*’ (network) to describe themselves (see EGS 2004b; 2005a).

Thus EGS has gradually moved from being in a position of ignorance regarding the network functioning of the community, to recognising and participating to some extent in this functioning, to actually adopting a network structure itself, though of course the shift towards network functioning was not as neat and conclusive as this brief overview may suggest. In addition, it should be acknowledged that the EGS shift towards regarding their organisation as a network must also have been influenced by the increasing popularity of notions of network in the broader NGO community. As Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos (2004, p.839) note, this term has become ‘one of the hallmarks of the development industry’ and the increasing use of this term by other NGOs and donors is likely to have contributed to EGS’s new emphasis on network forms of organisation.

In the case of EGS, network functioning entails an absence of a large degree of centralised control and a fluidity of relations between the sub-entities within EGS. These sub-entities do not need the permission of a particular central body or person before deciding on their activities and for a while there were no regular meetings between all the members of all the different sub-entities of EGS or even between representatives of each of these sub-entities.<sup>15</sup> Beginning in the early 1980s all EGS staff members had met every Monday to discuss their progress; by the end of the 1990s, however, it was realised that these meetings ‘were conducted like a high mass’, functioning to reinforce a particular ideology and to control the activities of group members (Ndione et al., 2001, pp.269-270); and so they were abandoned in favour of more spontaneous meetings which could be initiated by anyone who wanted to share or ask for information. Thus EGS’s functioning became more

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<sup>15</sup> Recently, however, a Coordinating Council which is supposed to meet regularly and bring together representatives of all the sub-entities of the network has been established. This decision is discussed in more detail later on.

complex and less stratified, with some staff members, most notably Emmanuel Ndione, playing a prominent role, but with no one person or group systematically controlling the activities of the whole NGO.

This network form of functioning seems to facilitate the support of popular initiatives. By becoming part of community networks and linking up already existing networks, EGS helps poor people expand and diversify their social networks. When employing new staff EGS takes into account how the new staff will contribute to broadening the EGS network. Vice-coordinator Babacar Touré explained during the course of an interview in 2005 that EGS does not advertise positions and then look for people with the right CV to fill them, but rather tends to draw people already working in the community into the organisation, looking for people who are already part of the ‘social dynamics of change’ in the community. Frequently, it seems, EGS begins by working with those involved in community associations, before drawing some of such people more formally into the organisation itself or into particular projects for which it has funding.

The evolution of Enda Gram, one of the branches of Enda Graf Sahel, demonstrates this nicely.<sup>16</sup> Enda Gram is situated in Thiès, Senegal’s second largest city and works in Thiès, particularly in the peri-urban and rural areas around the city. While Enda Gram is a relatively new organisation (it began in the late 1990s), it grew out of an already existing associative movement in the rural area of Fandène just outside Thiès. Several of the current personnel of Enda Gram had been actively involved in various associative activities,

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<sup>16</sup> This discussion of Enda Gram is based on interviews with André Wade, Victor Tiné, Ferdinand Mbaye and Charles Wade, all members of Enda Gram. The interviews took place in Thiès on 29 and 30 June 2005.

particularly in associations providing a form of basic health insurance to people in the villages of Fandène. These associations began to cooperate and were given support by Enda Graf Sahel, which was also active in Thiès at the time. In this way, Enda Graim gradually emerged. By building on the community's networks and inserting new people in them, and building new bridges between different popular organisations, the EGS network extends itself while also building into and strengthening local networks.

Network structures are advantageous in that they allow for a degree of unity and cooperation without forcing very different initiatives into a single mode of functioning. Their looser and more fluid form of organisation means that the different groups brought together are able to function independently at times and to work together in flexible and continually evolving alliances at other times. During my stay with EGS, for example, I was invited to a ceremony in which the VAF network and a network of artisans signed a sort of memorandum of cooperation. A few days later, I overheard one of the members of the artisan network telling Emmanuel Ndione, who had not been present at the ceremony or, it seems, even aware that it was taking place, about this new agreement. The network structure meant that there was no need for Ndione, or any member of a central committee, to give permission before this agreement was signed – the choice of alliance is up to the sub-networks within EGS. Also, from what different people told me about the agreement, my impression was that it was rather vague, meaning that it could be adapted in response to the needs of VAF and the artisans. Of course, this vagueness is not without its problems and generally these kinds of fluid network relationships bring with them a risk of a lack of genuine cooperation between members of the networks and a lack of clarity regarding the

aims of this cooperation.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the advantages of such forms of organisation should not be underestimated – because EGS functions as a network, its constituent parts are given much more freedom to decide on how to relate to each other and to outside organisations than would otherwise be the case.

A further benefit of EGS's network functioning is that it allows for some blurring of the 'us'/'them' distinction which I highlighted earlier. The EGS network brings together and puts very different people in touch with each other. On the one hand, it is regularly visited by university lecturers, researchers and students from Europe and also by local élites and local university students; while, on the other, many of the people involved in sub-networks affiliated with EGS, such as the network of *caisses* and that of VAF, are poor and relatively disempowered. These people are then put in touch with each other and are able to benefit from each other's skills and, at least to some extent, to become more aware of the differences and similarities between themselves and their ways of life. For example, RACT (*Réseau des Acteurs du Transport*), a network of people involved in Dakar's transport system, brings together several local mini-bus (*car rapide*) drivers, the disadvantaged young men who work as *coxeurs*<sup>18</sup> for these drivers, the women who sell goods at bus stations and a French volunteer, all of whom work together, using their different skills, to try to promote cooperation among several important stake-holders in the transport

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<sup>17</sup> This problem is discussed further in Section 6.4.

<sup>18</sup> A *coxeur's* job involves attracting passengers by calling out the destination of the bus and handling payment of fares. It is a relatively low-status job usually undertaken by young men.

industry.<sup>19</sup> By linking people in networks, they are brought together in a way that does not clearly determine their relationships. Privileged people are not placed in a fixed position of authority over less privileged people, but rather a whole variety of people are linked up in fluid and slightly unclear ways, which allows for at least some blurring of the lines between the more and the less privileged. Because EGS brings together a whole spectrum of people, including privileged Western academics at the one extreme, and very poor local people at the other, it is perhaps more accurate not to speak of how EGS is able to support popular initiatives, but of how popular initiatives have been brought into, and are supported within, EGS. EGS blends together very different people, blurring boundaries between them and allowing opportunities for them to assist each other – after all, the privileged academic coming to EGS to do research is assisted by other members of the network in achieving his or her research goals, just as the poor woman who is part of VAF manages, through her involvement, to develop some skills which help her to improve her situation. Both have the opportunity to interact with people very different from themselves and, in this way, to break down at least some of the barriers separating them from ‘distant others’.

### 6.3.2 Broader Discussions on Network Structures

EGS is certainly not the only organisation which has decided to function as a network rather than a more centralised and rigidly organised entity. The broader literature on new social movements to which I referred earlier, devotes considerable attention to the new forms of organisation which appear to be emerging within NGOs, new social movements and the cooperative frameworks bringing such NGOs and movements together. It is worth

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<sup>19</sup> These comments are based on my own observation of the functioning of RACT and on comments regarding RACT in Enda Graf Sahel’s 2004 annual report (EGS, 2005a).

looking briefly at this literature to see to what extent EGS's experiences confirm – or challenge – emerging ideas about new organisational forms associated with new social movements. The term 'network', and related terms such as 'meshwork' or 'web', are often used when discussing these new organisational structures, with commentators arguing that one of the most characteristic and promising features of new left organisations and broader social movements is their network structure. Escobar (2004a, pp.210-222; 2004b, pp.351-356), for example, discusses how network structures could point to promising new ways of organisation and cooperation, and more broadly to new ways of thinking about the politics of the left. Another example is the attention that the experiences of the Zapatista support network<sup>20</sup> and of the World Social Forum (WSF) have been receiving from those interested in the possibilities offered by network structures. Some see the Zapatista support network and the WSF as exemplars of the way in which different anti-neo-liberal groups can cooperate while respecting differences between them (see Löwy, 2004), while others suggest that the Zapatista experience could reveal new understandings of solidarity (see Olesen, 2004). The networking possibilities opened up by the use of cyberspace by new social movements and the Zapatista support network in particular have been given much attention (see Escobar, 2004b, pp.350-356; Olesen 2004; Russell, 2005; Waterman, 2004, pp.59-60).

Generally, there is a feeling that network structures are commendable because they allow for greater cooperation in a way which does not endanger heterogeneity – thus, they are a

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<sup>20</sup> By 'Zapatista support network' I refer to the large network of those professing support for the Chiapas-based Zapatista movement. The EZLN (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* or Zapatista Army of National Liberation) has attracted a broad support base outside of Chiapas and it is to this network, rather than the actual original EZLN fighters, that I refer here. For more information on the EZLN and the broader Zapatista support network, see Holloway and Peláez (1998).

way to plot a path between parochialism, which may arise when one is too eager to defend diversity, and the insensitive universalism which characterises many other forms of cooperation. Another advantage often attributed to network structures is that they tend to function in a less hierarchical and more decentralised way. While some commentators acknowledge that network structures are not necessarily non-hierarchical (see for example Escobar, 2001, p.169), discussions of network structures and new social movements typically hold up a lack of hierarchy as one of the commendable things about such structures. For example, Rubin (2004, p.141) speaks of how scholars and activists disillusioned with traditional left politics praise the new social movements' less hierarchical way of organising and De Sousa Santos (2004, p.338) lists one of the noteworthy features of the WSF as being the absence of leaders and hierarchical structures in its organisation. Also, one of the most discussed, and somewhat mythologised, features of the Zapatista grassroots movement, is the apparent refusal of the Chiapans to organise along the hierarchical lines favoured by a group of radical students who had come to 'liberate' them (see Russell, 2005, p.567).

### 6.3.3 Noteworthy Features of EGS's Network Functioning

The network structures preferred by many new social movements and also by many of the NGOs involved in the WSF are thus praised for being sensitive to difference, decentralised and non-hierarchical. Can the EGS network be described as typical of the sort of network receiving attention in the above-mentioned literature? I believe that there are similarities, but that there are also some interesting divergences which I would like to highlight. Like the networks discussed in the above literature, the EGS network is decentralised and allows

for cooperation without imposing a single rigid framework of operation. In other ways, however, the EGS network functions quite differently from, for example, the Zapatista support network or the WSF. Firstly, the EGS network is a network that spreads out through personal connections and which does not include a significant ‘cyberspace’ element. Although it stretches across more than one continent, it is concentrated in Senegal, and indeed in Dakar, and it is built through the gradual integration of already existing social networks. Certainly, some members of the network use the internet, but relationships are primarily initiated and maintained through personal, face-to-face contact. A woman involved in the micro-credit and savings system affiliated with EGS may invite her neighbour to join her *caisse*. Through the *caisse*, and its contact with other parts of the EGS network, the neighbour may become aware of training sessions for dyeing fabric and begin to participate in these. She may then bring along her daughter-in-law and so the network continues to extend.

My own experiences with EGS illustrate the way in which it typically expands through personal connections rather than through more mediated ways. Having read a little about EGS in post-development literature, I set about trying to get in touch with the organisation. Being well-acquainted with ‘cyberculture’ I began by visiting the EGS website (which seems to have been updated last around 1999)<sup>21</sup> and sent EGS an email – to which I received no reply. I then telephoned the EGS coordinating office on several occasions eventually getting to speak to Ndione who told me that I was welcome to visit EGS as a *stagiaire* (intern) as long as I paid my way. Once I arrived in Dakar I set about finding the EGS main office which I had been told was ‘near *L’Église St Paul*’ in Grand Yoff. There

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<sup>21</sup> However, since April 2006 there has been a notice on the site stating that it is soon to be updated, but at the time of writing (June 2007), this updating had not yet occurred.

was no building in the vicinity marked ‘Enda Graf Sahel’ and my enquiries led me to a building which turned out to be the Grand Yoff Women’s Saving and Credit Association (*Mutuelle d’Épargne et de Crédit des Femmes de Grand Yoff*) which is affiliated with EGS. They in turn directed me down a dusty side street where I still saw no sign announcing ‘Enda Graf Sahel main office’ but did find signs for a community radio station and an internet café, both of which were, it turned out, affiliated with EGS and run from its unmarked main office. Evidently, people do not often stumble upon EGS either in cyberspace or in the Grand Yoff neighbourhood, but more typically come to know about it through being introduced to it through a personal contact.

Once I had arrived I found myself to be a bit of an anomaly. While there were other interns there, all from France, each had arrived through having a prior connection with EGS – in most cases their professors knew someone within EGS and had contacted that person directly to arrange for the student to spend some time doing an internship with that particular person. I, however, knew nobody who knew anybody in Enda Graf Sahel. It took me a while to realise that the initial difficulty I had in finding any kind of ‘niche’ for myself was partly a result of the peculiarity of my having come seemingly from outer space, rather than through an already established personal connection. Once there, I realised, too, that there is no single person who is always aware of everything – or even nearly everything – happening within EGS. I found out about events because someone with whom I had already established some kind of connection invited me along to them, and not because there was any central person who could inform me of what was happening or any central place (a notice board, newsletter or website perhaps) providing a schedule of activities for any particular week or month. EGS expands and functions by word of mouth

and the sub-entities and affiliates are often bound together through personal connections and drift closer and further apart with the ebb and flow of personal relationships. A breakdown in a personal relationship could lead to the severing, or weakening, of a tie between units of the network. For example, one of the members of Enda Graim, Charles Wade, informed me that the link between Enda Graim and EGS was ‘basically Emmanuel [Ndione]’.<sup>22</sup> I got the impression that were it not for the relationship between Ndione, who comes originally from the same community as do Wade and several others at Graim (they are all Christian Noon-speakers coming from the Fandène region), there would be little or no link between the activities undertaken by Enda Graim and those of EGS’s other sub-entities.

Thus, EGS – and surely many other networks operating in the Third World – has little in common with the broad network of Zapatista supporters who connect with each other through web-lists and blogs, or with the WSF network which also relies strongly on the internet and on other mediated forms of interaction. This is not to say that the actual Chiapas-based Zapatistas and some of the organisations involved in the WSF do not operate more like EGS – I suspect they do – but the broader networks which have been receiving most attention in the literature, seem to be characterised by considerable dependence on ICTs rather than on face-to-face interaction. If we are to determine whether network structures are truly promising avenues for new forms of political organisation, more attention ought to be given to the functioning of these sorts of face-to-face networks to prevent an overemphasis on more mediated network structures.

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<sup>22</sup> This was disclosed to me during an interview conducted on 30 June 2005.

There is a second difference worth noting when comparing the EGS network with those discussed in recent literature on new social movements and that is that it is less easily described as non-hierarchical as are some other networks. In much of the literature about network functioning it seems to be assumed that, ideally at least, networks function in relatively non-hierarchical ways (see Henry et al., 2004). EGS's experiences show how it is not so easy to assume that networks do, or even ought to, function in this way. EGS's inspiration for becoming a network came from the network functioning of the people of Grand Yoff. The social networks of Grand Yoff are fluid and in many ways decentralised, but it would not be accurate to describe them as non-hierarchical. The people EGS works with invest much time, money and energy in extending their social networks and seek to attract as many high status people as possible to these networks. The mode of functioning of one of the groups of women with which EGS was involved in the early days of its work is telling. EGS helped set up a women's organisation whose members would group together to buy goods in bulk and then sell them at a small profit. The group had chosen a relatively high-status woman to be their treasurer and she seemed to the EGS staff members to behave in ways that did not conform to their ideas of how a treasurer ought to behave. Her management of the money was not completely transparent and she seemed to be secretly giving loans to many group members. While each loan was made secretly, group members who did not receive loans seemed to be aware that something like this was happening and did not seem dissatisfied about it. Furthermore, when a member was unable to pay her contribution to the group's activities, the treasurer would sometimes pay it for her but would do this discreetly without embarrassing the person involved. Describing her, Ndione (1993, p.43) says:

She was a real mother, attentive to the needs of her children. She was always available to move around 'in high places', knocking on the doors of influential people, to help one or another group member who was struggling to enrol her child in school or looking for a job.

It was this kind of person that the women insisted on having as their treasurer – someone with high status who was willing to use her money and status for the benefit of the group. In exchange for what she did to advance the interests of her 'children', they gave her their devotion and loyalty, always responding to her requests and helping maintain her position of relative high status in the community. This kind of relationship emerged time and again in EGS's work in Grand Yoff – think also of the example of the small farming initiative described earlier, where the group preferred to allow one member to make all important decisions and control the money, provided he was willing to act as the 'father' of the group. The people of Grand Yoff wanted to bring high status people into their groups and to give them important positions and seemed to find EGS's desire that they elect 'ordinary' community members to leadership positions to be most peculiar. Rather they wanted high profile leaders who were able to use their status to advance the interests of the group and whose own position would be furthered by the group's loyalty and devotion. The relationships between group leaders and members were thus characterised by reciprocity but certainly not by egalitarianism.

EGS, which held strongly to notions of egalitarianism, was uncomfortable with this kind of functioning but realised that the sort of hierarchies occurring in the community were not unambiguously disadvantageous to the poor. Because of the power that low-status members had – the high profile members' status depended largely on poorer people's loyalty, praise and devotion – these hierarchies were fluid and easily disrupted, with groups often choosing to reject their previous leader and choose a new 'mother' or 'father'

because they were unhappy with some aspect of the person's leadership. While it may be tempting to argue that the poor's eager participation in these hierarchies was simply a result of some kind of false consciousness which made them act against their interests, an honest examination of the way in which these hierarchies work makes such arguments seem simplistic and condescending. Realising that local social hierarchies were more complex than they had first imagined did not lead the EGS staff members to completely abandon their egalitarian ideals – it is clear from later documents that many EGS members still hold up relatively egalitarian structures as ideal<sup>23</sup> – but made them less quick to condemn local hierarchies and more willing to acknowledge the logic that lay behind the people's desire to work within hierarchical structures.

Furthermore, despite EGS's professed preference for egalitarianism, the organisation itself does not function in an egalitarian, horizontal way, although there is no rigid hierarchy. The deference people show to Emmanuel Ndione and his seeming ambivalence with regard to his position of influence reveal the complexity of EGS's own position regarding hierarchies. For example, when enquiring about doing an internship with EGS, the secretary was insistent that to get permission for such a thing it was imperative that I speak to Ndione, and once while I was attending a gathering of people affiliated to different Enda TM projects someone outside of EGS pointed to Ndione and said 'That man, he *is* Enda Graf', suggesting that Ndione plays a role similar to that of the 'mother' of the women's group described above. However, I also witnessed Ndione deliberately downplaying his own position or refusing to take the lead in situations where it seemed others expected him

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<sup>23</sup> The whole of *Pauvreté, décentralisation et changement social* (De Leener et al., 1999) is a condemnation of centralisation and of many forms of hierarchical structures, and there are references in later work to values such as that of 'equity' and to attempts to function in a less hierarchical way. However, given the size and decentralisation of EGS today, it may well be that some newer staff members do not hold so much to the ideal of egalitarianism.

to do so. EGS's own functioning is in many ways similar to the functioning of networks in the community but there is a sense in which the EGS staff members, especially those who have worked for EGS for a long time, seem more uncomfortable with hierarchy than are the 'ordinary' people of Grand Yoff. The extent to which EGS's functioning is hierarchical is something upon which at least some EGS staff members have reflected. In a recent publication (Ndione et al., 2001, pp.259-274), the authors discuss the different institutional models which EGS has adopted over the years, arguing that initially the organisation functioned more or less like a family, with a father figure (Jacques Bugnicourt) and 'sibling rivalry' between the different staff members. Later, its functioning came closer to resembling that of an extended family or clan, and finally, EGS began to operate more like a polycentric forum which brings together many people, but has no clear, dominating centre. However, in this discussion, they stress that the current functioning of EGS combines elements of these three institutional styles, rather than only resembling a polycentric forum, thereby acknowledging that elements of hierarchy remain within the organisation (see Ndione et al., 2001, pp.268-269).

EGS's experiences show how careful we should be not to assume that decentralised, fluid structures are non-hierarchical or that hierarchies always function to limit the options of the poor. Reflecting on their first decade of work, Ndione (1993, pp.170-171) comments that when the EGS staff members first arrived in Grand Yoff they thought that they ought to work with the less privileged to the exclusion of the more privileged minority and that their ultimate aim was to 'overthrow the established order and institute a social system based on egalitarianism'. But the poor, who they had set out to save, had other ideas. EGS began to realise that many of the relations between the privileged and less privileged were reciprocal

even though they were not egalitarian. The poor had enough 'room to manoeuvre' to be able to influence at least some of the decisions made by prominent members of society. When discussing network structures and the promises they may hold for new kinds of political organisation, we need to think carefully about the ways in which these structures bring less and more privileged people together and how the hierarchies that may emerge within these structures really function. The flexible hierarchies and face-to-face nature of the network structures of the Grand Yoff community and also of EGS allow for the less privileged to make the kinds of claims upon more privileged network members that could not really be made in a more mediated and less hierarchical network. I do not mean to argue in favour of such hierarchies here – indeed, both I and many at EGS are not completely comfortable with such hierarchies. The point is rather to stress that we overlook interesting and important complexities when we assume that the less hierarchical the structure, the better, or that all forms of hierarchy function in much the same way.

Generally, the evolution of EGS into a network, and the observations of Ndione (1992; 1993) and other EGS staff members about the network functioning of the Grand Yoff community, are of value in that they demonstrate how network functioning can be instrumental in facilitating the support of popular initiatives, but also call into question the focus of some of the literature on network forms of organisation referred to earlier. As Escobar (2004b, p.351) admits, networks are 'in' at the moment, and those who are interested in exploring the potential of this kind of organisational structure would do well to pay attention to experiences such as those of EGS.

#### **6.4 Sensitivity to Difference and the Problem of Relativism**

One of the supposed advantages of network structures is that they allow for cooperation without being insensitive to difference. This concern with sensitivity to difference and the related antipathy to the idea of a single universal project with a single, clearly defined goal, is core both to post-development theory and to much contemporary social analysis. ‘Development’ is opposed because it lumps together diverse groups, labels them ‘underdeveloped’ and prescribes the ‘developed’ lifestyle of Western, industrialised countries as an ideal for all. Those opposing ‘development’ seek to find ways in which the genuinely undesirable situations experienced by many may be opposed without a single path to a single idealised future being advocated. One possibility is to suggest that each community ought to respond to its own situation in accordance with its own value framework and in isolation of other societies, but this is to advocate a narrow parochialism and is unworkable in the light of the interdependencies between different societies and regions today. Thus it seems that we need to find a way to relate different struggles together without ignoring or riding roughshod over differences between them. Network structures seem to be ideal in this respect, but this fluid, decentralised way of organising has risks too, and these risks are related to a broader problem – how to ensure that sensitivity to difference and an unwillingness to insist upon a single, rigid set of values and practices does not become a politically problematic form of relativism which refuses to criticise or reject any particular group or any particular practice.

This problem has a number of different facets, several of which have been touched upon already. In my discussion of criticisms directed at post-development theory I spoke about

concerns that post-development theorists' reaction against the universalism of earlier development theory had pushed them to a position in which they risked advocating a politically problematic form of relativism. In Chapter 5 I spoke about the problem of how to construct a conceptual framework that is not inflexible and dogmatic yet does not treat each community's values as if they are so different and incommensurable that no broad guiding conceptual framework may be constructed. Earlier on in the current chapter, I mentioned the tension between EGS's desire to be effective in the community – a desire that seemed to force it to compromise its values and to accept the values of whichever group it was working with – and its desire to hold on to and promote egalitarianism and democratic decision-making. I also noted that while the vagueness that characterised the agreement between the VAF women's group and the artisans' group allowed for cooperation between these two groups to be flexible, this vagueness is also problematic in that it could result in a lack of real cooperation between the groups because of the absence of a general guiding orientation to which both groups are committed. All of these problems are related in that they have to do with the tension between a desire on the one hand to be sensitive to difference and to allow for the coexistence and flourishing of diverse ways of doing things, and on the other hand, a desire to avoid a politically problematic form of relativism that refuses to condemn anyone or any particular practice. Working together along the lines of decentralised network-type structures allows for cooperation that does not stifle diversity, but how can it be ensured that this cooperation is coherent and has direction? If the groups have nothing at all in common or hold radically opposed values, how can any cooperation, no matter how decentralised and fluid, be meaningful?

Some of EGS's recent experiences regarding how to decentralise the organisation without losing a sense of coherence and unity, provide some insights with regard to such questions. During the 1990s, EGS began to promote its own organisational decentralisation, the motivation being a concern that centralisation tends to involve the imposition of a particular approach or way of doing things, and that if the various groups within the expanding EGS organisation were to be able to respond appropriately to their different contexts, such an imposition needed to be resisted. Hence, a strategy of decentralisation gradually arose as the various sub-entities within EGS were given more and more autonomy and encouraged to develop their own approaches and strategies.

Recently, however, the organisation has felt the need to try to redefine what it is that unites the different sub-entities of EGS (see EGS; 2005b). It was realised that while the burgeoning body of EGS staff members did have a sense of belonging to the 'Enda Graf family', their sense of contributing to a common project was rather vague and impalpable. The level of decentralisation within EGS had also resulted in some practical problems, such as an embarrassing incident where two sub-entities within EGS both submitted a funding proposal in the name of EGS to the same potential funding partner, giving the impression that EGS is very disorganised. To try to address such problems a research project on the organisation itself was initiated by the coordinating office in an attempt to define what it is that holds the organisation together and guides its diverse programmes. The tension experienced by EGS between the need for coherence within the organisation and the need for autonomy for the various components of the organisation, is in many ways the institutional equivalent of the tension discussed above between the need to avoid extreme relativism and the need for sensitivity to difference. While EGS did not want to

impose a particular approach – and thus a particular set of values – on its various components, without a sense of what held these components together, the organisation could not maintain its coherence.

EGS thus set about identifying some common values that unite the organisation and that all staff members seek to promote in the communities in which they work. A discussion session bringing together the broader EGS network led the EGS staff members to conclude that their intervention in the community, or indeed *any* intervention, could not be considered to be value neutral and that they were promoting a particular set of values, even if only implicitly. In attempting to make explicit these values, they speak of values such as solidarity, equity, autonomy, respect for others and for shared goods, conviviality, reflexivity, and protection of the environment (EGS, 2004b; 2005b). At this meeting some organisational structures and practices were set up with the aim of facilitating the further elaboration of a common set of values and orientations. A Coordinating Council was established in which the various sub-entities within EGS should all be represented and which is supposed to meet more or less monthly to help coordinate the activities of EGS as a whole. Furthermore, they decided to organise a number of orientation sessions, called *boussoles* (compasses), which would bring together people working on a particular theme with the aim of finding a ‘common north’ which would serve as a lodestar to orientate their activities, but would still allow the various programmes a large amount of flexibility. The compass metaphor is meant to capture the idea of there being a general common direction, but many different paths as a result of the diversity of contexts in which the various people within the EGS network find themselves. Over the last year and a half several such *boussoles* have been held on themes such as agriculture, the economy and communication.

Each *boussole* is supposed to bring together all those involved in programmes related to the theme of the *boussole*.

These recent developments at EGS indicate its recognition that on an organisational level decentralisation, and the sensitivity to difference and context it enables, must be balanced with some kind of unifying guiding orientation, or else the organisation will lose coherence. Likewise, in relation to post-development theory, it could be said that while post-development theorists are correct in wanting to present an alternative which is not overly prescriptive and which is sensitive to difference, in order for an alternative programme to be workable, there needs to be a broad guiding framework. There *are* several values which are implicit in much of post-development theory (very similar ones, indeed, to those listed by EGS) as in any other approach no matter how non-prescriptive, and making them explicit will help to clarify the political project proposed by post-development theorists. Likewise, those praising the virtues of decentralised, non-hierarchical network structures, need to clarify how it is that such structures are to enable action which can bring about the improvement of the lives of those belonging to a particular network. Where a network is nothing more than a messy collectivity of vaguely affiliated groups, it is unlikely that it will be able to drive any initiative forward or elaborate substantially upon new ideas and possibilities.

Of course, the balance between avoiding prescription on the one hand and incoherence and vagueness on the other, is a difficult one. It is not yet certain whether EGS's attempts to achieve this balance within the organisation have been successful. The values defined as being common to the organisation certainly avoid being prescriptive but it is not clear that

they are sufficiently defined to really draw the organisation together. It is still too early to tell if the meetings of the Coordinating Council and the *boussoles* will be able to provide the organisation with sufficient coherence. I attended two of EGS's *boussoles*, one on economics and one on agriculture, and from what I could see, the *boussoles* were attended not so much by all those involved in work related to the topic under discussion, but simply by all those who felt like it, with people dropping out of the *boussoles*, which typically last several days, if they felt that these were not useful to their particular objectives or if they had other things to do. Also, a large part of the two *boussoles* I attended took the form of an outside academic providing a series of lectures rather than being a general discussion leading to the identification of a 'common north'. It may be that these were not representative of the *boussoles* in general, and there was also at least one session during one of the *boussoles* which was attended only by EGS core staff, so it could be that it was there that the 'common north' was identified. However, my general impression was that the *boussoles* I attended did not seem to have the focus they were intended to have. Nevertheless, the recognition of the need to establish a sense of unity while avoiding prescription and insensitivity to difference, and the commitment to find a way to do so, is an interesting starting point.

Something should be said here about the related problem of deciding which popular initiatives ought to be supported. If, as pointed out by critics of post-development theory, not all such initiatives promote the broader interests of the communities in which they work, how is an NGO like EGS to decide which community organisations and initiatives to support? A clearly defined set of values and objectives could function as criteria for making such decisions, but could have the disadvantage of being experienced by the

community as an imposition from outside. The experiences of the EGS staff members have taught them that when they insist that particular values be respected by the organisations with which they work, these organisations tend to present a 'front' of cooperation, while operating according to their own values behind the scenes. As discussed earlier, EGS's initial approach involved the promotion of democratic and egalitarian leadership structures. But while community members pretended to go along with these requirements, in fact leaders were chosen according to local social hierarchies. Thus, the groups set up by EGS insisted upon choosing high-status people as their leaders rather than simply choosing 'ordinary' community members to head up their groups. Likewise, EGS's insistence on strict accounting practices and the rigid guidelines that accompanied the early loans offered, did not lead the community to manage money as EGS preferred, but simply resulted in community members involved in EGS projects presenting 'too perfect' accounts which disguised the real ways in which they spent the loans given by EGS. It seemed that insisting upon certain values did not lead the population to adopt these values, but did function as a barrier to openness and honesty between EGS and the community.

Nevertheless, providing support for any community organisation whatsoever could be considered to be politically irresponsible as this could entail supporting groups with questionable aims or which ultimately function to the disadvantage of the communities of which they form part. EGS staff members profess to advance their values in their cooperation with community groups and acknowledge that not all community organisations work for the interests of the broader community,<sup>24</sup> but avoid insisting on a rigidly defined

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<sup>24</sup> An EGS publication lists the criteria of a 'good' community organisation (see De Leener et al., 1999, p.47) which suggests that they believe it to be possible to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' community organisations.

set of values or practices. This is not a completely satisfactory response to the concern expressed by critics of post-development theory regarding how to decide which local movements should be supported. Nonetheless, EGS's experiences demonstrate the difficulty of finding a conclusive way to fit into and be relevant to the community without completely diluting one's own orientation and set of beliefs, and without being 'captured' by possibly unscrupulous community organisations. Currently, EGS does not support every community organisation that asks for aid and does try to encourage certain values within the community, but at the same time is very cautious neither to impose such values, nor to unintentionally encourage the population to pretend to embrace EGS's values by making EGS support conditional on the acceptance of a particular set of values or the practices entailed by such values.

This kind of struggle is sure to occur in any attempt to bring together diverse groups with a view to their cooperation but with a reluctance to stifle differences between them or to impose a single, rigid framework upon them. Recent discussions about the WSF show how this sort of struggle has occurred there too, with the WSF being criticised on the one hand for being too vague and little more than a 'talk shop' and on the other for becoming too much like a 'movement' rather than the open and non-prescriptive space favoured by some.<sup>25</sup>

Such struggles and the tensions related to them have led some contemporary social theorists to defend a minimal universalism against positions which seem to advocate

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<sup>25</sup> See volume 29(2) of the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* and volume 56, 4(182) of the *International Social Science Journal* both of which came out in 2004 and included several contributions on the WSF.

extreme relativism. For example, Tomlinson's (2001) concern that an excessive sensitivity to difference can lead to forms of ethnic or national chauvinism, leads him to defend a 'benign universalism' which entails a recognition that there are at least some things that are true for all human beings, and that it is worth trying to construct consensual values with respect to such similarities. Likewise, Corbridge (1994, pp.109-110) insists that he is

not willing to deconstruct further certain minimally universalist claims, of the type that involuntary death from hunger, or involuntary malnutrition, or involuntary homelessness, or slavery or torture are bad things which should be struggled against.

Another author who deals extensively with this issue is Smith (see 1994, pp.289-296; 1997a; 1997b; 1998; 1999; 2000; 2001) who discusses it in relation to ethics and geography. Like the above-mentioned authors, Smith attempts to rescue some universal claims from the threat posed to them by the extreme anti-universalist and anti-essentialist stance of some post-modern writers.<sup>26</sup> Such attempts highlight the difficulty of negotiating our way between an insensitive, rigid, prescriptive, 'one size fits all' approach and an irresponsible, all-embracing, 'do as you please' approach. This challenge is of interest and importance both for moral theorists and for those engaged in concrete attempts to cooperate with or to assist those different from themselves.

EGS's experiences do not provide a solution to this tension, but this failing, if we must call it a failing, is a reflection more of the nature of the problem than of EGS's shortcomings. The tension that results from trying to avoid both irresponsible relativism and insensitive universalism is, I believe, one that requires continual reflection and adaptation rather than

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<sup>26</sup> Countless other authors have provided similar defences of some kind of minimalist universalism. Prominent examples include Nussbaum's (1992) defence of Aristotelian essentialism and Benhabib's (1992, p.3) argument in favour of a 'post-Enlightenment project of interactive universalism'. Smith's (1997b; 1999; 2001) reviews in *Progress in Human Geography* provide further references to several authors defending such a position.

one that can be conclusively resolved. Those involved in supporting popular initiatives will always have to try to negotiate a difficult path between dogmatic insistence that groups adhere to certain principles and irresponsible support for just any group or initiative. Likewise, attempts by post-development and other thinkers to reflect on possible ways to work for justice and against poverty and oppression will always have to bear in mind both the need to be aware of and sensitive to differences between people and the need to respond tangibly and responsibly to situations of suffering.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

In the previous chapter I sketched a conceptual framework which could help guide attempts to think about how to oppose poverty and injustice in the light of the post-development debate. In this chapter I have outlined one of the principal ways in which we who are not poor and oppressed may participate in the struggles of those who are. The provision of support for local and popular initiatives seems to be a way in which we can participate in the struggles of the poor and oppressed without dictating to such people or assuming that we are somehow more able to know what it is they require than they are. After explaining why I, and many others, believe that supporting the local and the popular is a commendable strategy, I went on to suggest some of the things that ‘we’ can bring to local and popular struggles, referring to several of the ways in which EGS has worked with and indeed become part of a number of Senegalese communities and has supported their attempts to improve their lives. EGS has administrative skills, an ability to communicate over long distances, connections with a variety of people and an ability to attract funding and skilled people, and it has put these advantages at the disposal of community groups. It

has also used its different positioning and its different knowledge to expose members of the communities with which it works to other ways of thinking about their problems and their broader situation.

In the latter half of the chapter, I have examined network structures, and particularly EGS's network structure, to see in what ways such structures can facilitate the support of local and popular initiatives. Network structures have been lauded by some who believe that they point to new and promising ways of political organisation for those who are uncomfortable with more centralised and rigidly hierarchical structures. In some recent literature on new social movements and contemporary struggles for social justice, network structures are being held up as a helpful alternative form of organisation which is able to bring together diverse groups, always aware of and sensitive to the differences between them, and enable them to support each other and to coordinate their efforts where appropriate, without ever forcing down a particular way of doing things or a single, rigid understanding of what ought to be done. To determine the extent to which network structures are able to provide for this kind of cooperation, it is useful to examine particular networks, such as the EGS network. EGS's experiences provide some insights regarding how face-to-face networks function and about forms of hierarchy within decentralised, fluid networks.

One of the key issues that needs to receive more attention by those advocating the support of the local and the popular and those favouring network forms of organisation, is the issue of how to balance a concern with sensitivity to difference with a concern with the avoidance of an extreme form of relativism. A reluctance to interfere in the lives of others and a legitimate questioning of our expertise should not lead relatively privileged people to

disengage from struggles against poverty and oppression, or to engage in such struggles in a way that refuses to differentiate between initiatives and to favour some over others. When we attempt to assist those less privileged than ourselves we need to always be aware of the tension between the need for sensitivity to difference and the danger of extreme relativism, and to engage it critically and carefully.

## CHAPTER 7

### SOLIDARITY WITH DISTANT OTHERS HERE AT HOME

Having discussed ways to rethink the struggle against poverty and injustice, and ways to support popular struggles, we arrive finally at the question of what can be done ‘here at home’. What changes need to occur in the spaces where ‘we, the privileged’ are most at ease? In what ways can our actions ‘at home’ be in solidarity with the struggles of distant others?

#### **7.1 Why Change is Needed ‘Here at Home’**

Post-development theorists, echoing one of the key refrains of dependency theory, argue that the wealth and comfort (or ‘development’) of some is predicated to a considerable extent upon the exploitation and oppression (or ‘underdevelopment’) of others.<sup>1</sup> A proper analysis of the relations between more and less privileged people suggests that we cannot view the suffering of distant others, or at least some types of such suffering, as having nothing to do with us, while considering ourselves as generous and charitable when we choose to respond to such suffering. As I have already argued with reference to Corbridge (1998b) and Collier (1992), because the lives of geographically distant people are today intricately linked, if things are to change ‘over there’, things will also have to change ‘here at home’. I should clarify here, as I did in Chapter 3, that ‘here at home’ is not meant to refer to a particular set of countries (such as those described as ‘Western’); nor is ‘over

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of a dependency theorist arguing along these lines, see Frank (1969a; 1969b); for an example of a post-development text with this theme, see Alvares (1992).

there' meant to refer to the Third World. Rather, 'at home' refers to the spaces and settings to which the relatively privileged have easy access, and from which the poor are excluded, while the spaces and settings to which the poor are confined, be they in the West or in the Third World, can be described as 'over there'.

While change is needed 'here at home' if things are to improve for the poor, post-development writers also give us reason to think that the kinds of changes we may want to introduce 'here at home' in acknowledgement of the suffering of distant others may ultimately benefit us too. If, as some argue (see for example Marglin, 1990; Mies, 1993), and as I discuss in Chapter 2, the lives of the 'developed' are not as enviable as may be supposed, then the changes required 'here at home' in the interest of the distant others who suffer as a result of our practices, may also be in our own interest.

These arguments in favour of change 'here at home' link up to Oleson's (2004) discussion of global solidarity. In contrast to earlier forms of solidarity which, at least in their ideal typical forms, 'denote a one-way relationship between those who offer solidarity and those who benefit from it', Oleson (2004, p.258) believes that a new form of global solidarity which 'blurs the distinction between providers and beneficiaries' is emerging. This form of solidarity is expressive of an 'extensive global consciousness that constructs the grievances of physically, socially and culturally distant people as deeply intertwined' (Oleson, 2004, p.259). The rise of this kind of solidarity is related to contemporary anti-neo-liberal and anti-globalisation movements which bring together different groups united in their opposition to the somewhat nebulous enemy of neo-liberalism, which is seen as negatively affecting all of their lives (Coughlan, 2006). Global solidarity, as described by Oleson

(2004), involves a recognition of the interconnectedness of the lives of distant groups and the need for dialogue and change in the lives of all involved. The need for change 'here at home' should not then be viewed solely as a responsibility incumbent upon the privileged as a result of our complex entanglement in the lives of the poor, but also as a recognition of the possibility that such change may ultimately also improve our lives.

The question of what kinds of changes may be needed 'here at home' is a very broad and complex one to which far more answers need to be provided than could possibly be included in a single chapter here. What follows therefore is a discussion of only three of many possible ways in which we can change things here in solidarity with distant others. I look firstly at the ways in which we can change our research and teaching practices 'here at home'; then at the in-between role of Third World elites; and, finally, at the ways in which the acknowledgement of the shortcomings of our lives 'here at home' can function in solidarity with distant others. As with previous chapters, extensive reference will be made to the experiences of Enda Graf Sahel, but the chapter will also draw on a variety of other sources.

## **7.2 Researching and Teaching Differently**

As discussed previously, one of the most important preoccupations of EGS today is the promotion of popular research. I would like to briefly re-examine EGS's notion of popular research, which has been touched on earlier, in order to see what we can draw from this discussion with reference to how to do research 'here at home' in solidarity with struggles against poverty and injustice. According to EGS texts, there are several features which

distinguish popular research from the forms of research they oppose and which they refer to as elite, professional or official research.<sup>2</sup> Firstly, popular research makes no clear distinction between the people doing the research and the people being researched. There are no human ‘objects’ of research and those outside a community can only fruitfully participate in that community’s research if they ‘break with ways of relating to the other in terms which view the other as an object’ (Ndione et al., 2001, p.159). Secondly, popular research is done in the community rather than in formal research settings. Thirdly, it is research that works to oppose oppression and domination, in contrast to elite research which frequently ‘legitimises norms which produce competition and exclusion’ (Ndione et al., 2001, p.292). Finally, popular research is more concerned with producing locally relevant knowledge than with trying to determine universal principles – it is research that is ‘in life and not about Life’ (Ndione et al., 2001, p.293).

What Ndione and others at EGS call popular research is not research that is done ‘here at home’ but rather research that is done ‘over there’ in poor communities primarily by those who are not typically considered to be researchers. However, EGS’s discussion of popular research may help us reflect on ways in which we can transform research ‘here at home’ so that it is not what EGS writers refer to as elite research but rather complements popular research and works with it to oppose oppressive and exploitative relations.

Before drawing such inferences from the writings of EGS staff I should, however, highlight some problems with their notion of popular research. At best, their discussion is

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<sup>2</sup> The discussion that follows is based particularly on sections of *Une Afrique s’Invente* (Ndione et al., 2001), but also on Chapter 4 of *Reinventer le Présent* (Ndione et al., 1994) and discussions with EGS staff.

an appeal for the recognition of the ability of popular actors to do research and for the promotion of collaborative research in which elite researchers work in respectful partnerships with non-elites. Such an appeal is commendable, but there are some worrying features of their idea of popular research, worrying at least to those concerned with the problems of relativism and parochialism discussed in Chapter 6. The EGS writers commend popular research for its rootedness in the particular experiences of particular groups of people and stress that, unlike elite research, popular research does not aim to discover universal truths (Ndione et al., 2001, p.293). They criticise elite research for ‘conveying the idea of universal knowledge, above the people and outside their history, cut off from any reference to places, people and powers’ (Ndione et al., 2001, p.288). It may be that such comments are aimed at attacking approaches which purport to be objective and neutral but are in fact infused with questionable assumptions and hidden power relations; however, such comments could also be used to argue in favour of a radical parochialism and relativism in which each community does research based on its own experiences and belief systems without any interest in the experiences of others and without questioning its own beliefs.

This kind of approach is problematic in that it does not welcome the possibility of learning from or teaching others and protects belief systems from critical assessment and contestation by others. Furthermore, this sort of comment jars with other passages in EGS’s discussion of popular research. Elsewhere, Ndione et al. (2001, p.301) claim

[p]opular research will be an engine for change if it leads people and groups to call into question the legitimacy of acquired knowledge and if they begin to interrogate the order of things

and that such questioning ‘cannot occur without exchange, confrontation and the establishment of networks’ (Ndione et al., 2001, p.283). Clearly, then, the EGS authors do not ultimately advocate a parochial and strongly relativist position, but in their zeal to oppose elite research, they reveal some of the shortcomings of a position which sees only popular ‘on the ground’ research as legitimate. Surely there are other forms of research which can also play a constructive role in struggles against poverty and oppression?

While some comments made in EGS texts seem to dismiss all forms of research other than popular research, the close collaboration between EGS staff, many of whom are university-educated, with academics and university students suggests that they are not opposed to all forms of professional research. They recognise that there are forms of research other than popular research, which do not produce oppression or involve so single-minded a pursuit of ‘knowledge certified and recognised by faraway powers’ (Ndione et al., 2001, p.292) that they result in blindness to the knowledge of marginalised people. Research done ‘here at home’ which seeks to expose and oppose oppression can surely complement popular research and help create links between different popular research initiatives.

It is not, however, easy to determine which kinds of professional research are progressive and emancipatory and which are complicit with oppressive and exploitative systems and structures. The post-development debate embodies this difficulty, with post-development theorists believing fervently that their deconstruction of development ultimately works in favour of the poor and oppressed, while their critics are concerned that it does just the opposite. Rather than siding with one or the other, I would argue that it is such debates themselves, and the critical reflexivity encouraged by participation in them, that are

important if we are to produce research that helps undermine unjust and exploitative systems and structures. While it is difficult, and no doubt foolish, to try to definitively adjudicate between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ professional research, it seems fair to make a smaller point and simply advocate greater concern about, and awareness of, the effects of professional research on distant others. Professional research informed by such an awareness and such concerns is more likely to function in solidarity with the poor and oppressed and with their own research efforts. Professional researchers, who are often so caught up in concerns about their research meeting peer and professional approval (peer-reviewed journals, university review panels, research funding bodies, etc) ought to balance such concerns with care for the possible implications of their research on struggles against poverty and injustice. It is the case that researchers are today encouraged to think a little more about the ethical implications of their research and are often given ethical frameworks as guidelines when setting out to do research.<sup>3</sup> This is good, but what I am suggesting here goes further than many of these frameworks in that it entails not so much a concern that research not violate certain ethical principles, but that researchers reflect at length and depth on the likely *effects* of their research rather than principally on the ethics of the research *process*. I would also argue that more attention needs to be given to what is considered ‘important’ and ‘relevant’ research in our academic fields.<sup>4</sup> Thus, we may need to rethink not only *how* we do research, but *what* we research.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example the United Kingdom’s Economic and Social Research Council’s Research Ethics Framework available at [http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC\\_Re\\_Ethics\\_Frame\\_tcm6-11291.pdf](http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC_Re_Ethics_Frame_tcm6-11291.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> For an example of a discussion of ways in which the ‘relevance’ or ‘importance’ of research may be contested, see Cline-Cole (2006).

What then of teaching? In what ways can teaching ‘at home’ be in solidarity with the poor and oppressed? At a recent conference on post-development thinking, Lakshman Yapa (2002b), who teaches geography at Pennsylvania State University, USA, argued that grassroots struggles need to be complemented by engagement with and contestation of the rationalities that are nurtured by universities and the media. Yapa is involved in a project which aims to improve the lives of people in West Philadelphia where he works and where up to 80% of the population live below the so-called ‘poverty criterion’, a cost of living measure used in the USA.<sup>5</sup> Together with some of his students, Yapa works to research the situation of the poor of West Philadelphia and to contest dominant interpretations of the causes and possible solutions to this and similar situations. He stresses that one of the aims of the project is to use it to change university teaching practices as he and his students reveal ways in which the courses taught currently play an indirect role in creating conditions that aggravate poverty. For example, Yapa and his students discovered that one of the biggest problems facing the inner city poor in West Philadelphia relates to the spatial organisation of the city and to related transportation problems. The poor are trapped in the inner cities because of a lack of affordable public transport to take them to areas where they can find work. Yapa argues that the city’s spatial organisation and transportation logic is partly a consequence of what is taught in engineering and city planning courses at universities such as the one where he works. Thus, responding to the suffering of the poor of West Philadelphia must entail the transformation of American university teaching practices.

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<sup>5</sup> Further information on this project is available in Yapa (2002b) and also on the website of the Pennsylvania State University at <http://www.geog.psu.edu/phila/>.

Elsewhere, Yapa (2002a) critically examines a mainstream American geography textbook asking what it teaches American undergraduates about themselves, the Third World and poverty. He reveals and interrogates several assumptions informing the textbook, arguing that it, like many other textbooks, contributes to the development of the 'patronizing, ethnocentric attitudes [American] students have towards the people of Africa and Asia' and 'conceals and marginalizes the innumerable ways in which we can creatively address problems of basic needs outside the framework of development' (Yapa, 2002a, pp.43-44). Yapa's attempts to contest some forms of teaching and to promote others illustrate the necessity of considering changing teaching 'here at home' as part of an ethical response to the suffering of distant others.<sup>6</sup>

There is a problem, however, with the kind of arguments which Yapa and another post-development theorist, Gilbert Rist, present regarding their role as academics. Both argue, correctly I think, that what goes on in privileged spaces of learning such as universities, is of great relevance to struggles against poverty and oppression: what is taught and how it is taught influences the beliefs and practices of privileged people and, given the interconnectedness of the lives of the more and less privileged, these beliefs and practices need to be transformed if the relations between more and less privileged people are to be changed. All this is sound and well worth highlighting, but what I find strange about their arguments is that they seem at times to assume that they cannot be anything other than university lecturers and thus that whatever role they are to play must be played within a university context. Consider the following two passages:

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<sup>6</sup> While my discussion of teaching focuses on Yapa's work, he is certainly not the only university lecturer to be concerned with thinking about ways in which teaching can contribute to struggles against poverty, exploitation, oppression and the like. For examples of other discussions on this general theme, see Volume 10, Number 2 of the journal *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, particularly Hay's (2001) contribution.

I always say to myself: I can't solve the problems of Africa, I can't solve the problems of India if I can't change my own university, as this is where I teach. ... I am a university teacher, I have access to students, so I work with students .... (Yapa 2002b, p.208).

What can we do instead [of previous failed development initiatives]? ... I cannot answer for the whole of humanity or for all the people in this [conference] room, I can only tell you what I myself am doing. I am a lecturer and Swiss, there's not much I can do about that, I think that in my situation what I can do is call into question the assumptions of the economic system which we know ... we need to begin to imagine, to invent another economic theory ... I am where I am, I give you what I can do (Rist 2002, p.34).

Neither Yapa nor Rist seem to consider that they could, if they chose, decide to leave academia and become something other than university lecturers. This is a small but relevant problem with their arguments that their role is one of contesting dominant theories and suggesting alternatives. This certainly is a valid and important role and it may well be the role that Yapa and Rist are best able to play, but there must surely be an openness to the possibility that they could play another role in the struggles of the poor and oppressed, perhaps as NGO workers or activists. The point is that surely they should not only consider how best they can contribute to struggles against poverty and oppression where they are, but should perhaps also consider changing their context if they can better contribute to such struggles from another position.<sup>7</sup> This is, however, a small if important consideration, and does not change the central point they make, which is that researching and teaching differently are important elements of broader struggles against poverty and injustice.

There is another question to be asked with relation to how teaching and research can best contribute to struggles against poverty and oppression, and this is the question of whether we can do research and teach in solidarity with those we do not know. Can one truly show

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, there is no need to decide definitively between academia and activism – the two can be combined. Ideas about how to combine the two have received much attention within the field of critical geography – see for example Painter's (2003) remarks about the International Critical Geography Group (ICGG) and the ICGG's (1999) own statement of purpose.

solidarity with the poor and oppressed if one has little knowledge of what it is like to be poor and oppressed? There are good reasons to suppose that at least some exposure to the lives of these ‘distant others’ is necessary if we are to act in solidarity with them. Two recent papers by Philippe de Leener (2003a; 2003b), the coordinator of Enda Intermondes,<sup>8</sup> are of interest here. De Leener, some other EGS researchers and researchers from several other entities initiated an agroforestry research project in Aguié, a region of Niger, in partnership with peasants in several villages there. The research aimed not only to address agroforestry related questions in Aguié but also to explore ways of doing collaborative research and particularly to examine the behaviour of elite researchers as they attempted to work in partnership with peasant researchers.

The elite researchers found that to do research differently, they had to be different – ‘*Doing with*’ implicitly supposes *being otherwise with* villagers’ (De Leener, 2003a, emphasis in the original). The elite researchers began to think in the words of the peasant researchers with whom they were collaborating; they began to be ‘inhabited’ by the peasants’ opinions and points of view. The ways in which the elite researchers related to each other also altered as they began to adopt some of the modes of behaviour they had learnt from the peasants when interacting with each other. De Leener shows how the elite researchers – as well as the peasant researchers – were changed by this collaborative research project. They began to think differently and to act differently; their view of the world was altered somewhat. The kind of contact the elite researchers had with these ‘distant others’ changed them in a way that is likely to influence how they conduct future research.

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<sup>8</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 4, Enda Intermondes, which is based in Belgium, is sometimes referred to as a branch of Enda TM and sometimes as a branch of EGS. De Leener has worked closely with EGS for many years and is listed as one of the authors on several of EGS’s publications.

Of course, not just any type of contact with the peasants would have brought about this change in the elite researchers. It is quite possible to imagine a sort of research in which the elite researchers are not really attentive to the opinions and knowledge of the peasants and are not open to infiltration by peasant voices and ideas. In an earlier EGS publication (Ndione et al., 1994, p.81), it is stressed that what is needed is an open interaction between elites and non-elites where both groups allow their view of the world to be genuinely confronted by a different one.

De Leener's work shows how elite researchers who have taken time to reduce the distance between themselves and 'distant others' are likely to be more attuned to these others and thus better able to do research in solidarity with them. While Rist may be correct in saying that the best contribution he can make to struggles against poverty and injustice is to question dominant economic systems, it is likely that he can best do this work if he has been 'infiltrated' by some of the ideas and knowledges of those most marginalised by the economic systems he questions.<sup>9</sup>

In order for such infiltration to occur, we ought to advocate, as do Batterbury (1997) and Simon (et al., 2003; 2006, p.17), the creation of various kinds of research alliances. These could include alliances between Northern and Southern academics and research students, but also alliances between researchers on the one hand and non-governmental organisations, research institutions and government departments on the other. In addition to

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<sup>9</sup> I have no idea whether or not Rist does have such contact and do not mean to suggest that he does not, only to make the point that having such contact is likely to make him better able to do what he says he would like to do in the passage quoted earlier.

the creation of such alliances, however, we should also try to think of ways in which meaningful contact between elite researchers from both the North and the South and non-elites can be fostered. De Leener (2003a) argues that elite researchers from the North and South are to a large extent members of the same group and that the real gulf is not between these two groups but between them both and the non-elites who are most often excluded from any active role in research.<sup>10</sup> In order to research in a way that genuinely confronts poverty and injustice, what is needed is both collaboration between elite researchers from different parts of the world and forms of meaningful contact between elite researchers and the distant others whose lives may be affected in some way by the research being undertaken. Such meaningful contact could include, but is not limited to, collaborative research of the type De Leener describes.

Fostering contact between academic researchers and actors outside academia also helps address some of the concerns about the ethics of fieldwork raised in Chapter 1. There I spoke of my concerns about the ‘usefulness’ of my research and of my presence as a student in Senegal. I also referred to the writings of others who warn that fieldwork can sometimes involve researchers treating those among and about whom they do research as ‘mines of information’ or ‘mere objects’ on which to do research (see England, 1994, p.82; Stanley and Wise, 1993, p.168). Such concerns have led researchers like Batterbury (1997) and Bebbington and Carney (1990) to argue in favour of increased cooperation between academic researchers and non-academic actors. Those opposed to such cooperation could argue that it is potentially academically compromising and of little academic value because

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<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that there is not also considerable distance between elite Northern and elite Southern groups – for discussions of the challenges of North-South research and other collaboration, see Cline-Cole (1999) and Simon et al. (2003).

it favours applied research rather than research addressing fundamental conceptual issues.

However, Bebbington and Carney (1990, pp.38-39) argue that

while geographers' [and surely other researchers'] responsibility to those they study demands that they do not allow the fundamental issues of poverty, powerlessness, and dignity to escape their view, it also demands that we do not grab 'our' data and run to make a career out of it without leaving anything behind for our informants ....

Collaboration with research institutions,<sup>11</sup> they argue, gives researchers a chance to 'leave something behind'.

Collaboration with a diversity of actors – including, it must be stressed, non-elite actors – can then help us address some of the concerns about the 'usefulness' of our research and about the ethics of fieldwork research. Moreover, it can help us develop the kind of sensitivity and awareness needed in order to be able to better use our position as researchers 'here at home' in solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

### **7.3 The In-between Role of Third World Elites**

To some extent Third World elites, or at least some Third World elites, are able to move comfortably both in spaces of privilege and in the worlds of the less privileged; although in some cases it may be more correct to say that they are equally *uncomfortable* in both worlds: fitting in somewhat, but not entirely, in the privileged spaces to which they have gained access, and still at home in, but a little alienated from, the less privileged spaces from which many Third World elites come. This 'in-betweenness' makes it possible for

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<sup>11</sup> Bebbington and Carney (1990) are concerned in this article with collaboration with research institutions and with International Agricultural Research Centres (IARCs) in particular, but this point could be generalised to refer also to collaboration with NGOs and various other actors who are actively working 'on the ground' with those about whom we do our research.

such elites to act as translators or mediators between ‘us’ and ‘them’. A recent Enda Diapol<sup>12</sup> initiative concerning the WTO and the cotton trade in Africa is an example of a fruitful way in which Third World elites can use their access to spaces of privilege to provide those excluded from such spaces with a glimpse into their workings. Aware that much information and reporting on WTO events is not accessible to Third World non-elites and does not reflect their concerns, Enda Diapol sent three West African journalists to Cancun with the aim of producing information on this meeting tailored specifically for West African audiences and aimed at helping West African non-elites to better understand the procedures and outcomes of WTO meetings. Enda Diapol staff members and the journalists they sponsored are sufficiently in touch with both privileged and less privileged spaces to be able to know which kinds of meetings held ‘here at home’<sup>13</sup> are of relevance to non-elites and to be able to convey information about such meetings in a way that is of interest and is understandable to non-elites. In the case of the Cancun meeting, Enda Diapol was particularly interested in the question of agricultural subsidies, a very prominent issue at this meeting, as they wanted to inform West African farmers of the implications that decisions regarding agricultural subsidies may have on their livelihoods. Since Cancun, Enda Diapol has continued to keep a close eye on the cotton trade and the WTO, also sending journalists to the 2005 Hong Kong meeting of the WTO. Enda Diapol organised a workshop on cotton in July 2005 in the city of Saly, Senegal, to discuss pan-African strategies with regard to the cotton trade.<sup>14</sup> Generally, Enda Diapol is involved in

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<sup>12</sup> Enda Diapol stands for *Enda Prospectives Dialogues Politiques* (Enda Possibilities for Political Dialogue). It began as a project of EGS but is now officially a branch of Enda TM. The section that follows is based on the 2003 annual reports of Enda Diapol (2004) and of Enda TM (2004).

<sup>13</sup> Although this meeting took place in Cancun, Mexico which may not seem to some to be ‘at home’, my earlier explanation makes it clear that ‘at home’ includes spaces of privilege in the Third World. WTO meetings, wherever they may be held, constitute spaces of privilege.

<sup>14</sup> Enda Diapol has set up a workshop website, which also includes examples of articles in the popular press resulting from Enda Diapol’s sponsorship of journalists to attend the WTO Hong

several ongoing initiatives to try to increase awareness about the inequities embodied in the global cotton trade

This example shows how Third World elites can play an in-between role which functions in solidarity with poorer people. However, the role of such elites is not always so helpful – indeed, the question of how Third World elites may, or may not, contribute positively to struggles against poverty and injustice has been the subject of much controversy. Many African theorists and novelists have dealt, indirectly or directly, with this question. Consider the many negative depictions of African elites in African literature and popular music – the local businessmen in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1977) *Petals of Blood* and the corrupt Koomson and his wife Estella in Ayi Kwei Armah's (1988) *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* come to mind. Indeed, the corrupt local politician or businessman is a very common character in many African novels, plays and dance music.

Much of the theorising about Negritude, Afrocentricity and other similar movements is also concerned with how African elites ought to respond to Western dominance and what position they ought to adopt towards their less privileged fellow citizens. Advocates of movements such as the Negritude movement may seem to be addressing general concerns about Africa's future, but in fact, as pointed out by Soyinka (1976, p.135), this literature is for the most part written by and directed towards elites in Africa and involves a search for identity conducted by those who find themselves in some kind of in-between position – African, yet French or English-speaking and educated according to the French or English

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Kong meeting. Several other documents and reports relating to Diapol's involvement, and to the cotton industry more generally, are also available on this site (see <http://diapol.enda.sn/WebsiteFrench/index.htm>).

system. ‘Ordinary’ Africans do not sit around reflecting upon their Negritude, notes Soyinka. Similar comments can be made about Afrocentricity, which is also largely an attempt by relatively privileged Africans (and people of African descent in the diaspora) who find themselves in-between the world of most Africans and the ‘developed’ world and who are trying to figure out how to respond to this in-betweenness.

African novels and writings about Afrocentricity and Negritude provide interesting insights into the situation of African elites. These insights could be explored at length elsewhere, but I will focus here in particular on the writings of only two authors, Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral, who are both critical of the role typically played by such elites. Fanon’s (1967) classic text *Black Skin, White Masks* provides a critique of black elite behaviour showing how elite black men often become alienated from non-elites in their country of origin as a result of their striving to become assimilated with the white men they both despise and admire.<sup>15</sup> Black elites, in his description, are in-between the white and black worlds but it is by no means assured that they will use their in-betweenness in favour of black non-elites. Consider these observations by Fanon (1967, p.37):

In every country of the world there are climbers, ‘the ones who forget who they are’ and, in contrast to them, ‘the ones who remember where they came from’. The Antilles Negro who goes home from France expresses himself in dialect if he wants to make it plain that nothing has changed. One can feel this at the dock where his family and friends are waiting for him. Waiting for him not only because he is physically arriving, but in the sense of waiting for the chance to strike back. They need a minute or two in order to make their diagnosis. If the voyager tells his acquaintances, ‘I am so happy to be back with you. Good Lord, it is hot in this country, I shall certainly not be able to endure it very long,’ they know: A European has got off the ship.

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<sup>15</sup> I say ‘men’ because Fanon’s study is mainly a study of the position of elite black men, although much is also of relevance to elite black women. I use ‘black’ rather than ‘African’ because Fanon’s study is not only concerned with African men but also with black men from other parts of the (former) colonised world.

He continues by saying that such elites have two choices: 'either to stand with the white world ... or to reject Europe'. His analysis shows that the second option is by no means the more likely.

Amilcar Cabral, the anti-colonial revolutionary from Guinea-Bissau, sets up a similar distinction arguing that African elites must decide – they can either 'betray the revolution or commit suicide as a class' (Cabral, 1966). According to Cabral, African elites can either choose to be subject to imperialist capital, considering themselves superior to other Africans on the basis of their assimilation with imperialist forces, or else they must reject 'bourgeois inclinations', develop a 'revolutionary consciousness' and so join the anti-imperialist struggle (Chilcote, 1991, p.56). Cabral (1973, p.67) makes it clear that he does not expect that the majority of African elites will do this.

Cabral's call for elites to commit 'class suicide' can be compared with the comments of another revolutionary leader, the Vietnamese Thanh Nien, who said (quoted in Davidson, 1986):

... it is indispensable that all the comrades 'proletarianise' themselves, 'revolutionise' themselves, in order to have the same thought, behaviour, language, etc. ... [They must] abandon their rich clothes and don the rags of the proletarians, become workers, peasants, men of the people, etc.

Likewise, Cabral (1966) argues that

... the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie must be capable of committing suicide as a class, so as to be restored to life in the conditions of revolutionary workers, completely identified with the deepest aspirations of their peoples.

These quotes do not present the in-betweenness of Third World elites as a strength. Rather, such elites are urged to throw off any identification with the privileged or 'white world'

and to identify fully with the 'black world' or the world of the less privileged. Meaningful participation in struggles against oppression seems then to entail the rejection of this in-betweenness. But is such a rejection really possible and desirable? Can Third World elites cease to be in-between and become 'the same [in] thought, behaviour and language' as non-elites as Nien suggests they should? When Fanon says that the Antilles Negro who chooses to speak in dialect rather than French 'wants to make it plain that *nothing has changed*' (my emphasis), he surely does not mean that this person, who has spent a considerable amount of time living in the 'white world' can return home completely unchanged. Such a person *is* changed and not all the forms of privilege he or she has acquired are easily shrugged off. Certain markers of privilege, such as expensive possessions, can be refused, but education, connections, language and an awareness of what to say and how to behave in privileged settings is not so easily set aside, nor is it clear why all aspects of privilege ought to be rejected. By refusing certain forms of privilege a once-privileged person may lose his or her status; and while this may, in certain contexts, be a good thing, it is important to stress that privilege is complex and that eschewing it is by no means a simple and unambiguous process.

I do not believe that it is the outright denial of in-betweenness that will ultimately allow Third World elites to act in solidarity with the oppressed, but rather that what is needed is the critical use of this in-betweenness. Indeed, Cabral (1966; 1973, p.69) admits something like this when he says that the petty bourgeoisie is able to play a decisive role in struggles against oppression because its awareness of imperial subjugation is often more acute than that of non-elites, and because it is more familiar with the structures of domination which oppress subject peoples. This class then has to *identify with* the interests of the poorer class,

but its 'class suicide' does not entail it becoming *identical to* such non-elites. After committing 'class suicide', elites are able to engage with non-elites in a more respectful way and such engagement can potentially change both the elites and the non-elites involved. Cabral says that the latter, through contact with the former, come to better understand their situation and are able to 'break the fetters of a village universe' and play a more informed role in their own liberation (quoted in Davidson, 1986, p.38). It is the elite in-betweenness that allows elites to facilitate this change in the perceptions of non-elites.

How then can 'we Third World elites' use our in-betweenness in solidarity with the poor and oppressed? I hesitate to proclaim something like 'good and bad ways to be a Third World elite', but would rather simply argue that what is necessary is the kind of reflection in which elites such as Fanon, Cabral, Nandy and others have engaged.<sup>16</sup> Like them, contemporary Third World elites, need to reflect critically on our positions in order to become aware of ways in which we are complicit in oppressive and exploitative relations and ways in which we could use our privilege in solidarity with the poor and oppressed. To prevent such reflection from becoming isolated self-indulgent introspection, we should take into account another point made by Cabral and which links up to my earlier discussion of De Leener's research: in order for Third World elites to be better able to use our in-betweenness in solidarity with the poor, contact between ourselves and non-elites is needed. Cabral (1973, p.45) puts it strongly, saying that the elite 'class suicide' or 'reconversion' is only completed 'through daily contact with the popular masses in the communion of sacrifice required by the struggle'. Following Cabral's call for 'class

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<sup>16</sup> I have not discussed Nandy here but his reflections on colonialism, discussed in Chapter 5, are also relevant here. Further examples of African thinkers who have reflected on the role of African elites include Appiah (1992), Mbembe (2001) and Mkandawire (1999).

suicide' several members of Guinea-Bissau's elite 'sunk their social and moral identity into the base of the village masses, fighting or working in forests or swamplands, learning local languages, eschewing privileges' (Davidson, 1986, p.28). While I would stress again that such engagement ought not to be based on the pretence that privilege is a garment that can easily be discarded, Cabral and his followers' insistence that elites engage with and participate in the lives of the poor and oppressed must be taken seriously. Such engagement, like the engagement De Leener (2003a; 2003b) describes between elite and peasant researchers, transforms all involved and helps elites who seek to act in solidarity with the poor and oppressed to better understand those for whose emancipation they claim to work. The in-betweenness of Third World elites can at worst function to facilitate the further exploitation of the oppressed – as condemned in so much African literature – but may also be used to prise open spaces of privilege such that the workings of exploitative systems become more transparent to the oppressed and thus easier to oppose.

#### **7.4 Acknowledging the Negative Aspects of 'Our' Lives and the Importance of Dialogue**

Earlier I described the critique of modern, Western ways of life that post-development theorists like Latouche (1993), Marglin (1990), Mies (1993) and Verhelst (1990) provide.<sup>17</sup> These authors point out that while there clearly are many benefits to the 'developed' way of life, there are also many problems in 'developed' countries – depression, alienation, loneliness, insecurity, meaninglessness and political apathy are some that come to mind. It is necessary to draw attention to these negative features of the lives of the privileged in

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 2.5.4.

order to counter the overwhelmingly positive way in which the ‘developed’ way of life is presented in development discourse, and to encourage a more positive view of alternative ways of life based on the beliefs and practices of people in the ‘underdeveloped’ world. This stance is relevant to discussions of how we may work to build the global solidarity referred to earlier. As long as ‘we’ are unable to acknowledge the failings of ‘our’ lives, the reciprocity which characterises global solidarity is unlikely to be realised. Thus, critiques of the ‘developed’ way of life can be commended for helping to bring about a situation in which ‘we’ can work with ‘distant others’ to find ways to improve all of our lives, whether this means reflecting on how to address loneliness and alienation in the North or economic insecurity and food shortages in the South.

The acknowledgement that ‘our’ lives are flawed too and that we have something to learn as well as to give in our interaction with ‘distant others’ will also help to erode the ‘us’/‘them’ distinction, and related distinctions such as those between the First and Third Worlds and the ‘developed’ and ‘developing’, all of which I have reluctantly been using throughout this discussion. Such erosion could ultimately bring about situations where meetings between privileged and poor people can break out of the mould of ‘we, the helpful experts’ meeting ‘them, the needy victims’ and begin to take on a more reciprocal nature.

The recognition that ‘we’ have something to learn from ‘them’ is also useful in encouraging greater dialogue between people who live very different lives. This dialogue is necessary if privileged people are to find ways to participate meaningfully in struggles against poverty and oppression. Without dialogue it is very difficult for privileged people

to determine how it is that they can contribute to struggles against poverty and injustice. It could, I suppose, be argued that all we need in order to effectively oppose poverty and injustice is a solid, universalist theory of justice which identifies certain universal human needs and rights – a theory along the lines of the one Corbridge (1994) begins to describe in his defence of a minimally universalist politics. It could be suggested that such a sound and comprehensive universalist theory makes dialogue between the poor and the privileged unnecessary. However, in defence of dialogue, I would argue that while a minimally universalist theory of justice is necessary, it cannot be constructed without dialogue. If we are to determine what basic things are true for all people in all places at all times, we need to encourage dialogue between people who live very different lives. Dialogue is important, both in determining universal principles and in deciding upon their specific application.

Before concluding a brief qualification needs to be made with regard to the question of responding to desperate suffering. In the paragraphs above, and in several other places in the thesis, I stress that our response to the suffering of distant others should not be one that treats such distant others as needy objects requiring altruism. I have argued that our responses to poverty should recognise the agency of the poor, their ability to respond to their situation and the possibility that ‘we’ may be able to address the failings of ‘our’ lives through learning from ‘them’. I hold to all the above, but should acknowledge that there are extreme situations where this kind of attitude to the suffering of others may be inappropriate. These are situations in which the suffering in question is acute and desperate – situations of starvation, severe injury or incapacitation, or homelessness resulting from natural disaster, for example. In such situations it would indeed be inappropriate to approach such others with an attitude that is concerned with working in partnership with

them and learning from each other rather than one that is concerned primarily with attending to their evident and desperate need. However, even in such cases it could be said that privileged people who have already had some contact with particular groups of distant others, are likely to be better able to assist them should they fall into situations of desperate need, than are privileged people with no understanding of or past relationship with the distant others in question.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

I have managed only to briefly describe three possible ways in which we can change things ‘here at home’ in solidarity with distant struggles against poverty and oppression. Several other possible changes could be suggested and many prominent contemporary debates link up to the general question of what needs to be done in non-poor regions and countries in order to respond to the suffering of distant others – think of debates around aid, debt cancellation and the fair trade movement, for example. All of these debates seek to highlight how our attempts to change government policies and consumer practices ‘here at home’ are part of an ethical response to the suffering of distant others.<sup>18</sup> Rather than engaging in these already prominent debates, I have raised some perhaps more neglected issues and have looked in particular at two sub-categories of ‘we, the privileged’ – ‘we, university academics’ who need to rethink our research and teaching practices, and ‘we, Third World elites’ who need to find critical and creative ways of responding to our in-betweenness. In this way I have presented some very preliminary suggestions of ways in

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<sup>18</sup> For discussions of some of the implications of the Fair Trade and debt cancellation campaigns, see Hudson and Hudson (2003), Jaffee et al. (2004), Mayo (2005) and Wright (2004).

which privileged people can work to change our own privileged settings in ways that are in solidarity with struggles against poverty and oppression.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

In a recent article Rapley (2006, p.167) claims:

From rather inauspicious beginnings a decade or so ago at the fringes of development thought, post-development thought has become one of the most discussed and compelling topics in the field. Drawing upon disparate branches of scholarship – from law to economics to political science – post-development thought apparently rode the wave of resistance to globalization in the late 1990s to thrust itself to the forefront of the discipline.

Perhaps Rapley exaggerates the influence of post-development thought here, but he is surely correct in describing it as compelling. The claims made by post-development writers have invited strong and varied reactions. The debates sparked by these claims have contributed not only to development studies but also to broader and more general discussions about the nature of the so-called Third World and about the future of left politics in a post-communist, post-modern world. Post-development theory can be credited with raising and contributing to a number of interesting debates, some of which have been explored at length here.

My own initial impression of post-development theory was a very favourable one. It seemed to be an exciting, rebellious and daring set of ideas put forward by a group of intellectuals who seemed to have alternative ideas, not only about development but also about what knowledge and research were supposed to be – alternative at least to the admittedly naïve image of academic life I had at the time. Consider Sachs' (1992, p.5) comments on introducing his edited *Development Dictionary*:

This book, it must be said, is the fruit of friendship. Above all it is our gift to one another. Over the years, all of us authors, in various contexts and associations, have been involved

in continuous conversation, spending days or weeks together chatting, cooking, travelling, studying and celebrating .... In the fall of 1988, sitting on the porch of Barbara Duden's [one of the contributors] wooden house at State College in Pennsylvania, we drew up the plan for this book after an intense week of debate interrupted by cutting onions and uncorking bottles.

This picture of collegial conviviality appealed greatly to me, as did the claims by some of the contributors to the book to be 'deprofessionalised intellectuals' (Sachs, 1992, p.5). The idea of being on the fringes of academia and actively part of local, popular struggles held great appeal for me. However, on further reflection and, prompted by the insightful, if cynical, comments on post-development theory made by some with whom I discussed my research, I began to realise that the appealing picture above is, undeniably, a sketch of the lives of a group of privileged – even if 'deprofessionalised' – intellectuals. It describes a familiar stereotype of the 'ivory tower academics' or the international development consultants/advisers – relatively privileged individuals meeting together in a privileged setting and, over a bottle or two of good wine, discussing poverty, destitution, oppression, hunger and other situations of which they have little, if any, direct experience and which are very far removed from the setting of the discussion. Some may say 'So what – why should it matter that such topics are being discussed in such settings by privileged people?'. I suspect, however, that I am not the first to feel a slight sense of irony and discomfort at the disjuncture between the lives of those involved in these debates about development and the lives of those who stand to gain or lose the most from initiatives aimed at addressing poverty.

Such reflections led me to become increasingly aware of one of the most important features of the broader post-development debate: namely, that it is, to some extent at least, a debate about how we who are privileged ought to respond to poverty and deprivation. Ought we to

promote the development of the Third World or ought we to question and ultimately reject the notions of ‘development’ and ‘Third World’ – and if so, how should we think about and react to situations of destitution, hunger and oppression? Of course, much of the debate is more generally about poverty, inequality and related issues rather than specifically about how we who are privileged ought to respond to such issues. But the role of the privileged is a very important preoccupation of participants in the debate. Consider, for example, many of the concerns of critics of post-development theory: concerns that post-development theorists romanticise the poor or that they advocate abandoning poor people. These are concerns about how we who are privileged should respond to poverty and injustice rather than more generally about how poverty and injustice ought to be confronted.

In line with these reflections, I decided to make the role of the privileged in responding to poverty and injustice an explicit focus of this thesis. Development work has routinely been presented as an altruistic way in which well-meaning privileged people can beneficially intervene in the lives of the poor. With the emergence of post-development theory, and its questioning of both the good will and good results of development work, uncritical support for development ceases to be an option. Hence my question: what, then, should we do?

## **8.1 Addressing my Research Questions**

As indicated at the start of this thesis, the main question addressed is how the relatively privileged can respond to poverty and injustice in the light of the post-development debate, or, as I put it more succinctly above: ‘What, then, should we do?’ This question has been comprehensively outlined in Chapter 3 and some possible responses to it are provided in

Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I show that post-development theory provides some critical and important challenges to past development theory and practice. These challenges mean that those of us who are relatively privileged and who would like to respond ethically to the suffering of the less privileged cannot just continue to support failing mainstream development initiatives, but must find alternative approaches to thinking about and responding to poverty and injustice.

I suggest in Chapter 5 some alternative conceptualisations of poverty and injustice. Poverty, I argue, should be understood as a multi-dimensional concept and increased emphasis ought to be placed on the contexts, causes and mechanisms of poverty in recognition of the fact that poverty most often arises as a result of problematic relations between different groups of people. Our approach to poverty must be one that recognises the inextricable ways in which poverty and privilege are linked. Recognition of the interrelatedness of privilege and poverty will change the questions we ask about poverty and the way in which we go about trying to respond to it. Injustice, I argue, ought to be defined in relation to oppression rather than principally in relation to distribution. Understanding injustice as oppression, broadly defined, encourages attention not only to be paid to obvious inequalities in the distribution of material goods, but also to less tangible forms of injustice – what Nandy calls ‘the second colonialism’ and Enda Graf Sahel staff members describe as ‘internalised domination’. Through conceptualising poverty and injustice differently, we may begin to sketch out some kind of post-development project which retains a concern with the material well-being of the poor, but which is sensitive to

difference and which does not present the developed way of life as a desirable and realisable ideal for all people.<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter 6 I further address my main research question by looking at how the support of popular initiatives is one way in which the relatively privileged may ethically respond to poverty and injustice. I draw on the experiences of Enda Graf Sahel to show how, through supporting popular initiatives, the relatively privileged can be involved in and committed to struggles against poverty and injustice while avoiding the paternalism, presumptuousness and insensitivity to difference of many development initiatives. I discuss how EGS critically interrogated its original approach to development and began to favour an approach which prioritises the support of already existing popular initiatives. The NGO's adoption of a network structure and how this structure assists it to better support popular struggles is also detailed. While I show that EGS's current approach has significant strengths, I also discuss the difficulties and tensions which the organisation confronted in adopting this new approach, and which are likely to confront other attempts to support popular initiatives and to organise along network lines.

I sketch out one more possible response to poverty and injustice in Chapter 7. Here I suggest some changes that relatively privileged people can bring about 'at home' – that is, in the spaces where they are most comfortable and from which the less privileged are most often excluded. Because of the interconnectedness of the lives of the more and less privileged, certain changes brought about 'at home' can work in solidarity with distant

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<sup>1</sup> All I mean by 'post-development project' is a set of attempts to respond to key development issues – poverty, inequality, oppression and the like – in a way that builds upon and constructively engages with post-development theory and with critical responses to it. A lengthier discussion of what the construction of such a project would entail is given in the conclusion to Chapter 5.

struggles against poverty and injustice. I show how changes in university teaching and research practices may contribute positively, albeit indirectly, to addressing poverty and injustice. Some of the particular challenges faced by Third World elites in using their privilege in solidarity with the poor are also discussed here, as is the way in which the recognition of the imperfections of the 'developed' way of life, and the promotion of dialogue between more and less privileged people, can contribute constructively to struggles against poverty and injustice. In this chapter I demonstrate how responding to poverty and injustice need not always entail direct involvement with poor people and in poor regions – indeed, changes in the lives of those who are not poor are essential if poverty is to be addressed.

These, then, are the responses I provide to the key research question guiding this discussion. I do not suggest that these are the *only* ways in which the privileged may meaningfully respond to the suffering of less privileged distant others. I argue instead that the three general suggestions made in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are important and valuable responses to poverty and injustice which build upon, and critically respond to, arguments made by both advocates and critics of post-development theory.

In order to adequately contextualise my research question and to provide the background needed for my arguments, I address some subsidiary research questions which constitute specific objectives. In Chapter 2 I provide a lengthy and comprehensive discussion of the post-development debate, detailing both the key arguments of and key objections to post-development theory. In this way I answer questions relating to what post-development theory is and what the main criticisms of the theory have been. In so doing, I set out to

fulfil the objective of providing a helpful summary of an important debate in development studies. I try to move past a simple defence or rejection of post-development theory in order to prise out what is at the heart of the disagreements between post-development theorists and their critics and what the implications of these disagreements are for those who seek to respond meaningfully to poverty and injustice. Another objective of the thesis is to explore and critically discuss the work and thought of the NGO Enda Graf Sahel whose experiences are referred to extensively throughout the thesis. This objective is dealt with comprehensively in Chapter 4. While Enda Graf Sahel has received some attention in development literature, what is provided here is, to my knowledge, the most comprehensive outsider discussion of the organisation.<sup>2</sup> Also, while I do not present EGS as being a ‘typical’ NGO nor do I describe it as being a ‘new social movement’, my discussion of EGS’s experiences may be helpful not only in dealing with some of the problems raised in the post-development debate, but also more generally in understanding the role of NGOs and NSMs in development practice.

In summary, then, my thesis makes a contribution to the post-development debate itself, but particularly to attempts to move past this debate towards the construction of some kind of post-development project. While the arguments presented here echo and complement many other contributions to the post-development and related debates, my discussion adds two particular aspects to the broader debate. Firstly, my discussion focuses on the specific question of the role of the privileged in struggles against poverty and oppression, thus making explicit, and drawing critical attention to, this important issue. Secondly, my

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<sup>2</sup> It could, perhaps, be objected that my discussion is not that of a complete ‘outsider’, given that I spent time as an intern with EGS. I should stress, however, that my position there was a temporary and unpaid one, and that I was treated by most EGS staff and affiliates as an outsider who had come to spend time with them, rather than as a staff member.

discussion draws on the particular experiences of an African NGO, introducing a different context and set of challenges to a debate which has been dominated by contributions from those writing about Latin America and Asia. While this thesis is perhaps primarily a contribution to an ongoing conversation taking place in development studies, I hope also to contribute to some more general, less development-focused, discussions: to deliberations about the meanings of justice and poverty; to emerging debates about the political potential of network forms of organisation; and to reflections on what it means to be privileged and how those of us who are privileged should engage with our privilege. These topics are all related in some way to the post-development debate, but I believe they also have much wider significance and that they require much further reflection and research.

## **8.2 Avenues for Further Research**

In this investigation I have discussed a few ways in which we may move on from, and build upon, the post-development debate in order to find ways to respond ethically to poverty and injustice. In so doing I have, inevitably, pointed to but failed to address a whole number of questions which are related in some way to the arguments presented here. In this section, I will briefly identify some of the issues which I believe have not been and cannot be fully addressed here, but which relate to my discussion and which are deserving of further research attention.

### 8.2.1 Further Detailing a Post-Development Project

I have provided some ideas about how we can move past a debate about the benefits and flaws of post-development theory towards improved ways of addressing problems like poverty and injustice. But there is still much work to be done in reconciling the concerns of defenders of development – concerns about responding tangibly and practically to suffering in the Third World – with the concerns of post-development and some other ‘post’ approaches (about sensitivity to difference, about resisting paternalism and about critically responding to and moving past ‘modernity’).

A recent special edition of *The Geographical Journal* entitled ‘Postcolonialism and Development: New Dialogues?’ is one example of a promising recent attempt to discuss and begin to reconcile these concerns (see McFarlane 2006; McKinnon 2006; Sharp and Briggs, 2006; Simon 2006; Sylvester 2006; Yeboah 2006). The editors of this special edition, Joanne Sharp and John Briggs, come to the debate from different perspectives, with Briggs having worked for years in the field of development studies while Sharp has a background in postcolonial theory. In this issue they, and the various contributors, try to overcome the distaste that many in development studies have for postcolonial theory and *vice versa* in order to establish dialogue between the two fields. Post-development theory could be said to fall somewhere between development studies and postcolonial theory because while it concerns itself with development-related issues, its objections to mainstream development theory and practice echo features of postcolonial theory, such as the rejection of Eurocentrism and modernism and the concern that much contemporary Western intervention in the Third World amounts to arrogant neo-colonialism. If we are to

further detail a post-development project, we need to bring together and try to reconcile the concerns of those in development studies and those in postcolonial theory. The attempts to do this by the contributors to this edition of *The Geographical Journal* are to be commended and it may be hoped that further research of this nature will be undertaken.

More fieldwork of the kind discussed in this thesis could also help further detail a post-development project. As I indicated in Chapter 1, there are some limitations to the use of a single case study, thus other attempts to relate the post-development debate to the work of NGOs could help to provide some other ideas about how to build upon and move forward from the post-development debate.

### 8.2.2 New Forms of Organisation

In Chapter 6 I highlight some of the possibilities and problems associated with network forms of organisation. As mentioned there, the idea of organising along the lines of networks or meshworks rather than more conventional, formally structured lines is receiving attention in literature examining new social movements, the World Social Forum and the alternative globalisation movement more generally. More research needs to be done about the functioning of such networks, and particularly of face-to-face networks like that of EGS, as well as about the kinds of hierarchies that emerge within such networks. One of the recurring themes discussed in a recent special WSF-focused edition of the *International Social Science Journal* was the question of how new ways of organising are a central feature of the WSF and, more broadly, of the alternative globalisation movement (see, especially, contributions by Biagiotti 2004; De Angelis 2004; Osterweil 2004; Pleyers

2004). It is argued here that the way in which opponents to globalisation organise forms an essential part of their resistance to globalisation rather than just being a procedural or technical issue. One of the contributors puts it as follows:

... the choice to work in networks or meshworks ... is not simply, or necessarily, a technical matter of efficiency and organisation. When articulated to compelling and convincing narratives – such as those about the democratic, sustainable, and durable nature of self-organised systems – they become part of the complex and ongoing strategy for living social reality according to logics that do not fit with those of capitalism or modernity (Osterweil, 2004, p.504).

The point being made here is similar to a point I make with regard to EGS's use of network forms of organisation: EGS began to use this form of organisation because the organisational form itself helped to facilitate the support of popular initiatives. EGS staff members were better able to fit into and support the communities with which they worked once they allowed themselves to be integrated into these communities' fluid, complex networks, and once the internal functioning of the organisation emulated these networks. It should be recognised that modes of organisation are central to attempts to construct alternatives, whether we are talking about alternative ways of intervening in poor communities or alternative ways of arranging global economic relations. De Angelis (2004, p.597) argues: 'if another world is possible, the minimum condition is that we coordinate social action in a different way'. It is not just a question of finding a way to organise that helps us to effectively meet our goals; rather, it may be that organising differently may help us to clarify or redefine our goals and therefore to understand these goals in new ways. Thus, further reflection about alternative ways of organising, particularly about the increasingly popular network or meshwork forms of organisation, is vitally important. As indicated in Chapter 6, there is little current research about networks such as that of EGS as the focus of current network-related research tends to be on more mediated networks and

on the use of ICTs in such networks. Thus, I reiterate here that it would be particularly useful to study further the ways in which local NGOs and popular organisations and movements construct networks and the types of hierarchy that emerge within these networks.

### 8.2.3 Changes ‘Here at Home’

In Chapter 7 I outline some ways in which we may seek to change things ‘here at home’ in solidarity with the struggles of the poor and oppressed. I focus here on three issues: teaching and research, the role of Third World elites, and the importance of acknowledging the shortcomings of ‘our’ lives and encouraging dialogue between the more and less privileged. While these issues constitute the chapter’s main focus, I mention at the end of the chapter some arguably more prominent related issues: debates about aid, debt cancellation and fair trade.

At the moment, in the West at least, these latter issues are receiving a fair amount of media attention. The general public is, it would appear, becoming more aware of some of the ways in which Western government policies affect the Third World and how our consumer practices impact upon the lives of distant others. Consider, for example, the increased prominence of Fairtrade products in the United Kingdom – the Fairtrade Foundation reports increases of 40% per annum in its sales and refers to polls reporting that more than half of UK consumers now recognise the Fairtrade label (Fairtrade Foundation, 2006). While increased awareness about the distant effects of our consumer practices must surely be celebrated and encouraged, there are many who are sceptical about the long-term

benefits of campaigns like Make Poverty History and the Fairtrade movement. Further research needs to be done about the likely impact and implications of such campaigns. For example, is the Fairtrade Foundation (2002, p.26) correct in claiming that by buying Fairtrade coffee we can ‘make an immediate difference to coffee farmers and their organisations and will signal our support for much wider change in the economic relationships between rich and poor countries’? Or are more cynical commentators correct in calling Fairtrade coffee a “bourgeois luxury” which allows consumers the satisfaction of guzzling down a preferred beverage and at the same time feeling [they] can contribute to sustainable economic development’ while in fact the benefits of such initiatives are dubious (Wilson, 2006, p.27).<sup>3</sup> The public campaigns around debt relief, poverty alleviation and fair trade tend to present fairly simplistic solutions to poverty (cancel debt, increase aid, buy Fairtrade labelled products, donate a goat to a poor Malawian farmer ....) and further research is needed to explore and critically interrogate the solutions on offer.

This is not to say that research about how to change things ‘here at home’ ought to be confined to, or be focused on, the above-mentioned campaigns; it is to indicate that their prominence in public debate makes them deserving of further research attention and to note that the fact that they receive only a passing mention in Chapter 7 does not mean to suggest that they are not important. However, further research ought also to be conducted about the strategies I discuss in more detail; for example, much research is needed to explore how Third World elites can use the ‘in-betweenness’ I discuss in ways that help change relations that cause poverty and oppression. Further introspection and discussion along the lines of that of De Leener (2003a; 2003b) and Yapa (2002a; 2002b) about how academic

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<sup>3</sup> See also a short documentary entitled ‘The Bitter Aftertaste’ which takes a very critical look at the idea of fair trade. It is available online at [www.worldwrite.org.uk/bitter](http://www.worldwrite.org.uk/bitter).

research and teaching can better contribute to struggles against poverty and oppression is also needed.

A related theme on which further research is needed is the role of universities, research institutions and academics in Africa in particular and also more generally in the Third World. African academics fit into both of the categories of privileged people I discuss in Chapter 7 in that they are both academics and Third World elites and the challenges faced by them, and by African universities, deserve special attention. Some such attention has recently been given by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) whose 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference in 2003 was organised around the theme ‘Intellectuals, Nationalism and the Pan-African Ideal’. The reflections of some of the participants at this conference were later collated in a book edited by Mkandawire (2005). In the introduction to this book, Mkandawire (2005, p.7) asks a question which makes clear the in-betweenness of African academics:

How does an intellectual class formed in the languages of the erstwhile colonial masters cease being one of ‘informed natives’ talking to the outside world, bearers of the memory of colonizers, and become instrumental in turning African cultures into pillars of self-confident Africa?

The contributors to this book attempt some answers to this question and their deliberations and similar work<sup>4</sup> are needed to adequately answer questions about ways in which the privileged may address poverty and injustice by changing things ‘here at home’.

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<sup>4</sup> Some of CODESRIA’s other projects also encourage reflection on the role of African intellectuals – see for example their *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*.

#### 8.2.4 New Forms of Left Politics and the Role of the State

As I mention in Chapter 1, the post-development debate is in many ways a debate between those adopting a more traditional left position, who usually display scepticism about post-development and loyalty to some kind of development project; and those on the more amorphous new left who question the benefits of both development and modernity. Both groups are concerned in some way with issues like poverty, inequality, exploitation and oppression, but the former considers development – often state-led – as the solution, while the latter prefers to build upon popular initiatives and finds hope in the work of non-governmental and grassroots organisations. Many post-development theorists, most notably Escobar, are involved with the World Social Forum (WSF) and the broader alternative globalisation movement. A lot of the contemporary uncertainty about what it means to be on the left has filtered into debates within the WSF and within many related meetings and movements. In a discussion of approaches to social change in the WSF, Rioufol (2004, p.551) makes a useful distinction between three kinds of left politics: one which favours social change through revolution led by an avant-garde; one which favours working towards reform led by parties and unions; and one which sees social change as best achieved through the promotion of ‘chinks’ or ‘pockets’ of resistance which slowly erode the dominant social system. According to Rioufol, all three of these approaches exist side by side in the alternative globalisation movement and the WSF, but she argues that the last of the three, which was not as prominent in previous left struggles, is dominant.

Post-development theorists would arguably also be most comfortable with the last approach as it focuses on making relatively small, often local, changes and then bringing

these micro-level initiatives for change together in fluid networks. If some kind of post-development project is to succeed and is to adequately respond to criticism from more traditional leftists who find this strategy vague and inefficient, then more research needs to be done about what exactly 'change by pockets of resistance' (Rioufol, 2004, p.551) entails.

The kind of new left approach favoured by post-development theory and the alternative globalisation movement is one which has little – and certainly little positive – to say about the role of the state in bringing about beneficial social change. The agents of progressive social change in the eyes of post-development and similar thinkers are social and popular movements and NGOs rather than the state. To defenders of development, and to more traditional left activists, this wariness of the state and of political power more generally is perplexing. Commenting on the WSF, long-term leftist Peter Marcuse (2005, p.420) says:

When all is said and done, basic social change requires a shift in power, on at least a national if not international level. That can only be achieved by government. Changes in government can be accomplished by a variety of means, of which the electoral is only one; but in the end the power of government needs to be moved from its present holders to the dispossessed. Yet the social forums are almost intuitively anti-governmental, focused on direct grass-roots efforts, protest movements rather than movements seeking power.

Voicing the opinion of the other side of the debate, Rioufol (2004, p.555) argues that the kind of left approach that is dominant within the alternative globalisation movement is one that 'gives up the model of social change that attempts to seize State power through revolution and to implement a (predefined) project for a better society'. Rather, this approach finds its inspiration in a more Foucauldian understanding of power and thus the objective is 'to attack not so much "such and such" an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class, but rather a technique, a form of power' (Foucault, 1982, p.212, cited in

Rioufol, 2004, p.555). The strategy suggested by Rioufol is one that involves a multiplicity of small struggles on a number of levels. Social change then emerges from numerous different strategies and practices of resistance which exist on the margins of the dominant system and which spread through 'progressive contagiousness' (Rioufol, 2004, p.555).

I cannot here further elaborate on the differences between these approaches or try to adjudicate between them, but would rather suggest that a very important avenue for further research is one that critically explores such disputes about the state. If we are to find alternative ways to pursue the goals associated with left politics – particularly the goals of greater equality and justice – we need to clarify what role the state can and should play in bringing about desirable social change and how contemporary left activists ought to engage with the state. These kinds of discussions need to take into account very different contexts – debates about how contemporary left activists in the West ought to engage with the state are quite different from debates about, for example, the role of the state in fighting poverty in Africa. The role of the state in development has long been the focus of research attention but there is certainly space for more research on some of the issues touched on above; for example, on how exactly the kind of strategy Rioufol suggests would relate to the state. If, as she suggests, the struggle is to be one focused on techniques of power rather than institutions and classes, and if the struggle is to be fought in numerous different ways, it ought surely to involve some engagement with the state and conventional party politics, and further research is needed to determine what this engagement may involve.

### **8.3 Concluding Comments**

To end this discussion, it seems appropriate to point to a few very general conclusions which I have reached through conducting this research. I have summarised above some of the specific conclusions I have made with respect to my particular research questions, but have not indicated what I think can be concluded more generally about post-development theory, about the future of development and about the work of Enda Graf Sahel. This thesis does not seek to answer these bigger, more general questions in detail; yet it is surely possible to make a few very provisional comments on these issues.

In terms of post-development theory: looking back now on almost two decades of post-development writing, what can be concluded about this body of literature? My lengthy engagement with it and with responses to it, have tempered my initial enthusiasm about post-development theory somewhat. While I still hold to my initial view that it is an important body of literature which raises some probing and insightful questions, I cannot deny the accuracy of many of the criticisms levelled against it. What has been most helpful about post-development theory is, I believe, the larger debate it has brought about. Together, post-development theorists and their critics have identified some very important problems with current development work – but also with the possibility of abandoning such development work completely. The post-development theorists highlight many of the problematic assumptions upon which much development theory and practice is built and have managed, very capably and astutely, to articulate some of the anger and disillusionment felt by those who have been let down by development. Nevertheless, it seems unfair to tar all development initiatives with the same brush and impossible to

advocate the complete abandonment of all the kinds of initiatives that were conducted in the name of development. And so those of us who feel compelled to respond in some way to the poverty and suffering of distant others are left with a difficult task. How do we overcome the distances – physical, experiential, cultural, economic and political – between our own lives of privilege and the lives of the poor? How do we stop ourselves from closing up into a ball of introspective, self-absorbed, hyper-critical inactivity in the face of the difficulty of bridging these distances? And yet, how do we ensure that our involvement with poor communities is accompanied by the appropriate amount of self-interrogation and critical reflexivity? Years of engagement with post-development theory leave me with these questions, rather than answers, and leave me uncertain both of what can finally be concluded about the post-development debate and what can be predicted about the future of development theory and practice. What I am sure of, however, is that this debate has helped clarify some important questions and that such clarification is needed before careful answers can emerge.

What, then, of the work of Enda Graf Sahel? Here again, my initial enthusiasm has perhaps suffered some set-backs. The EGS that I experienced and engaged with during my time in Senegal was perhaps not quite as inspiring as the EGS I had pictured in my imagination before my arrival. Nevertheless, I refuse the cynical attitude of many I have met who imply that NGO workers are, for the most part at least, self-seeking manipulators who carefully manufacture an image of critical, committed engagement to disguise their real interest, which is the accumulation of the material benefits and kudos that NGO work can bring. My interaction with EGS staff convinces me of the complexity of motivations that drive people to commit themselves to development work and of the difficulty of truthfully and fairly

assessing the effects of the work they do. My relatively short visit with EGS makes me unwilling to even attempt some kind of final and global assessment of its work, but I remain impressed at least with EGS staff commitment to continually interrogating their practice and convinced that there is much to learn from their experiences and reflections.

Examined together, the post-development debate and the experiences of Enda Graf Sahel draw out some of the most interesting and difficult issues related to development today, revealing both the need for a continued committed engagement with poverty on the part of the relatively privileged and the necessity of much further careful and critical reflection on how such engagement can avoid being insensitive, paternalistic, arrogant, misguided and ultimately counter-productive. My own immersion in this research has led me to be cautious, even reluctant, about any form of intervention on my part in order to 'help the poor', but at the same time also committed to and sometimes even optimistic about finding ways in which the more and less privileged may meet and may work together to bring about a more just and meaningful world.

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