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STRUCTURE, AGENCY AND DEVELOPMENT:

Hegemony and Change in Development Theory and Practice

by

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ABSTRACT

This study emerges the face of global struggles for transformation in existing structures of power and inequality. Through an analysis of current debates on development and property rights, it is revealed that these struggles are frequently either ignored or co-opted and transformed into rhetoric that becomes important in waging what Gramsci called a 'war of position'; that is, an ideological struggle to win popular consent to the program of the ruling class. It is argued that unless and until widely-held assumptions about human nature, property, the economy and history are apprehended as productions of a hegemonic discourse on development, existing relationships of power and interest will remain intact. In this light, the study calls for a new, more holistic theoretical framework and methodology that can simultaneously apprehend multiple-levels of analysis – i.e. local and global; material and ideal/discursive. This study is an attempt to exemplify such an approach.

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INTRODUCTION

The present work has been in progress for almost two years. During the course of its creation, it has quite organically transformed from a critical analysis of transitions in forest resource management practices in the mountain states of India to a much broader discussion of how these micro-level alterations form part of much larger political discourses on property rights and, even more broadly, 'development'. As such, while the case study has remained an integral part of this work, the report on its findings have been relegated to a single chapter. This decision was not made due to a dearth of information in the field. On the contrary, the complex, multileveled and conflictual local and regional realities I came to face within India challenged me on numerous occasions to relinquish my grip on those theoretical frameworks I had come to favour, know and love so intimately during my passage through the academy. The failure of any one of them to adequately approach or encompass those realities (despite considerable efforts on my part to mould and/or force them to) was very disheartening and frustrating. However, the obvious alternative – i.e. exhibiting the observed discourses, culture and relationships of power as endlessly variegated and diffuse and pertaining only to that particular area – did not seem appropriate either.

I found myself, thus, in an entirely predictable and, admittedly, anticipated dilemma; facing a question that is very familiar, perplexing and finally demanding of an answer. The question emerges out of my own awareness of a prevailing tension in the social sciences and, more broadly, the history of Western philosophy – that between scholars coming from a 'modernist'/'structuralist' bent and those of a 'post-modern'/'post-structuralist' persuasion. One's conscious or unconscious positioning in one or another of these two camps has a significant bearing not only on the way one selectively perceives and interprets lived experience, but also (for those of us concerned with emancipatory politics and the possibility

for radical transformation in the ‘global order’) on whether or not one chooses and attempts to envision and participate actively in alternative possibilities. In navigating the muddy waters between these two epistemological persuasions, my own attraction was always to those few political and social theorists who attempt to bridge the delicate gap between these two realms.

It is my fascination with this ‘intermediate space’ that produced the question that beleaguered me throughout my university career and in the Indian Himalayas, where I found myself doing research for its final chapter. This question is: *How can one simultaneously recognize and reconcile individual and diverse local discourses and practices with an overarching, intelligent and by no means merely dictatorial hegemonic context?*

This is not a new question. Its very nature already makes certain assumptions about the existence of concentrations of capitalist powers and interests that could be called broadly dominant or ‘hegemonic’. The existence and supposedly subsuming power of such ‘structures’ has been denied by many political and social theorists and philosophers, particularly those inspired by what has come to be known as ‘post-modernism’. Wood explains,

Postmodernism sees the world as essentially fragmented and indeterminate, rejects any ‘totalizing’ discourses, any ‘metanarratives’, any comprehensive and universalistic political projects – in other words, projects for general *human* emancipation rather than very particular struggles against very diverse and particular oppressions (Wood 2002, 191).

My fear, however, is that if the world and power are conceived of as infinitely variable and diffuse, one is in danger of losing sight of the ways in which particular realities and struggles are shaped by material conditions and interests and the ways in which these influence the constant evolution of social and political realities at all scales of analysis (i.e. individual, local, regional, national, international, global). Nevertheless, post-modern scholars have also revealed that those of a ‘structuralist’/‘materialist’ persuasion frequently also produce

distorted and inaccurate representations of reality. This tendency is implicit in the rigid, dogmatic and homogenizing theoretical paradigms of, for example, the ‘modernization’ school of development, classical Marxism and neoliberalism. By explicitly or implicitly presenting history as a predictable unfolding of stages of ‘development’, these schools are guilty of simplifying what in reality are very diverse, complex and undetermined realities.

As such, too dogmatic a generality can easily contribute to inaccurate assumptions that support fundamentalist political programs based on the notion of trusteeship (i.e. that ‘more advanced’ and experienced countries can guide ‘less advanced’ ones towards structurally-determined and supposedly inevitable goals). By the same token, however, too positivistic a localized focus can also be a source of distortion and inaccuracy and, as a methodology, potentially support larger material interests and powers by obscuring their very existence. As Wood puts it,

The idea of Postmodernity is derived from a conception of modernity that, at its worst, makes capitalism historically invisible or, at the very least, naturalizes it. It is important to notice...that even the *critique* of modernity can have the same effect of naturalizing capitalism. (Wood 2002, 191)

In view of the fact that even the currently very popular and seemingly progressive postmodern approach can be seen to effectively naturalize and thus inadvertently support the very structures and processes it denies the existence of, I have naturally sought and gravitated towards theoretical approaches that attempt to understand the interaction between local particularities and global structures *dialectically* – i.e. articulating how the ‘outside’ is integrally related to the constitution of the ‘inside’ and vice versa. This said, I believe it is important not to deny the existence and interrelatedness of either ‘side’.

The first struggle I faced, thus, was finding a way to situate the local case of transformation and resistance I was recording within a perceptual framework that would allow me to conceptualize their relationships within larger political discourses and practices.

This search was motivated by the notion that without a conception of what Sanbonmatsu calls the “cognitive map of the empirical whole”, the full reach of my analysis and critique could not be achieved (Sanbonmatsu 2004, 198). In other words, if I only focused my discussion (as many have already) on the exclusions of ‘Joint Forestry Management’ (JFM) based on a description of its emergence and effects on the village of Jardhargaon, I would be missing an important opportunity to relate those observed patterns to a much larger national and international discourse on exclusive (and exclusionary) property rights. By the same token, if I were to focus only on the discourse on property rights and the negative impacts of land privatization, I may be missing a chance to relate these processes to broader discourses on development that implicitly support the expansionist drives of capitalism as a world system wherein nature is reduced to a commodity.

On their own, descriptive, localized case studies and critiques do indeed provide valuable fragments of data. However, until these pieces are brought together so that they can be perceived as moments in larger structures of meaning that can be known, analyzed and potentially defeated, then they run the risk of remaining invisible or occluding their own historical significance. Sanbonmatsu explains,

Every social movement offers a partial view of the *whole* of suffering: like shards of a hologram, each contains the refracted image of the whole – but from a particular perspective. One individual sees this suffering and thinks that it is exploitation of the worker, while another sees it as male domination of women, and a third sees it as the enslavement and mass extermination of other species of beings. None of them is mistaken: each perceives a particular, irreducible aspect of the totality of oppression. Yet once they come together in the same room to share perspectives – each holding her own “candle” to the totality – each comes to *see* in the practical activity of the others common work on an interdependent whole. Only in coming together do their different perceptual fields begin to cohere into one. Together they are able to map the whole, and thus perceive patterns of power, common traditions of resistance, ideological coherences. (Sanbonmatsu 2004, 201)

In order to perceive the isolated and particular experiences of a largely failed but still popular development project in northern India as part of a larger whole, I needed to expand my study to include investigation of the discourses that substantiate and legitimate it. As such,

the objective of this study was not only to document and critique a contemporary development project – it was also to problematize the discursive assumptions that have made it a legitimate practice in the first place.

This study is about the origins of development and its associations with the hegemonic motives and logic of capitalism. It is about the controversies it has evoked, both historical and theoretical, and its extraordinary capacity to strategically absorb and respond to dissent and resistance. To this end, **Chapter One** provides an examination of the aura of self-evidence that surrounds the central organizing concept and widely legitimated task of development in order to locate and reveal its social and historical positionality and to explain its success as a discursive field in the modern era. As Rist puts it, the strength of the discourse on development “comes of its power to seduce, in every sense of the term: to charm, to please, to fascinate, to set dreaming, but also to abuse, to turn away from the truth, to deceive” (Rist 1999, 1). Indelibly infused with at times explicit and (more often) implicit beliefs in progress and forward-movement, development is popularly conceived of as an historically inevitable goal, rather than as a contingent process that is set in motion as a result of political choices. It is argued that the discourse on development forms an essential part of a broader hegemonic ideology that actively enables, sustains and promotes immanent processes of capitalist expansion. As part of a hegemonic nexus, ‘development’ is shown to be an extremely ideologically packed concept that both frames and limits the realm of the possible in practice by making alternative visions appear misguided or simply unrealistic.

Chapter Two examines how one aspect of the discourse on development – i.e. the establishment of private rights to property – has become one of the most powerful cornerstones of neoliberal development policy and, indeed, of capitalism itself. The tremendous success of the mainstream property rights discourse will be revealed with

regards to the recent interest taken by international development organizations in the promotion of private rights to land despite strong empirical evidence that there are alternative models of tenure that may lead to a more efficient, productive and socially and environmentally appropriate use of resources. The discussion focuses on how the mainstream discourse on property rights succeeds at either silencing or strategically co-opting these critiques and associates this skill with the notion of hegemony discussed in Chapter One. It is revealed that the resilience and stability of the hegemonic discourse on property rights, like that of development, does not require complete consensus but relies instead on its capacity to respond materially and ideologically to criticism and dissent.

This discussion sets the stage for the case study in **Chapter Three** of a politically popular (and thus disguised) variation on privatization – i.e. ‘decentralization’. The macro- and micro-level forces that structure and regulate forest tenure arrangements and management practices in India are identified and critically examined in order to illuminate the impacts of decentralized forest tenure and management systems. The current popularity of community based natural resource management (CBNRM) strategies – as examples of devolved systems of rights that will supposedly involve the participation of formerly excluded and marginalized citizens – is situated within the globally dominant, neo-liberal ideological discourse on property rights that ultimately serves the interests of capital and the powerful interests of elite classes. An analysis of the varying impacts this discourse has had on the ‘community’ of Jardhargaon reveals that, far from being ‘participatory’ and inclusive, certain parties are further marginalized and excluded. The focus of JFM on the devolution of ‘legitimate proprietary rights’ in order to ‘enhance tenure security’ is critiqued for its lack of attention to dynamics of power within conveniently imagined ‘communities’.

Despite its many flaws and loose ends, as such, the present work presents itself as an effort to reveal and understand, within particular discursive and practical nexuses, how some widely suspect and discredited ideas surrounding and contained within the concept of development are maintained and legitimated. It is important to emphasize that the purpose of this exercise is both scholarly and political. As Said has written, “the fascinated description of exercised power is never a substitute for trying to change power relationships within society” (Said 1995, 221). As such, an equally important objective of this work is participation in the search for the possibility for progressive social transformation. This will require a movement of real people who are impelled to act out of both by practical necessity *and* theoretical awareness.

To the extent that the hegemonic discourse on development is successful at naturalizing existing relationships of power and interest, the possibility for change that accounts for the interests of all segments of the global population appears slim. This is true within the context of the case study area and subject examined inasmuch as it is for any project aimed at social, economic and environmental ‘development’. As such, it is argued that it is absolutely essential that the subject of development – whether it be a single empirical project case study or a analytical discussion of a controversial topic embedded in its discourse – is always situated within larger, interrelated networks of meaning and power. This requires a theoretical framework and methodology that can simultaneously apprehend multiple-levels of analysis – i.e. local and global; material and ideal/discursive. This study is an attempt to exemplify such an approach. It is hoped that the task of imagining and engaging alternatives can begin once the apparently self-evident and uncritically accepted ideas inherent within the discourse on development are problematized in this way.

CHAPTER ONE: Reaching Beyond Hegemony in Development Theory

The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Delusion, disappointment, failures and crimes have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work... Nevertheless, the ruin still stands there and still dominates the scenery like a landmark. (Sachs 1992, 1)

In the context of what appears to some as a paradigmatic crisis or “theoretical impasse” (Booth 1985; Leys 1996; Schuurman 1996) and to others as the emergence of a post-modern sensibility (Veltmeyer 2001), the idea and practice of ‘development’ has become the subject of a great deal of energetic debate and contestation. As Sachs posits above, most would agree that development rarely seems to “work”. Nevertheless, talk and debate about development still pervades not only official statements but even the language of grassroots movements. This is true even though its theoretical, empirical and historical foundations have consistently been shown to be weak and implausible by social scientists from a broad diversity of disciplinary and analytical persuasions. A central question of debate, as such, is *how it is possible that, although scepticism about development remains so widespread, it not only persists but seems continuously to be expanding its reach and scope?*

In this chapter, an attempt is made to answer this question with allusion to the vast quantities of theoretical and field-based studies that have been produced in recent decades that report on and attempt to make sense of the fact that progressive, critical discourse on development is rarely successfully translated into mainline policy on development. What becomes rapidly clear to one attempting to understand this reality is the fact that, in its long history, a tremendous variety of ideas and definitions of what development *should* be have come into existence. However, relatively little discussion is directed towards the question of what development actually *is* in practice. In the opening chapter of Sachs’ well-known *Development Dictionary* (1992), Esteva refers to this paradox:

Development occupies the centre of an incredibly powerful semantic constellation. There is nothing in modern mentality comparable to it as a force guiding thought and behaviour. At the same time, very few words are as feeble, as fragile and as incapable of giving substance and meaning to thought and behaviour as this one. (Esteva 1992, 8)

On the one hand, he presents development as a forcible, apparently self-evident concept within the modern mentality that has come to guide both thought (theory) and behaviour (practice). On the other hand, he observes it is a word that is “fragile” in its substance and meaning because it is subjected to such a vast multiplicity of guises and interpretations. *How is it that this word can appear coherent enough to be called “the central organizing concept of our time” (Cowen and Shenton 1995, 27) forming the foundation of a powerful and extensive intellectual and practical tradition, while simultaneously enigmatic enough to become the subject of so much epistemological doubt, speculation and contestation?*

It is argued in this chapter that the answer to this and the question above has a great deal to do with the fact that ‘development’ is a word that has long had fantasy, allusion and rhetoric built into its meaning. Far from endangering its utility as a concept, however, this elusive and ambiguous quality has in fact lent it great strength and durability. The infinite malleability of the concept of development enables its associated legions of scholars, experts, practitioners, planners, advocates and critics to constantly define, categorize and re-imagine it in relation to shifting social, political and economic realities and interests. Even so, despite its constantly shifting language, strategy and practice over time, the basic goals of development have remained relatively consistent over time. It is indeed possible to argue that the history of development theory and practice basically consists of a fundamental set of core beliefs in basically Western ideals of progress and modernization together with constantly shifting ideas through time of how best to achieve these ends.

The argument presented in this chapter (and developed in further detail and at different levels of analysis in the following chapters) is that development theory and policy

has been overwhelmed by a consensus that both reflects and rationalizes the advance of market forces around the world. Drawing theoretical inspiration from the writings of, amongst others, Antonio Gramsci,¹ it is my intention to situate the current crisis in development theory and the resultant immobilization of coordinated movements of resistance within the context of the *hegemony* of a neo-liberal, capitalist ideology. In this sense, the discourse surrounding the idea and practice of development is seen to form an essential part of a broader hegemonic ideology that actively enables, sustains and promotes *immanent processes* of capitalist expansion. By presenting development as an ideology that forms an aspect of the current hegemony, the interest in this chapter is in its strategy and tremendous success in presenting people with a way of understanding social change that leads them to accept the legitimacy of the existing order because it is deemed relatively desirable and just or because it appears natural and beyond challenge. Interest is also taken in the ways in which development ideology ensures that fundamental critiques the status quo appear perverse, unrealistic or misguided.

Within this context, it is argued that the late critical discourse on development has indeed posed important questions, challenges and new insights. However, it has not yet succeeded in posing any fundamental challenges to the advance of these immanent processes. Rather, the critical contributions of researchers and theorists have been selectively engaged, interpreted and absorbed by the dominant ideology in a way that adds sophisticated nuances to its legitimizing discourse, thereby lending it an aura of theoretical

¹ Antonio Gramsci was an Italian Marxist historian who is best known for his theories on 'hegemony'. See A. Gramsci (1985), *Selections from Cultural Writings*. David Forgacs and G. Nowell-Smith (trans.) (eds.), Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.

integrity and accountability. The way in which the critique of post-modern² thinkers has been selectively adapted and co-opted by the dominant development paradigm is offered as an example. It is argued that, far from providing a critique that will enable a practical transformation of the dominant discourse on development, the ‘theoretical impasse’ initiated by the contributions and analyses of post-modern scholarship effectively robs analysts and activists of the theoretical tools needed to constructively counter the hegemony of neo-liberal capitalism.

The interest taken in the deep-seated nature, extensive reach and implications of the hegemonic discourse on development in this study is reflective of a concern for mobilizing the potential for transformative political critique and engagement. Just as development discourse promotes and justifies very real interventions and practices within the lives of its ‘beneficiaries’ (or victims), it is critical to remember that ideas about it are also formed within a very real set of material relationships, activities and powers. Too often, the focus in development research is restricted to a scale that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to apprehend the larger structural, historical and geographical contexts within which its language, strategies and practices are produced. What this means practically in terms of research methodology is that it is essential that attention given to the minutia of lived, subjective experience is balanced with careful attention to the economic and the political realms. More generally, what is needed is a new, ‘post-impasse’ approach in development theory that takes into account the operation and influence of discourse at micro- levels while simultaneously apprehending the power of macro- structural variables at influencing and sustaining these in order to maintain particular organizations of capital and power. Without

² There are many ‘post-modernisms’ as it is a term that has come to encompass vastly different objects and theoretical projects through very liberal usage. It is not possible to come up with a definition that summarizes all of its uses or that even stakes out any meaningful common ground between them.

such a dialectical analytical framework for examining social processes of change, it is exceedingly difficult to perceive what appears to be isolated datum – e.g. a layoff of workers, a cleared rainforest – “as moments in a larger structure of meaning” that can be identified, analysed and potentially defeated (Sanbonmatsu 2004, 193). Such an epistemological breakthrough is essential if we assume that, contrary to the determinist utopias of modernization theorists, ‘vulgar’ Marxists³ and post-modernists, the future is unwritten and that structures of social injustice will not crumble by themselves.⁴

To these ends, **Section 1.1** introduces and critically evaluates some of the standard assumptions about development that have come to serve as starting points from which research, theory and criticism proceed. Some of the major themes that have characterized studies in post-1945 international development are discussed. The ways in which development has been understood and practiced by the modernization school of development (broadly conceived to include all schools of a ‘structuralist’ orientation) is discussed. This is followed by a look at the contributions of some of the ‘alternative’ schools of thought and practice (particularly post-modernism/post-development) which emerged in opposition to mainstream, deterministic readings of development. **Section 1.2** outlines the contemporary ‘impasse’ in development theory and describes the associated triumph of neoliberal models of development. **Section 1.3** situates the impasse in development theory in the context of the *hegemony* of neo-liberal, capitalist ideology. Drawing inspiration from the theoretical approaches of Gramsci, Foucault and their synthesis in the work of Said, the

³Marxists believe that liberation is written into the dialectical progress of history. Accordingly, it is presupposed that capitalism will eventually succumb to the weight of its own economic contradictions. Post-modernists can also be criticized for championing a ‘determinist utopia’ because it is accepted that the indeterminacy of language and/or the open character of textuality will eventually destroy the “semic pillars of the temple of social authority” (Tetzlaff 1991, 9). Epistemological enlightenment is thus seen to be the guarantor of transformation.

⁴ Discourse analysis, as Escobar points out, is essential to reveal and “liberate the discursive field” so that the “task of imagining alternatives can begin” (Escobar 1995, 14). However, whether or not these imagined (or already existing) alternatives can be realized will depend on a great deal more than just dreaming.

ways in which the present state of discord and theoretical fragmentation actively enables, sustains and promotes immanent processes of capitalist expansion are examined. In Section 1.4 there is a discussion of what a ‘post-impasse’ theory of development might look like. It is argued that any opportunity for radical transformation of development ideology or practice requires the transcendence of the dominant, intellectually and politically demobilizing paradigm of post-modernism (the “culture of late capitalism”) while simultaneously avoiding recourse to the ahistorical and overly deterministic modernization theories of social change. Hence, a holistic theory of development that incorporates a dialectical understanding of the interaction between local, subjective experiences and global, objective structures is advocated in order to bring them into simultaneous viewing. This is a hermeneutic that protests theoretical extremism (in the forms of pure idealism or pure materialism) and instead calls for a perceptual and analytical framework that requires the integration of the speculative insights and contributions of both. The Gramscian theoretical framework, which has an extraordinary capacity to link micro-level, material and social realities with macro-level processes of change and political interest, is proposed as a means of achieving such a synthesis.⁵

1.1 WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT?

As Rojas has posited, there are at least two different ways to look at a word: “One is to analyse the word the same way we examine an object; the other is to engage in a conversation with the word” (Rojas 2001, 571). She takes the position that a “dialogic penetration” into a word, revealing and taking seriously its capacity to confer meaning, is far

⁵ Other frameworks, including those provided by theorists such as Polanyi, J.S. Scott and even Weber, also offer similar frameworks. Gramsci’s idea of hegemony, however, will be especially useful for the purposes of this study because it so succinctly links material and ideological explanations for relations of power and domination.

more rewarding than an approach that purveys one particular understanding of a supposedly neutral “word-thing” (Rojas 2001, 571). In other words, language is not only *descriptive* – implying a one-way interaction between what is seen (be it an object or social fact) and the observer. It is also *prescriptive* – implying a two-way interaction between the observer and whatever it is that is being observed. Therefore, a word *conveys* meaning in as much as it actively *gives* meaning. Words, and thus languages, are never self-referential but are constructed within historical and social contexts. Further, the meanings that words are given reflect the definitions that best suit the individuals and collectives that use and institutionalize them in light of their practical interests. Language, as such, is indicative of and essential to the relations of power, exploitation, privilege and inequality that order society and history.

The power of words to define perception (as opposed to only describe it) becomes very evident when one examines the exemplary concept of development. Cowen and Shenton point out that “development defies definition, although not for a want of definitions on offer” (Cowen and Shenton 1995, 28). Nevertheless, despite significant variation in use and intention, it is a word that causes little disrupt in common parlance because its meaning is more or less taken for granted.

Typically ‘development’ is taken to express the desirability of and need for modern technical assistance or the expanded provision of ‘basic needs’ (e.g. education, housing, modern health facilities, water, etc.). This is achieved through the facilitation of other forms of institutional and structural change such as ‘state building’ (i.e. decentralization, democracy, ‘good governance’) and the provision of financial assistance *for* the ‘un-’ or ‘under-’ developed, ‘southern’ or ‘third world’ countries of the world *by* the ‘developed’, ‘Western’ or ‘northern’ countries. These tactical expressions of development convey what has become

the widely-legitimated practical and institutional mission of development. As Sachs writes, however, development is more than a socio-economic endeavour: “It is a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies, and a fantasy which unleashes passions” (Sachs 1992, 1). Less immediately apparent in common associations with the concept are the implicit ideas or theoretical constructs that inform and support its various forms and practices. These are also unavoidably present each time one thinks about or uses the word. Commenting on the slippery use and meaning of the word, Esteva writes:

Throughout the century, the meanings associated with... development concurred with many others to transform the word... into one with contours that are about as precise as those of an amoeba. It is now a mere algorithm whose significance depends on the context in which it is employed. It may allude to a housing project, to the logical sequence of a thought, to the awakening of a child’s mind, to a chess game or to the budding of a teenager’s breasts. *But even though it lacks, on its own, any precise definition, it is firmly rooted in popular and intellectual perception. And it always appears as an evocation of a net of significances in which the person who uses it is irremediably trapped.* (Esteva 1992, 10, italics mine)

Esteva makes the point here that development can not properly be disassociated from the words and ‘net’ of meanings with and through which it was formed (e.g. growth, maturation, progress, evolution, well-being, social justice, personal blossoming, etc.): “No matter the context in which it is used...the expression becomes qualified and coloured by meanings perhaps unwanted” (Esteva 1992, 10). It is when one begins to analyse these latent meanings and associations that it becomes clear that there are particularly structured assumptions inherent in the powerful concept of development. It does not only describe an objective, institutionalized set of neutral relationships and practices. It implies, in its very essence, relationships of power, domination and exploitation that are fuelled and legitimated through a tacit endorsement of particular interpretations of history and valuations of what constitutes ‘progress’ and ‘success’. Development is, in this sense, an inescapably normative term. However, it is regularly treated with an ease that reifies its historicity and underestimates its complexity as an idea and political instrument of power.

This is not to say that there have not been in-depth, persistent and strong critical analyses and critiques of the concept and power of development. The debates and controversies that have emerged in what has been called a contemporary ‘crisis’ in development theory bear testimony to the fact that there are. What is not clear though is whether the deep-seated disaffection with dominant perspectives on development forms a challenge significant enough to make room for reasonable and coherent alternatives. Before entering into a discussion of whether or not this is has been the case, an examination of the main intellectual and cultural roots of the dominant and newly emergent ‘alternative’ perspectives of development is in order.

1.1.1 The Development of ‘Development’: Dominant Perspectives

Development, which had suffered the most dramatic and grotesque metamorphosis of its history in Truman’s hands, was impoverished even more in the hands of its first promoters, who reduced it to *economic growth*. For these men, development consisted simply of growth in income per person in economically underdeveloped areas. (Esteva 1992, 12)

In his infamous inauguration speech on January 20, 1949, Harry S. Truman declared the Southern hemisphere ‘underdeveloped’ for the first time. For many development thinkers, this speech signifies the beginning of a new era in development theory and intervention (e.g. Sachs, 1992). One of the main features perceived to characterize this transformation in the discourse of development is that a “threshold of internalization” was crossed (Crush 1995, 11): those who were once the ‘victims’ of development began to define themselves according to its increasingly taken-for-granted meanings and terms.

The post-1945 period in development history is undoubtedly significant. It was this period that saw the rise and institutionalization of ‘development economics’ as a practice concerned with certain questions about a newly constructed object, the ‘underdeveloped economy’. Nevertheless, it is arguably short-sighted to conceive of these developments as

evidence of something entirely ‘new’ and disconnected from the consolidation, over many centuries, of a dominant view and practice of the economy in Western history.⁶ In this vein, Cowen and Shenton (1995, 1996) argue that the modern idea of development should be properly traced back to where it was first ‘invented’ – i.e. amidst the disorder and chaos of early industrial capitalism in Europe. One could even look back further in history to find its metaphorical associations with organic notions of unfurling and growth in the, at first, philosophic and then natural sciences. Rist (1997), for example, finds the roots of contemporary thought on development in the writings of Aristotle on science and nature, Saint Augustine’s theology of history, Descartes, Pascal, Fontenelle, Rosseau, Condorcet, and in the “triumph of social evolutionism” wrought by liberal social-scientific interpretations of Darwin’s theory of evolution.

Regardless of when one chooses to locate the beginnings of development, a central task for one seeking to understand its significance as an ambiguous and yet significant instrument of power is to gain an understanding of its discursive origins and contexts. It is only when one examines the discourse in these terms that it becomes clear that the reductionistic analyses and prescriptions of the ‘development experts’ form but an instant in the long history of capitalist development and expansion. Thus, although there are many strands in contemporary development theory, it is arguable that they all prescribe to and are contained within the confines of an established economic and politically-driven discourse.

Speculating on the first theories of development, Leys proposes that the advent of capitalism and especially industrial capitalism between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, “forced the fact of human economic, social, political and cultural development on people’s

⁶ Leys notes that it is quite amazing how little of the post-1945 theoretical work “drew on, or even related itself to, the existing body of theory about development that had been prompted by the original advent of capitalism itself” (Leys 1996, 5).

attention” (Leys 1996, 4). Various thinkers began to conceive of a ‘universal history’, and of history as progress. For example, Karl Marx (1818-1883), whom Leys presents as one of the key originators of development theory, conceived of history as a series of modes of production, “each disclosing a higher level than before of the uniquely human capacity of self-realization, and succeeding each other through the working out of contradictions in their inner dynamics” (Leys 1996, 4). He found in history laws “winning their way through and working themselves out with iron necessity” (Marx 1976, 91).⁷ The same kind of construction of the history of humanity is presented in one of the founding texts of economics, Adam Smith’s (1776), *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Here, the “progress of opulence” is seen to be in the “order of things which *necessity* imposes in general”, and “is promoted by the *natural* inclinations of man” (Smith 1961, 402; cited in Rist 1997, 40, italics mine). ‘Progress’ here is thus seen as a development that is inescapable.

Thus, in what later became known as some of the founding, ‘classical’ texts on economics, development is presented as a natural process that unfolds in the history of societies, knowledge and wealth in accordance with certain necessary laws and dynamics. The idea of a natural history of humanity that can be, more or less, mechanically deduced from theory grounded the possibility for a ‘grand narrative’. These early works inspired a vast output of theoretically-inspired historiographies concerned with the ‘evolution’ and ‘progress’ of human history as a predictable and therefore structured totality. They were also significant because the discourse of production, labour and the market (around which the

⁷ Further, the sequential development of economic formations of society – proceeding in his formulation from feudalism to bourgeois capitalism, to communist society – was seen by Marx as “a process of natural history” (Marx 1976, 93). Marx wrote: “Nature as it comes into being in human history – in the act of creation of human society – is the *true* nature of man; hence nature as it comes into being through industry, though in an *estranged* form, is true *anthropological* nature.” (Marx 1975, 355). Rist notes that this equation of economic development with natural, inevitable processes is a large part of the reason that Marx can be considered as “the last of the classical economists” (Rist 1997, 41).

political economies of theorists like Smith and Marx were structured) came to pervade the language of everyday life:

Simply put, modern people came to see life in general through the lens of production. Many aspects of life became increasingly economized, including human biology, the nonhuman natural world, relations among people, and relations between people and nature. (Escobar 1995, 60).

The emergence of this economic discourse was not arbitrary – rather, it is an aspect of a political project to ‘normalize’ new forms of production, exchange and, of course, power. In this sense, Escobar notes that “people did not go into the factories gladly and of their own accord”. The institutionalization of the market system in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, “required a transformation at the level of the individual...and the regulation of populations in ways consistent with the movements of capital” (Escobar 1995, 60).⁸ The emergent science of political economics, which portrayed and explained all of history and the new economy as the realization of ‘natural’ tendencies, created an increasingly taken-for-granted understanding and expectancy that the whole world could not help but follow in the same footsteps of the Western, ‘developed’ nations.

The dawn and rapid expansion of what is known today as ‘development economics’ beginning in the 1950s brought a new, practical significance to these early theorizations. As decolonisation approached, the question of how the colonial possessions of European powers could be transformed into ‘modern’ and productive states became central (Leys 1996, 5). This was the case for a number of political and economic reasons, including the staking out the allegiances of ‘underdeveloped’ nations in the shadow of the Cold War and

⁸ Escobar elaborates further: “An entire regime of discipline and normalization was necessary... The restructuring of the individual and society was achieved through manifold forms of discipline, on the one hand, and through the set of interventions that made up the domain of the social... The result of this process – *Homo oeconomicus* – was a normalized subject that produces under certain physical and cultural conditions. To accumulate capital, spread education and health, and regulate the movement of people and wealth required no less than the establishment of a disciplinary society.” (Escobar 1995, 60)

the creation of the Bretton Woods financial and trading regimes.⁹ In addition, the appearance and rapid expansion of the empirical social sciences brought a confidence among scholars and planners that science was no longer contaminated by prejudice and error.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the theories of economic growth and modernization that came to dominate were developed by economists, social scientists and sociologists. Although these are grouped variously by different theorists, the vast majority of formulations can reasonably be grouped under the heading of ‘modernization theory’. Banuri usefully lists the various sub-disciplines of this literature as follows: (1) *Development economics*, with its competing paradigms of *institutionalist mainstream*, *neo-classical*, and *structural* approaches; (2) The *political economy* approach, rooted in the Marxist tradition and including the *world systems* approach, the *dependency* school, and *non-dependency* Marxists; (3) *Political development*, concerned with issues of state-building, and (4) *social modernization* theory, which is inspired by the writings of Weber and perceives ‘correct’ social values and behaviors as necessary prerequisites of development (Banuri 1990, 32-33).

Often, the *world systems* and *dependency* schools – both Marxist-inspired – are seen as critics of a more rigidly defined ‘modernization’ school (i.e. as described in Leys 1996, 8-19). Banuri (1990) finds it useful and appropriate to conceive of these and the other theoretical schools listed as part of a single family of theory because they all subscribe to linear, deterministic views of history that place Western countries ahead of Third World countries.¹⁰ In addition, despite different literatures and areas of expertise, these theoretical schools were consistently supportive of certain other basic assumptions and conclusions, including: (1) A

⁹ The Bretton Woods agreements arranged to allow national governments to manage their economies so as to maximize growth and employment. They placed new conditions on capital mobility, enabled governments to determine domestic interest rates, fix national currency exchange rates, and tax and spend as was seen fit to secure national economic interests and thus made national economic planning essential.

¹⁰ Thus, while the ‘political economy’ school has directed major criticism at ‘mainstream’ theories, its more orthodox views share with mainstream writers the “linear view of progress according to which developing countries are on an evolutionary trail blazed by the industrialized countries” (Banuri 1990, 33).

belief in the role of modernization as the only force capable of destroying archaic superstitions and relations, at whatever social, cultural and political cost (Escobar 1995, 39); (2) A belief that the process of modernization, although multidimensional and contingent, basically takes the form of capitalist development (thus requiring the institutionalization of private property in the means of production, wage labour, 'modern' values, etc.); (3) An implicit positivist assumption "that the means for achieving social ends are separable from the ends themselves; and often also that moral considerations apply primarily to ends rather than means" (Banuri 1990, 34).

These theories, as such, extended classical formulations of the economic and social history of Western countries and instilled the conviction that it was only a matter of time before poor, 'underdeveloped' countries would become rich and 'developed'. The already (or at least further) 'developed' status of Western countries placed them in a position of relative authority in the context of changes in the international environment. The increased experience and economic knowledge in the 'developed' world as a result of experience in the economic intervention inspired confidence in the managerial ranks of their financial and technological capacity to ensure social and economic 'progress' all over the world. As such, the supposedly advanced knowledge and the indisputably greater economic standing of Western countries in the international community was combined with an open humanitarian concern for improvement in the overall 'well-being' of the populations of colonial and ex-colonial states to form a powerful face of legitimacy for the new 'project' of development. "The terrain", as such, "was prepared for the emergence of economic development as a legitimate theoretical endeavour" (Escobar 1995, 37).

Leys proposes that it "is no great oversimplification to say that 'development theory' was originally just theory about the best way for colonial, and then ex-colonial, states to

accelerate national economic growth” (Leys 1996, 7). Indeed, economic growth did become a central preoccupation of development theorists and practitioners.¹¹ Material advancement was seen as the key to the achievement of social, cultural and political ‘progresses’.¹² The ‘underdeveloped’ economy was characterized negatively as suffering from a ‘vicious circle’ of low productivity, lack of capital, and inadequate industrialization. The cure the pioneers of development economics presented was relatively straightforward and mechanistic: the primary concern was capital accumulation and “deliberate industrialization” to attract foreign capital, improve their stake in international trade, productively employ the rural unemployed and underemployed and thus achieve maximum capital accumulation (Escobar 1995, 74). In true form, these classical and neo-classically inspired models of growth implicitly held the prosperous economies of ‘developed’ countries as their standard.¹³

At base, modernization theories of either the liberal or Marxist persuasion all advance similar universalizing theories that take as a starting point the assumption that the material conditions of social and economic change can be analysed and explained ‘structurally’ in terms of objective tendencies or ‘laws’ (i.e. conditions beyond the control and will of individuals involved).¹⁴ Marxist theories, for example, view change as essentially fuelled by the spontaneous unfolding of contradictions between relations of production and

¹¹ In 1955, Lewis gave a speech which reflected the emphasis on economic growth that came to permeate the whole field of development thinking: “First,” he began, “it should be noted that our subject matter is growth, and not distribution” (Lewis 1955; cited in Sachs 1992, 13).

¹² The improvements and changes promised from adherence to plans for economic growth – involving essentially capitalist development, rural migration to urban centers and agrarian reform – were hypothesized to be ‘progressive’ in the sense of spreading the benefits equitably over time and gradually increasing levels of social inclusion. Rist writes: “Growth has the ideological function of making people believe that inequalities are decreasing, given that the cake is said to be growing bigger all the time (and so its fairer distribution is not an issue)” (Rist 1997, 16).

¹³ This was true despite the fact that ‘underdeveloped’ country economies were characterized by extremely different circumstances (e.g. deteriorating terms of trade, price changes due to inflationary biases in their economies, low capital availability, a “savings gap”, which had to be filled with foreign aid, loans or private foreign investment) (Escobar 1995, 75).

¹⁴ Gudeman writes, “Although the particular theories used in economics are quite diverse, they share the assumption that one or another universal model exists and can be used to explain a given field of data” (Gudeman 1986, 28).

productive forces, where the state's main function is confined to shortening the transition period between two modes of production in order to usher in and consolidate new modes. Neoliberal theories of 'progress', in a similar vein, assume that development requires the institutionalization of a capitalist system, particularly private property in the means of production and wage labour, as well as an institutional (re)orientation towards a particular set of development-enhancing "modern", liberal values like democracy and individual achievement (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, 85).¹⁵ Government and international organizations were considered key in promoting and orchestrating the necessary efforts to overcome 'backwardness' and 'underdevelopment'.

In both of these conceptions, development involves a linear progression of history that is complex and multidimensional but basically predictable. In addition, in both cases the peasantry and 'traditional' modes of production (e.g. based on collective ownership and management structures) are invariably seen as either victims of unassailable modernization processes or as obstacles to necessary changes. The picture, therefore, is of a progressive movement into the future based on implicit typologies that define and explain what the present state of affairs is and where intentional development can lead. The belief that there are overarching and historically inevitable forces driving history and humanity towards these preordained forms gives the holders of this knowledge a position of authority and power over those who do not have it. Thus, by making other forms of socio-economic organization appear impractical, implausible or simply destined for demise, the dominant discourse on development has been widely successful at legitimizing only very partial visions of what a 'better world' could look like and at silencing alternative realities and possibilities.

¹⁵ "Stages of growth" (Rostow 1960) theory, for example, presented the hypothesis that the social and economic conditions of 'mature' capitalist countries – i.e. industrialization, urbanization, agricultural modernization, infrastructure, provision of social services, high levels of literacy, etc. – could be replicated in poor countries through economic growth.

1.1.2 “Alternative” Perspectives on Development

Nowadays, the once-hegemonic emancipation projects of modernity are under heavy post-modern fire. The artillery is not only aimed at the universality of the modernity project (i.e., the universal significance and applicability of the emancipation project) but also at its realisability. (Schuurman 1996, 187)

The post-modern challenge to scientific forms of analysis and associated meta-theories (e.g. modernization, emancipatory discourses etc.) was mounted in the 1980's by proponents of 'post-structuralism', 'post-Marxism' and 'discourse-theory'. Although this literature encompasses a vast number of perspectives, the writers of the tradition share an antagonism towards any analysis predicated on the objectivity of material and social conditions (i.e. 'structuralism') and their associated metatheories and ideologies. Within the field of development studies, a vast literature that confronts the fundamentally modernist genesis and character of development theory and practice has assembled (e.g. Schumacher 1973; Goulet 1980; Sachs 1992; Peet and Watts 1993; Escobar 1995; Rist 1999; Rojas 2001; Sanbonmatsu, 2004) and provides important insight into the historical origin and discursive power of the idea and practice of development with imperialist motives and advances.

The search for new, 'non-structural' paradigms in development theory was spurred and supported by a growing sense of disappointment accompanying the recognition that there was little correspondence between the promises of development and the realities facing much of the Third World: ecological disasters, persistent and/or growing poverty and unemployment (despite expanded production), and higher levels of conflict and tension (Banuri 1990, 30-31). These realities created serious questions about the 'realisability' of development goals and, thereafter, consistent calls for an 'archaeology' and 'genealogy' of the entire concept (Schumacher, 1973; Goulet, 1980; Peet and Watts 1993; Escobar 1995).

Although the results and theoretical implications of these studies vary widely, the important general consensus is that development is not a neutral, descriptive concept, but

rather emerged within a particular history, culture and nexus of power. A profound dissatisfaction with the revealed Western-based modernization impetus and ideological justification for development cast a dark shadow on any theoretical framework which views the dynamics of change and development in structural terms. In an attack on the imperialist designs and cultural abuses within the dominant form of discourse, the proponents of post-structuralist analysis and a post-modernist perspective on society have called for the rejection of all forms of 'metatheoretical' analysis and action.

This is in line with the basic impulse of post-modernists: to make a definitive break with theories and forms of analysis that equate reason, emancipation and progress and that share a faith in the power of human reason to comprehend and transform the world in terms of universal rationalist principals.¹⁶ Based on the conclusion that "meaning arises from within a discourse rather than from any relation of *truth* or correspondence to *reality* (the outside world)", post-modernist thinkers criticize all theories that "are grounded in a universal standard; the working of a structure; rationalist principals such as progress, freedom and equality; or the discourse on inalienable human rights" (Veltmeyer 2001, 600). Post-modern thinkers proposed that such ideas and theories about reality are formed in relation to productions of knowledge and meaning (i.e. 'discourses') and thus must be contextualized and understood "in perspectivist terms, that is, on the basis of knowledge that reality is heterogeneous (not homogenous) and that it cannot be grasped from any unitary standpoint" (Veltmeyer 2001, 600).

This epistemological rupture has had profound implications for studies of literature, sociology, economics, politics and history. The proponents of a post-structuralist analytic

¹⁶ Foucault writes of those, like himself, who are making "a great effort to liberate themselves, once and for all, from [the] conceptual framework [of the] transcendental tradition of the nineteenth century" (Foucault 1980, 120).

turned a very critical eye on the scientific pretensions of scientific research. The generally-held view is that all supposed ‘facts’ are, in reality, social or mental constructions with no empirical referents (i.e. they hold meanings which were constructed within and remain internal to the discourse which gave rise to them) (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, 89).¹⁷ Taken as a discursive construct within this post-modern critique, development itself came to be viewed as an imposition of Western ‘knowledge’ or “way of conceiving and perceiving the world” on the minds of its subjects (Tucker 1999, 1).¹⁸

Practically, the attack of post-modernism on theory and method in development studies and the natural and social sciences more broadly,

...shifted the focus of analysis from ‘the linear to the non-linear, simplification to complexity, neutral objectivity to the impossibility of removing the observer from the process of investigation, and the superiority of qualitative modes of interpretation over the precision of quantitative analysis. (Gulbenkian Commission 1996, 61; cited in Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, 89)

The search for alternative, non-structural forms of analysis has taken diverse forms, but has generally shared a common goal. Various conceived, this has been to imagine, promote, enable and/or establish “another development” (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, 86) or “a post-development era” (Escobar 1995). For post-modernists, thus, interest in ‘development’ was focused on local, small-scale, community-based dynamics of change – i.e. those generated from below and inside rather than from above and the outside. The existence of the so-called ‘new social movements’ in both the ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ worlds are looked to as encouraging examples of civil society attempting “to create new identities and

¹⁷ In this conception, concepts such as ‘class’ and ‘modes of production’ have “no empirical referents”, but are rather ‘linguistic symbols’, ‘the product of discursive practice with no concrete referent in the material world (Spivak 1988; cited in Veltmeyer 2001, 604).

¹⁸ This view causes Tucker to define development as “the process whereby other people are dominated and their destinies are shaped according to an essentially Western way of conceiving and perceiving the world” (Tucker 1999, 1).

to thwart the hegemonic attempts of the mainstream ideology to colonize the inner life-spaces” (Schuurman 1996, 188).

As no ‘outside’, ‘homogenizing’ conception of what constitutes development can adequately capture the diverse reality of lived experience – a “reality which is open to surprise” (Esteva 1992, 23) – the ideas propounded by generations of scholars regarding the institution of modern forms of society were either deserted or considered irrelevant by post-modern scholars. The task remaining is to constantly and persistently expose and critique the prejudices, limitations and short-sightedness of the conventional development discourse. The goal is “to liberate the discursive field” (Escobar 1995, 14) so that the possibility of constructing (or recovering) alternatives can begin.

The tremendous amount of energy that has been focused on a radical critique of the partial, linear and homogenizing theories of the Western idea and project of ‘development’ has had important outcomes. The post-modern/post-structural critique has revealed the association of discourses on development with the application of Western power and domination and the subjugation of the ‘Third World’. Insofar as its thoroughgoing and widely-popularized critique has ‘denaturalized’ the concept of development, the notion that it can, by default, create a just and humane society has become a natural cause for suspicion. In addition, as Banuri notes, the challenge post-modernism has posed to this myth has effectively permitted an “increase in popularity and self-assurance of non-Western (and often anti-Western) social, cultural, and political movements in Third World countries” (Banuri 1990, 31). Post-modernism also provides scholars with a powerful analytical tool: the deconstruction not only of ‘meta-narratives’ but also of lower order discourses (Schuurman 1996, 189). The new importance placed on the need for research on the local, subjective and qualitative dimensions of social change has resulted in a wealth of field-level studies that lend

a dimension of depth and humanity to development studies that never before existed. This has influenced new trends in the ways in which development is practiced. For example, in an effort to undermine monolithic, 'top-down' approaches to planning and delivery, 'participatory' approaches have achieved widespread currency (Chambers 1997). Similarly, micro-level research has revealed that there are many local conditions that will impact the ways in which development aid is utilized. For example, recognition of the gendered nature of resource access and distribution has influenced the emergence of 'Women in Development' (WID) and, more recently, 'Gender and Development' (GAD) programs.

Considering the value and wide reach of post-modern/post-structural analytical contributions to the discourse on development, why did its emergence create an apparent 'impasse' in development theory? It is to this question this analysis now turns.

1.2 THE IMPASSE IN DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Since the mid-1980s, when the post-modern criticism of theory formation in the social sciences was combined with an awareness that the emphasis in development practice and theory on economic growth was not paving the way towards its championed goals, the academic discourse on development has been suffering a state of theoretical limbo. In the midst of this state, critical theorists have been struggling to find new ways of understanding the dynamics of development. As yet, however, there has been no agreement on what the scale of analysis should be.

Post-modern/structuralist critiques of the homogenizing assumptions and categorizations inherent in the grand narratives of modernist (including Marxist and neo-Marxist) theoretical paradigms have posited that the most important unit of analysis is the individual, outside of whom there is no common objective reality. Development, in these terms, is understood as a discursive construct that is successfully imposed on the minds of

people because it is an invention or, as in Kant's formulation, an 'ideal' (Veltmeyer 2001, 604). By projecting an ideal vision of what constitutes a modern, developed condition, the ideological and political justification (and aspiration) for intervention in 'un-' or 'under-' developed states is created. Accordingly, post-modern/-structural approaches suggest that the idea of development has such staying power because it promotes, authorizes and justifies certain interventions and practices while delegitimizing and/or excluding others through its seductive language of metaphor, rhetoric and fantasy. The main pursuit of 'post-development' scholars, as such, is not to construct yet another formula for development that promises universal emancipation or 'well-being' based on the misassumption that it is possible to find some "common meaning in different forms of social action in distinct social and historical contexts" (Veltmeyer 2001, 602). Rather, they are intent on foregrounding and supporting the existing forces of resistance and opposition to the predominant discourse on development.¹⁹ In addition to revealing the existence of alternative voices, scholars working from a post-modern/post-development perspective are faced with the challenge of 'deconstructing' the tightly woven discursive web of modernism through discourse (especially textual) analyses.

"The problem with this position", note Petras and Veltmeyer, "and one that is rarely posed (let alone tackled) is that the forces of capitalist modernization continue to resist these efforts to dissolve them in thought" (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, 86). Sharing this antithetical view, a host of other critical theorists have maintained the importance of viewing the dynamics of change and development as the outcome of an empirically identifiable and comparable set of institutionalized practices or 'underlying structures'. It is argued that the tendency in the post-modern dialogue to focus attention on the discursive and subjective

¹⁹ E.g. Rojas writes, "One of the main challenges for scholars working with a postcolonial/post-development perspective is recovering alternative spaces from which the subaltern can speak" (Rojas 2001, 582).

creation of social conditions (e.g. of poverty and ‘underdevelopment’) and the development project itself is problematic because the role and importance of objectively-given structural factors or determinants is occluded. Without denying the role of ideology, theorists of this persuasion always ground discourse analyses within observable socio-economic structures. In this view, ideas are not only *constitutive* of matrices of power and political and social realities – they are also *reflections* of and *conditioned by* them.²⁰ In this sense, it is argued that the particularized focus of analysis called for by proponents of post-modern approaches is idealist and detracts attention from the very real national and supra-national structures of power through which conditions of poverty and underdevelopment, exploitation and oppression are at least partially mediated.²¹

Development is seen, in this perspective, to persist despite practical failures because it is tied to very real, deeply rooted and pervasive structures of power that are based not only on the power of ideas but on the operation of conditions that are objective in their effects. Based on this perspective, development is seen by these scholars as a “manufactured consensus” (Bienefeld 2002, 208) that functions (and always has functioned) to both rationalize and reflect the advance of market forces globally.

Although post-modern and modernist approaches converge on the identification of the idea and practice of development with the spectacle of capitalist triumphalism and neo-liberal reform, there is no shared understanding of how (and at what levels) systems of domination are preserved and of how social order and control maintained. As such, the

²⁰ From a structuralist perspective concepts like class and mode of production *do* have empirical referents and discourse, contrary to the poststructuralist position, is thought of as a means of describing and explaining relations and conditions that are real and objective in their effects.

²¹ Veltmeyer argues strongly “In its hypercritical, anti-structural and idealist stance (postdevelopment) generally induces intellectual immobilization and the political demobilization of the social forces for systemic change. In abandoning the development project, the proponents of postdevelopment or, to be more precise, counterdevelopment – have laid aside the various toolboxes of useful ideas that have been put together over the years to inform and give direction to an adequate political response – to *constructively engage* the development project.” (Veltmeyer 2001, 616).

deliberations between analysts and theorists of these two broad persuasions have resulted in a general sense of malaise; a ‘crisis of developmentalism’ in practice and an ‘impasse’ in development theory. By implication, there is no clear or unified sense of how best to practice and/or resist interventions carried out in the name of development.

1.2.1 The Triumph of Neoliberalism

In the midst of these struggles, a very extreme permutation of the modernization paradigm has taken root and today guides the policies of some of the most politically and economically influential development institutions in existence. Schuurman writes:

Since the end of the 1980’s, the only group not touched by the crisis (and who reacted with a sometimes irritating and unfounded triumphalism) were the neo-liberal adherents of the open market ideology. This post-Keynesian vision (also known as Reganomics) has, since the middle of the 1970’s, turned the crisis to its advantage... What started as a neo-monetarist vision on the problem of hyperinflation in many Third World countries, grew into a new development ideology. (Schuurman 1996, 11)

The limitations of mainstream, modernist development theory were not only revealed through the critical debates that have been described. By the mid-1980s, the world on which conventional ‘development theory’ had been based (i.e. growth via state implementation of macroeconomic policy adjustments) had disappeared. The removal of national and international controls over capital mobility reduced the capacity of any state to promote national development goals (e.g. facilitating the provision of houses, health care, schooling, food). As “none of the alternative candidates (such as ‘social movements’ or ‘communities’) proposed by ‘development theorists...were very convincing” (Leys 1996, 7) the ‘international development community’ – namely, proponents of neoliberalism – became focused on the task of strengthening market forces. This was to be accomplished through ‘structural adjustments’ that aimed to eliminate most state regulations on the functioning of the ‘free market’.

As a development ideology, neo-liberalism very closely resembles the modernization paradigms discussed above. There were many critical researchers and theorists who recognised this association and attempted to introduce alternatives to this latest emergence of modernization-inspired development theory.²² Thus far, however, they have been unsuccessful in their efforts to substantially disrupt and/or transform its progress. That is to say, although major critiques have certainly entered academic and public forums and have sparked major debate and creative efforts to envision alternative possibilities, they have not collectively come together to pose a new paradigm powerful enough to counter the existing dominant and deeply-engrained one. Indeed, many theorists (e.g. Banuri 1990; Polanyi 2001; Tetslaff 1991, Watts 1995) have come to view the very existence of doubt, debate, controversy and emphatic critique as evidence that development does in fact work very well:

Could it be that development does in fact work very well? It is just that what it says it is doing, and what we believe it to be doing, are simply not what is actually happening? If this is so, then perhaps we need to understand not only why the language of development can be so evasive, even misleading, but also why so many people in so many parts of the world seem to need to believe it and have done so for so long. (Crush 1995, 4)

1.3 CAPITALISM, CONTROL AND HISTORY

We return, thus, to the question that opened this chapter: *how it is possible that, although scepticism about development remains so widespread, it not only persists but seems continuously to be expanding its reach and scope?* The two broad theoretical perspectives on development discussed above offer only partial answers to this question.²³ Although these perspectives

²² Some manifestations of these alternative solutions include attention to the need for 'bottom-up', 'participatory' approaches (especially by Chambers 1997). Attention to 'new social movements' in the North and South emerged as a major preoccupation of many 'critical' theorists. These struggles over the environment, culture, women and a general resistance to development and authoritarian regimes were viewed as attempts to create new identities and to overcome "the attempts of mainstream ideology to colonize the inner-life spaces" (Schuurman 1996, 188; also in Escobar 1995, Sachs 1992). For many observers, these movements represented examples of alternatives to development.

²³ From the modernist outlook, development persists because it conceived of as a dimension of historically inevitable processes of economic, political and social/human 'modernization'. The Marxist/neo-Marxist angle of this perspective perceives the acceptance of these processes to be the result of the coercive strength of

have separate strengths, insights and continuing relevance, both present interpretations of development that effectively negate the possibility for progressive transformation. The post-modern stance, particularly in its most extreme forms, presupposes that it is impossible for any political or historical project to establish a common purpose or meaning in different forms of social action.²⁴ Similarly, excessively determinist modernist/structuralist outlooks assume that development can and will only be achieved by singular socio-economic configurations. Tetzlaff summarizes:

‘Vulgar’ Marxists may remain secure in their faith that liberation is written into the dialectical progress of history, that it is only a matter of time before capitalism crumbles under the weight of its own economic contradictions. In more fashionable determinist utopias, the inevitable indeterminacy of language and/or the necessarily open character of textuality stand ready to sunder the semic pillars of the temple of social authority. These positions are sort of the left-theoretical versions of ‘Don’t worry, be happy!’ They relieve us from any responsibility for action. Thus, they are perfect for academics. We need only watch and describe the inexorable forces. There is little at stake in our analyses of the prevailing systems of dominance, for history or epistemology have guaranteed that the oppressors will be swept away when the time is right. (Tetzlaff 1991, 9)

Assuming, instead, that the future is not in fact written and that structures of social injustice will not vanish by themselves, an understanding of how systems of domination legitimate and preserve themselves *simultaneously at both* macro- (structural) and micro- (agency) levels is

powerful economic and political forces and interests. The latest expression of this school of thought places and propagates faith in the supposedly infallible logic of the global market and, practically, in the hands of neo-classically inspired economists and planners. Conceivably, it is the widespread belief in the capacity of a free and open market to regulate itself to achieve optimum levels of resource extraction, production and exchange that allows development to persist and constantly expand its reach and scope. From the post-modern/post-structuralist outlook, development is not a natural and/or inevitable occurrence – it is a discursive production that is “embedded in disciplines, institutions and procedures of rule” (Rojas 2001, 584). Accordingly, the discourse of development persists because it forms the world in its own image. The ‘ideal type’ of society that it has long licensed and promoted has become deeply embedded and has, writes Rojas, successfully “captured the desires of both the powerful and the weak” (Rojas 2001, 572). The role of post-structuralist/post-development scholars and activists is to foreground the fluid, always-changing, contested and constructed nature of reality in order to “provide a fine-grained consideration of the actual processes through which power and meaning are negotiated” (Mallon 1999, 339).

²⁴ This is on the grounds that the post-modern/post-structural analytical orientation rejects structuralism, materialism and the objectivity of experience/principals. Thus, there can be no objectively-given and structurally determined bases for collective action. All that can be done to unravel existing power relationships is to confront and ‘deconstruct’ the intellectual and political practices that form dominant discourses. Academically, this has been partially accomplished by scholars of this persuasion through a focus on the subjectivity of experience and on ‘reality’ as it is construed by the subjects/‘subalterns’ of social action themselves. This has involved a shift of the research agenda – defined it in terms of culture and locality – instead of by social theory, quantitative analysis, and comparative frameworks.

needed so that they can be effectively countered or resisted. Recognition that ideas about development did not (and do not) arise in a social, institutional or literary vacuum is central to an understanding of its cultural and political appeal as a concept and its historical and modern associations with structures of power and interest. A theoretical understanding of how power operates, however, is also needed in order to understand how the ideas expressed and enacted through the metaphor of development are legitimated by both those who possess its power and those who are subject to its practice.

The work of Edward Said (1993, 1995) provides a useful point of departure in this task because of his success in theoretically and practically establishing a link between the seemingly the disparate fields of knowledge, culture and imperialism to explain how the colonial project was justified. In order to make this connection, Said draws on and, uniquely, synchronizes the critical philosophies of the prominent Italian Marxist and political theorist, Antonio Gramsci, and the ‘father of post-modernism’, Michael Foucault, to unify cultural and political-economic explanations of power and empire. In this way, Said provides a reminder of the need to situate the realms of culture (i.e. language, literature, media, religion, education, etc.) within imperial worlds. Further, through his synthesis of Gramscian and Foucauldian theoretical lenses, he develops a framework with which to begin to analyze the dialectic between individual agents (the predominant interest of post-modern scholars) and the complex collective formations to which their actions are a contribution (the predominant interest of structuralist scholars). Accordingly, *an individual agent’s perception of reality is as much a contributing factor to or cause of the structuring of social reality as it is a reflection or effect of it.* The great beauty in the synchronization of structuralist and post-modern/post-structuralist approaches Said achieves in his work is its success in linking material *and* ideological explanations for relations of power and domination.

Following is a brief elaboration on this unique contribution by Said and closer analysis of, in particular, some of the key concepts he drew from the theoretical work of Gramsci. The argument is that several of Gramsci's concepts – especially when enhanced by the kind of attention given by Said to the ideological factors that serve to legitimate particular structures of power – can facilitate a more complex understanding of the present state of 'globalization', its effects and the potential spaces for a constructive, progressive politics. Part of the struggle within the crisis in development theory constitutes a search by theorists for ways to reconstitute social development research along new, more productive and challenging lines. Although his theoretical and methodological frameworks cannot provide all of the answers, Gramsci's work can help to formulate more useful questions.

1.3.1 Hegemony: Culture and Control

The long-reigning philosophy of modern empiricism, and by extension *common sense*, tells us that knowledge of the world comes objectively through the senses. Accordingly, it is assumed possible to objectively arrive at universal understandings of 'reality' in both the material and idealistic realms of experience. This long-held and deeply rooted dictum, however, has been challenged by studies on the nature of human perception of the phenomenal world. Consciousness, according to the work of Edmund Husserl, is always directed towards an object, so "there is an indissoluble unity between the conscious mind and the object of which it is conscious" (Bortoft 1996, 54). Accordingly, although the dimension of mind is transparent during a moment of cognition, it is always present and always layering cognition with *meaning*. Bortoft summarizes: "There cannot be a cognitive perception of meaningless data because in the act of seeing the world it *is* meaning that we see" (Bortoft 1996, 53). The implication of this finding is that, whether one is observing an inanimate object, a person, or a social fact, *there is always a prior set of perceptual rules and*

normative expectations that help in the sorting of the enormous amount of sense data one is confronting. Therefore, the act of ‘seeing’ something always involves processes of filtration and selection. “We cannot see,” writes Sanbonmatsu, “before we have a sense of what we are looking for. One needs a principle of selection... a way of sorting out the perceptual wheat from the chaff” (Sanbonmatsu 2004, 194). Our knowledge of the world, thus, is *not* given singularly through our own independent, subjective experiences of the phenomenal world because we bring to each moment of cognition certain principles of selection, ‘perceptual frames’ or systems.

At various times in history different frameworks for perception have made it possible to see all manner of social objects or facts in particular ways. The power of a paradigm lies in its capacity to persuasively model social reality through the wide casting of perceptual filters that highlight certain aspects of reality while excluding others. The extent to which one particular framework is successful at promoting, licensing and justifying certain interventions and practices over others determines its strength. It can be persuasively argued that, contra Foucault, much of what determines the origins, objects, purposes, consequences and agents of power lies within the economic and political realms (Crush 1995, 7). Power thus conceived is both produced and executed via ideological *and* material conduits. This, essentially, is the starting point for Said. He writes:

Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. The struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings. (Said 1993, 7)

This quote exhibits Said’s concern for mapping the affiliations of ‘culture’²⁵ with imperialist motivations. Drawing from the theoretical legacy of Gramsci, it is his contention that

²⁵ Defined here by Said as “those practices like the art of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms,

‘struggles over geography,’ are never *only* the domain of political society (i.e. the coercive arm of the State; ‘soldiers and cannons’), but also that of civil society (i.e. the cultural realm of institutions that convey the ideological underpinnings of the State; ‘ideas, forms, images and imaginings’; schools, family religion, etc.).²⁶ Said’s contention that no person is absolutely free from the relationship between culture and empire (what Gramsci called *hegemony*) implicitly suggests that no subjective narrative is ever neutral or empty of structured, historical experience. This is a compelling idea because it obliges us, as actors within larger, collectively created and legitimated structures, to examine and reflect on the ideological and moral structuring of our existence. It is also an analytically useful framework through which to conduct a study because the implications of these ideological structures are empirically observable. In other words, as “productions of knowledge and meaning”, *discourses have social, political, geographical and material grounds and implications* that can be scrutinized if one can, proverbially, begin to ‘think outside of the box’ (Cousins and Hussein 1984, 84).

In his well-known book, *Orientalism* (1995), Said examines the role of culture, or more particularly hegemonic ideology operating *through* culture, in legitimating dominant power structures. The approach that Said takes in his study differs from those that preceded it on the subject of Europe’s representation of the East because it brought together the critical philosophies of Foucault and Gramsci to challenge the authority of Western knowledge of and power over the Orient (Bayoumi and Rubin 2000, 64). Although a

one of whose principal aims is pleasure. Included here...are both the popular stock of lore about distant parts of the world and specialized knowledge... (It also), almost imperceptibly, is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought...a sort of theatre where various political and ideological causes engage one another.” (Said 1993, xii-xiii)

²⁶ This formula depicts Gramsci’s conception of the State: Political Society (coercive arm of the State) + Civil Society (consensual arm of the State) = State. This formulation of the State includes, in the narrow sense, its political apparatus (the army, police, central bureaucracy), but also in an inclusive sense, the cultural institutions that convey its ideological underpinnings (the family, unions, schools, church). In this sense, the political apparatus of the state is its coercive arm (military). But the state operates subtly through culture/civil society – in the realm of ideas, which are carried through institutions (schools, media, etc.).

number of commentators have criticized Said for attempting to reconcile these apparently conflicting theoretical frameworks, Said uses any tension that exists between them productively.²⁷ He adopts Foucauldian notions of discourse, the dispersal of power and ‘regimes of truth’ and a Gramscian approach to associate these diffuse *but related* subjectivities with socio-political structures and resistance.

As all social practices entail meaning, or meaning-making, they all have a discursive aspect. Said used Foucault’s notion of discourse²⁸ to indicate how the meanings European colonizers gave to the ‘Orient’ were deeply implicated in how they behaved towards and treated their colonies. In an often cited passage, Said writes:

My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively in the post-Enlightenment period. (Said 1995, 3)

This is a bold statement and Said is himself aware of the methodological challenge associated with an attempt to bridge the gap between the large and diverse realms of culture with political and economic superstructures. “My two fears”, he writes, “are distortion and inaccuracy, or rather the kind of inaccuracy produced by too dogmatic a generality and too positivistic a localized focus” (Said 1995, 8). As such, he asks the important question of how one can “recognize individuality and reconcile it with its intelligent, and by no means passive or merely dictatorial, general and hegemonic context?” (Said 1995, 9).

²⁷ It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the arguments that the Foucauldian notion of dispersal of power is incompatible with Gramsci’s notions of hegemony and power. What is important to note for the purposes of this study is the fact that Said finds their combination extremely useful and appropriate. See Said in Goldberg and Quayson (2002, Ch.1).

²⁸ One important point about the Foucauldian notion of discourse is that it is not based on conventional distinctions between thought and action; language and practice. In Foucault’s account, discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. However, discourse is itself produced by a practice (i.e. ‘discursive practice’) – that is, the practice of producing meaning. In this sense, words or ideas do not objectively represent things or reality but rather *practically constitute them* (Rojas 2001, 579).

Said manages to bridge this gap through recourse to Gramsci's notion of *cultural hegemony*, which provided a way of explaining how the influence of certain ideas about the Orient prevailed over others *and not arbitrarily*, but for material and political purposes. Unlike Foucault, Said is interested in identifying *sites* of power (both individual and collective) and how its exploitation is legitimated through cultural institutions.²⁹ In an interview, he comments that an attempt to bring the Foucauldian and Gramscian narrative together involves: "breaking up the Foucauldian narrative into a series of smaller situations where Gramsci's terminology can become useful and illuminating for analytical purposes", or "the introduction of historical, what I would call a historical context, to Foucault" (Goldberg and Quayson 2002, 10). Said notes that, in general, "Foucault believes that the individual text or author counts for very little" (Said 1995, 23).³⁰ In contrast, Said is interested in the dialectic between individual text or author and the complex *collective* formation to which his work is a contribution. He believes that by exposing discourses and sites of power, one can begin to change them. Power is not such an abstract force in this sense but rather the result of historical and political circumstances that are contingent and changeable.

Gramsci's idea of hegemony is important to understand because it helped Said to explain how a *dispersed* knowledge ("collective yet particularized views") about the Orient were institutionalized through the realm of culture, and then used to legitimate Western power over the Orient. According to Gramsci, hegemony is maintained when dominant

²⁹ He notes that since the middle of the eighteenth century, the relationship between 'East' and 'West' involved both the growth of institutions in Europe conveying a systematic knowledge about the Orient, and the relative political *and* "cultural strength" or domination of Europe. Both politically and ideologically, thus, "the Oriental is contained and represented by dominating frameworks" (Said 1995, 40). As such, as Said is careful to point out, it is no coincidence that the "period of immense advance in the institutions and content of Orientalism coincided exactly with the period of unparalleled European expansion" (Said 1995, 41). He argues that, from their earliest beginnings, ideas about East were constructed within the context of Western ambitions for imperial expansion and domination.

³⁰ Elsewhere, he comments that one gets a sense of "teleology where everything is tending towards the same end" when reading Foucault (Goldberg and Quayson 2002, 10).

groups or classes secure the *consent* of subordinate groups or classes to rule over them by making sacrifices of an economic or corporate kind (e.g. offering relatively high wages or salaries, making welfare provisions and so on). In this conception, as long as the majority of civil society is politically pacified through these sorts of *strategic concessions*, the rule of the dominant is legitimated. In *Orientalism*, Said takes a different tack by focusing on how legitimization also occurs through what he calls “cultural hegemony at work”. He proposes that *it is not only through material concessions that power is extended and maintained, but also through ideas operating through cultural traditions and institutions* (literature, poetry, education, religion, etc.).

Hegemony, then, is a form of cultural leadership where certain ideas and cultural forms are more powerful and influential than others.³¹ Drawing from and extending Gramscian theory, Said shows how the colonial project was made politically acceptable through cultural hegemony.³² He claims that this was not achieved through brute force (although this certainly helped to contain dissent in the colonized countries) but rather through *consent* (understood here as an implicit agreement or understanding, which often

³¹ Many of critics of Said’s work suggest that he marginalizes the dissenting or ‘answering voice’, or assumes that the Orientalist discourse is far more united than it actually was. Several suggest that ‘the sites of resistance in Foucault are very difficult to follow’ (Goldberg and Quayson 2002, 9), implying that his notion of the ‘dispersal of power’ defeats all possibility of resistance. Said takes a different position by utilizing Foucault’s framework in combination with Gramsci’s, so that power and resistance are related in dual processes of formation. While Said does not deny the existence of fractures within and resistance to the Orientalist ideology, he conceives of these natural discrepancies and responses *as part of the dialectic of the dominant ideology*. He writes: “Like any set of durable ideas, Orientalist notions influenced the people who were called Orientals as well as those who were called Occidental, European or Western; in short, Orientalism is better grasped as a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought than it is simply as a positive doctrine” (Said 1995, 42). In an interview, he said: “I think there is a kind of deep structure of Orientalism, which is able to multiply and proliferate in all kinds of ways.” (Goldberg and Quayson 2002, 4). This multiplication, and infinitude of detail and variation, however, does not take away from the fact that *they all evolve out of or respond to a very small number of elements, or central themes, which are given by the dominant ideology*.

³² Through an examination of the works of nineteenth century French and British novelists, poets, historians, travelers and imperial administrators, Said shows how, together, their writings constituted an influential *discourse* he called “Orientalism”. Said presents Orientalism as a “political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (Said 1995, 43). The ‘West’ came to embody a certain *type* of society – rational, developed, industrialised, urbanised, capitalist, secular, and modern. The ‘East’ or ‘Orient’ came to be identified reflexively as irrational, un- or under-developed, traditional and backwards. This schema allowed Europeans to *define* and classify societies into neat, homogenous categories and it provided criteria of *evaluation* against which other societies could be ranked.

passes off as conventional wisdom or common sense). Dominant groups or classes procure the *consent* of certain subordinate groups or classes to rule over them by making sacrifices of an economic or corporate kind (e.g. offering relatively high wages or salaries, making welfare provisions etc.) (Boggs 1984; Femia 1994; Mouffe 1998). Thus, it represents collaboration between the dominant and the dominated: “it is the orchestration of the wills of the subordinates into harmony with the established order of power” (Gitlin 1987, 243). Colonial rule, which may have otherwise been recognised as inhumane and exploitative, was legitimated through the consent of civil society as a result of the penetration of the idea that they were serving a noble cause in speaking for and managing the ‘Orient’.³³ There was no need to sell or impose the idea that imperial expansion was a worthy endeavour because an ideological defence for colonialism was deeply-rooted in the Orientalist discourse that operated through the cultural traditions and institutions of European civil society.³⁴

Given its necessary pervasiveness and subtlety, it is difficult to perceive how hegemonic discourses and ideologies support particular arrangements of power and domination. It is relatively easy today to look at colonial text and to criticize its often-overt racism or romanticization of the developing world, but far more difficult to recognize how similar discourses operate within the modern context. This is particularly true since, as Gramsci tells us, hegemonic ideologies must always evolve so as to ensure that the systematic picture which they present remains widely accepted and compatible with a reality that is itself constantly transforming in response to shifts in the balance of power between

³³ Western society became ideologically committed to the idea that it had a role to play in ‘helping’ the East to discover itself (Said 1995, 86). By making the Orient familiar through a process of building up knowledge about ‘it’ as strange and other than ‘us’, the power to control it was acquired and legitimated.

³⁴ Said is careful to point out that the Orientalist project has deep historical roots. Even before the explosion of European Orientalist institutions and writing in 18th and 19th centuries, ideas about the “West” and “East” had long been evolving, providing a long history of “othering” discourse from which Orientalists could draw. This culturally pervasive reasoning was, as such deeply engrained in the Orientalist discourse Said uncovers, and it is through this arrangement and dispersal of knowledge that the colonial project was legitimated.

economic, social and political actors. Nevertheless, Said urges that we must attempt to make the difficult associations between culture and imperialism because “territory and possessions are at stake, geography and power” (Said 1993, 7).

1.3.2 Development Theory: A Hegemonic Ideology?

As Crush notes, “(t)o argue that development (like, say, the novels of Jane Austen) needs an imperial context may seem like a statement of the obvious”. However, “within the texts of development themselves, this context is either ignored, downplayed (as in much neo-Marxian ‘development theory’) made completely determining” (Crush 1995, 7).

Although Said had little to say about development as a component of Orientalism, his theoretical insights can be of tremendous value in any undertaking that attempts a critical analysis of the history, associations, meanings and power of *any* word, concept or idea. The concept of development can be conceived of as being akin in intention and power in the modern psyche to the idea of the Orient in the colonial period. With some substitutions, Said’s famous definition of Orientalism as the “systematic discourse by which Europe was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively” (Said 1995, 3) could serve as a description of the purpose and power of the dominant perspectives of development.

The immense apparatus of knowledge production and consumption that forms the ‘development industry’ has deep historical roots in vast networks of power and domination that today encompass the entire globe. The function of its productions (in the form of development plans, reports, evaluations, consultancies, papers, books, policies, speeches, presentations, debates etc.) is avowedly strategic and tactical: “to convince, persuade, that this (and not that) is the way the world actually is and ought to be” (Crush 1995, 5). Like the Orientalist discourse that functioned to legitimate colonial interventions, the modern

discourse on development as a component of 'globalization' is proving to be very successful at promoting, licensing and justifying certain interventions and practices over others. This is true despite the fact that the alleged universality of this hegemonic ideology is constantly challenged based on the fact that what it promises and what it practically delivers contrast significantly. Although invariably unintended, the practices the contemporary discourse promotes and justifies have very real (and often catastrophic) consequences. As such, what needs to be explained is how a contested and selective account of global change can provide the foundations for interventions in the name of a supposedly progressive 'development'.

As discussed above, in order to be hegemonic an ideology must provide people with a way of understanding the world that leads them to accept the legitimacy of the existing order because it is deemed relatively desirable. Furthermore, by ensuring that critiques appear irrational or misguided, it ensures consent and relative social and political stability. The discourse on development has been enormously successful on both of these counts. That the implicit and explicit assumptions embedded in economic theory and policy reflect specific ideologies is particularly obvious in the case of the neoclassical economics that underlies neoliberal economic policies. At base, these consist variously of the claim that an unrestricted national and international market economy is in the best interests of capital and, by extension, all resources (including 'human resources' or 'human capital') on the planet. The resilience, tenacity and strength of this guiding principal has not (primarily) been achieved through brute force, but rather as a result of a genuine faith that has been developed *over many years*. Political consent for the latest version of this capitalist discourse on development has thus been secured through a long history that has constructed it as a positive goal by virtue of the fact that the policies and institutions that it promotes are the ones that the developed countries had used in order to 'prosper' (Chang 2003, 10).

Although the economic theory that supports this conviction has become more sophisticated and nuanced over time, some basic themes remain constant. The current pressures for the development of a global market economy, for example, are consistently conceived of (and celebrated as): (1) ‘good’ because it promotes growth and enhances human welfare; and (2) an *inevitable* historic force for progress. If one considers the fit this picture of growth and progress has with previously dominant manifestations of development theory, it is hardly surprising that this contemporary vision is, for the large part, passed off easily as conventional wisdom or *common sense*. Rist explains,

Beliefs, in fact, are not dogmatic truths to which everyone subscribes by personal conviction; they are expressed in the form of simple propositions widely held to be true, which people believe – unable to do otherwise – because they hear everyone else saying them, and think that everyone believes them. For example: ‘economic recovery will solve the problem of employment’; ‘technological progress will allow today’s problems to be solved’; or ‘most citizens support the government’. They are ‘floating propositions’, then, which rely upon obscure authorities (opinion polls, experts) and are legitimated by fragments of ancient belief. (Rist 1997, 22)

Such “floating postulates” reflect propositions that are more or less taken-for-granted, or appear as ‘common sense’, because a very long history and impressive set of supposedly scientific (i.e. objective and neutral) authority back them up. “Common sense”, writes Esteva, “is so immersed in the economic way of thinking that no facts of life contradicting it seem enough to provoke critical reflection on its character” (Esteva 1992, 18). In this regard, Lebowitz comments on the fact that although contemporary economists themselves have exposed the limitations and over-simplification of neoclassical economic theory – revealing many cases of ‘market failures’ that call for an ameliorating role for government and the problem that neoclassical theorists often minimize the effects of interdependencies and externalities – “these sophisticated partial critiques of the simple message (i.e. ‘let capital

be free!) don't count for very much; in fact, that message... continues to be believed, and it functions as a weapon to be used on behalf of capital" (Lebowitz 2004, 16).³⁵

The constant productions of the development industry also function to sustain the belief that 'progress is underway' and that a better life is just around the corner.³⁶ As such, a generally favourable consensus thus surrounds the ideas inherent in the modern, mainstream conception of development. This is the case *even though* there are heated debates about whether the recommended policies for developing countries to adopt a set of 'good policies' and 'good institutions' are appropriate and will achieve the goals proposed. The existence of even very radical, thorough-going critiques of development (e.g. calling for its outright abandonment) and those pressing the importance of bearing witness to existing or possible alternatives are, when acknowledged at all, generally marginalized³⁷ or else (when necessary) selectively interpreted and/or co-opted by the hegemonic discourse on development in order to maintain legitimacy.³⁸ That is to say, when there are concessions made, they are 'strategic' and do not challenge the basic logic of capital development.³⁹

³⁵ "(E)ven in the age of unbounded optimism there were several voices of doubt and dissent regarding the sagacity, desirability, or feasibility of such a gigantic endeavour, but the self-assurance of the theorists was so unequivocal and belief in their nostrums so widespread that doubters could readily be dismissed as irrational and misguided 'cranks' if not as malicious mischief-makers. Accusations of failures could similarly be disregarded as resulting from weaknesses not in the theory but in the application" (Banuri 1990, 30).

³⁶ Crush notes: "Even a cursory glance at the basic liturgy of post-World War II development discourse will demonstrate contemporary development's almost overwhelming need to reinvent or erase the past. Most plans contain a formulaic bow to the previous plan period, a technocratic assessment of its failings designed as a prelude to the conclusion that this time 'it'll go much better'" (Crush 1995, 9).

³⁷ This is the argument presented in a recent article by C. Pestieau and S. Tait (2004), which examines the extent to which Canadian overseas development aid (ODA) policy is influenced by critical development research coming from the growing number of academics and researchers involved in international development studies programs at (especially) universities across Canada.

³⁸ This is an argument that has been made in a number of sources examining the influence of critical research on the mainstream practice and theory of development. Some are described in Tait (2004). Cooke makes the argument that the current focus on achieving 'empowerment' through participatory methods of development functionally grants only limited autonomy as a means of maintaining power (Cooke 2003, 47).

³⁹ In his analysis of the cultural logic and genius of capital, Tetslaff cautions that "the waning of specific forms of domination need not signal liberation", just as "relief from one form of control may be due to its usurpation by another equally as heinous" (Tetslaff 1991, 22).

In this sense, the maintenance of a hegemonic ideology does not likely ever involve complete consensus. Its resilience and stability is determined by its capacity to respond, materially and/or ideologically, to voices of dissent that emerge during crisis periods. This is an important dimension of the power of a hegemonic ideology to comprehend because the extent to which alternative visions are realizable will depend not only on recognizing its centralizing command. It will depend also on apprehending its extraordinary capacity to co-opt exigent critiques; turning the disunity that accompanies dissent into complicit consensus.

1.3.3 Divide and Conquer: The Political Utility of Fragmentation

The potential danger associated with a conception of development as part of a unifying, hegemonic ideology is that it may lead to the same fatalistic conclusion (and resignation) assumed by modernists themselves – i.e. that, although contestable, this state of affairs is basically inevitable. As was discussed above, one of the great gifts of post-modern/post-structural forms of analysis is that it brings into focus what is often obscured by macro-theoretical analyses of power and domination: those realms of contestation and contingency that make the possibility for change at least appear feasible. The fallacy of assuming that neoliberal capitalism will bring everyone up to the current levels of material welfare of North Atlantic states and that every country of the world is “slouching toward utopia” (a phrase coined by University of California at Berkeley economist J. Bradford DeLong; cited in Yates 2004, 37) is becoming clear. “Concrete conditions have a way of undermining accepted truths”, writes Lebowitz, “and nowhere has this been clearer than in less developed countries” (Lebowitz 2004, 21) where the contradictions and failures of neoliberal economic policy are rapidly becoming more apparent. It is when the contradictions and weaknesses of the hegemonic ideology become apparent during crisis periods of either a practical/material or theoretical/ideal nature that its resilience and

creativity is brought to test. What has made the present development ideology hegemonic is its capacity to consistently meet and transcend these challenges; in fact, to come through on the other side of a 'crisis' even stronger.

Regarding the incredible tenacity of the capitalist system through history, Tetzlaff provides a view of social control as fragmented and dispersed that challenges the converse presumption that it operates through 'dominant ideologies' that function through unification and the centering and repression and contradiction:

One problem with unity-as-control concepts of power is that they fail to mesh with the historical trajectory of capitalism, which has been marked by a continuing centralization of power accompanied by a dispersal of power effects, diversification in enterprise and an elevation of form over content. The parallel movements of concentration and diversification are not contradictory. On the contrary, the latter provides the basis on which the former is constituted. (Tetzlaff 1991, 16)

Tetzlaff suggests that it is in the direct interests of capital to encourage struggles over meaning. He posits that when cultural struggle produces popular discourses that may pose a challenge to capital's position, it becomes alerted to its weaknesses and can "identify the next target for incorporation (although the motivating force behind incorporation is generally an attempt to exploit markets for new cultural products, rather than any Machiavellian political intent)" (Tetzlaff 1991, 24).

Similarly, Watts interprets the constant struggles over the meaning and practice of development as part of the "'paradoxical unity' of modernity, a unity of disunity rooted in the maelstrom of 'perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish'" (Berman 1982, 15; cited in Watts 1995, 46). Deferring to Schumpeter, he locates the apparently constant need for a reinvention of the idea of and approach to development within the "essential fact of capitalism", namely, 'Creative Destruction' (Schumpeter 1952; cited in Watts 1995, 46). In other words, in order to persevere, capital must allow for conceptual dispute, critique and resistance.

In his article on the transformations that modernization theories of development have undergone since their inception, Banuri demonstrates how this process of ‘creative destruction’ has played out within the realm of development theory. He reveals how challenges posed by “substantial and often devastating critiques posed by outside theorists and activists” were constantly subsumed by and creatively synthesized in such a way as to make the ‘latest model’ more appealing and acceptable (Banuri 1990, 34). Social theorists respond to challenges creatively by:

...adapting or modifying theory assumptions, or by assimilating the criticism within their theories. This process, which gives theoretical systems they dynamism and strength, is the case of modernization theories conditioned and constrained by the need of theorists to maintain their paradigms and to defend modernity. (Banuri 1990, 37)

The same could be said of the assimilation of post-development thinking by the mainstream discourse on development. Quite a number of theorists observing the ‘impasse’ in development theory have argued that post-modernism/post-development, contrary to a view that conceives of it as a cultural signal of a new stage in history, can be associated with the genius of capitalism and thus anchored in the objective alterations of the economic order of capital itself. Anderson (1998), for example, considers post-modernism to be the “cultural logic of late capitalism”. Similarly, Buck-Morse (1989) suggests that modernism and post-modernism need not be conceived of as sequential eras; they can just as easily be seen as “political positions in the long struggle between culture and technology” (Buck-Morse 1989; cited in Watts 1995, 47).

Although post-modern analyses reveal important problems with liberal, Western-scientific notions of progress, rarely is the critical lens turned back on it to entertain the possibility that its theoretical and methodological hang-ups (despite being doctrinally anti-theory) are themselves reflective of certain conditions that structure the perception of reality and are favourable for the expansion of capital. In this vein, many critics have argued that

the penetration of post-modernist approaches in social research and theorizing about development – as embodied an exclusively actor-oriented/grassroots analyses of social issues – has abetted the acceleration of market forces around the world by directing analytical attention away from the objective location of individuals and groups who are the ‘beneficiaries’ or ‘victims’ of development interventions. Nanda comments:

One of the most remarkable – and the least remarked upon – features of the “radical” movement engaged in deconstructing natural science is how it ends up denying the unity (i.e. universality) of truth, reason, reality, and science precisely in the name of those who need these unities most urgently – the people resisting despotism and its lies. (Nanda 1997, 74)

Contrary to the view that people in the so-called Third World are “living in a post-modern state” or else actively fighting against the “unities of truth and reason” (Hacking 1996, 41) presented by a modernist/scientific discourse, many observers have made the argument that:

...the struggle in the countryside involves not so much a conflict between modernity and tradition as a confrontation between two alternative forms of modernization, one that is elitist and exclusionary and another based on landless workers and peasants. The persistence of this conflict is not based on traditional rural sectors tenaciously holding onto their land and resisting modernity but on a struggle over the means of production and state aid. (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, 95)

Schuurman (1996) makes similar observations in arguing that it is counterproductive to interpret the failure of the modernity project in the South to a ‘post-modern condition’:

Categorizing the creation of new values, new life-styles, new ways of communication and new ways of collective action as post-modern denies the history of the movements and misinterprets what they are all about. Whatever the relevance of characterizing Northern societies as post-industrial and post-modern, Southern societies for sure are not. (Schuurman 1996, 191)

Many critics have argued that the radical pedagogy and idealism of post-modern approaches effectively demobilize, in thought and practice, political projects for fundamental change (e.g. Anderson, 1998; Brass 2000; Holub 1992; Jameson 1984, 1998; Petras and Veltmeyer 2001; Sanbonmatsu 2004; Schuurman 1996; Tetslaff, 1991). Veltmeyer, for example, urges that by laying aside “toolboxes of useful ideas” which inform, inspire and give direction to an adequate political response to conditions of poverty and oppression,

...postdevelopment theorists cannot escape some intellectual responsibility of the post-modern condition lived by so many members of an advanced capitalist society and the premodern conditions of poverty, underdevelopment and oppression lived by so many others in the developing world. (Veltmeyer 2001, 616)

To be sure, the theoretical insights of post-modernism have harrowed important criticisms at the deterministic theories and homogenizing assumptions and practices of development. This has had very positive, practical outcomes in terms of development planning and policy formation (e.g. as exhibited by the interest in micro-level impacts of development, the emergence of WID/GAD, participatory development, etc.). However, there are consistent critiques of these developments insofar as they more often appear to be rhetoric than reality (i.e. serving as little more than image enhancing addendums to project planning and delivery). This has caused more and more scholars and practitioners to posit that these new developments are not the harbingers of 'radical' transformation that is hoped or promised (e.g. Agarwal 2001; Meera 1997; Sundar 2000, 2001).⁴⁰

If these interpretations are correct, the present struggles over meaning, method and theory in the study of development may just be one more episode in the search for new ideological justifications for immanent processes of expansion of capital. This poses a very different vision of the intention of development than what is projected by the industry itself and what it is popularly assumed to be. Nevertheless, critical studies have shown that the popular discourse on development has itself developed within a particular history and culture and has been very successful at licensing and promoting particular views of what it *should* constitute.⁴¹

⁴⁰ It is paradoxical that proponents of a development studies that is less plagued by universal, reductionistic theorizing can retroflexively be construed as co-opted captains of the economic and political 'system' they are trying to revolutionize. The deep penetration of the post-modern analytic may make it difficult to see its own associations with the very structures it attempts to dismantle and surpass.

⁴¹ It is important to note again here that the influence of certain ideas about what constitutes 'development' and how this state is best achieved have prevailed over others not arbitrarily, but for material and political purposes. Karl Polanyi (2001), for example, famously and persuasively argued that in reality, the market is the result of a

Cowen and Shenton posit that it is precisely in this discursive space – where ‘what development should constitute’ is constantly debated – that the power of development lies. They suggest that a great deal of the mystification surrounding the concept stems from a common confusion between what they distinguish as *intentional* development (as embodied in state policy) and *immanent* processes of development. “Most intentions to develop”, they write, “are themselves responses to what are deemed to be the undesirable effects - unemployment, impoverishment, - of (immanent) processes of development.” (Cowen and Shenton 1996, i, brackets mine) They propose that the institutional, professional and intellectual apparatuses of *intentional development* function to mask or diminish the damaging consequences of *immanent* processes of capitalist expansion.⁴² In other words, by focusing on and aggrandizing the positive intentions to develop, the prevailing discourse on development directs attention away from and/or compensates for the social (e.g. rapid urban migration, poverty and unemployment) and environmental disorders that emerge from the development of capitalism.

Inspired by Gramsci, Sanbonmatsu writes along similar lines about the constructive nature of ‘political fragmentation’:

Political fragmentation occludes the true radical significance, the *universal* significance, of *every* particular movement. And this, of course, is the way that dominant regimes of power want it. Power thrives through perceptual occlusion of truth and the forced forgetting of the *totality*, i.e., the whole ensemble of social relations and its patterns of significance through time. Enormous energies, indeed, are continuously summoned and expended in order to ensure the destruction of truth (every move by the counter-hegemonist is met with a

conscious and often violent intervention by government. It is an eminently *political* manifestation and thus should not be conceived of as something separate from the political (and thus ideological) sphere. Escobar writes that the market economy is, above all, “a cultural production, a way of producing human subjects and social orders of a certain kind” (Escobar 1995, 59). Dumont (1977) confers similar insights in arguing that the invention of economics involved a re-construction of social ideas and concepts. Referring to Dumont’s writings, Esteva writes, “The economic ‘laws’ of the classical economists were but deductive inventions which transformed the newly observed patterns of social behaviour, adopted with the emergence of economic society, into universal axioms designed to carry on a new political project” (Esteva 1992, 19).

⁴² They write, “One result of the confusion between the intentions to develop and an idea of a process of development is that the negative dimensions of the latter remain hidden.” (Cowen and Shenton 1995, i).

countermove by the dominant power, every feint with a counter-feint, and so on).
(Sanbonmatsu 2004, 98)

Gramsci's conception of a hegemonic system allows— indeed integrally requires — space for the expression of diverse wills. Power is conceived of as implicitly coercive in Gramsci's idea of 'consent'. In this sense, consent does not necessarily require consensus.

'Fragmentation' in the dominant discourse is necessary because hegemonic ideologies must always evolve so as to ensure that the systematic picture they present remains widely accepted and compatible with changing realities. This explains how the theory and practice of development do not appear as static entities while still maintaining a relative degree of continuity over time. It also explains why — despite repeated failures, extensive criticism and debate — development persists; indeed thrives.⁴³

As Bienefeld writes, the fact that contestations of the dominant regime are often recuperated or otherwise stacked in the favour of capital is a source of great frustration and attitudes of pessimistic defeat or resignation to apparently inevitable processes:

Increasingly unable to imagine a successful alternative, the opposition's ranks are thinning, while those of the cynics, defeatists, and the hucksters are swelling. As globalization comes to be more and more universally espoused by democratically elected governments around the world, it may seem as if the "end of history" is at hand. (Bienefeld 2002, 209)

However, he notes, "those preparing to celebrate this ultimate victory of bourgeois ideology have forgotten that *history is a dialectical process; every action begets a reaction*" (Bienefeld 2002, 209; italics mine).

When Gramsci himself was faced with a version of "there is no alternative", he engaged with positions similar to those of today's literature. He was able to avoid the common dichotomy between pessimistic resignation and optimistic voluntarism by focusing

⁴³ Rist writes, "If 'development' is regarded as an element of modern religion, this explains not only the discrepancy between the sociologist's definition and the believer's vision, but also why it does not threaten the existence of belief in any way... The Truth cannot lie, so lies — or mistakes — are always attributed to faulty interpretation, human failings, or lack of information" (Rist 1997, 23).

his attention on distinguishing between what he viewed to be, on the one hand, deeply rooted, long-term “organic tendencies” and what he considered, on the other, to be more immediate, contingent and short-term tendencies that are more closely determined by political forces and developments. Thus, from a Gramscian perspective the acceptance of or submission to globalization cannot be explained as merely the result of the domination of powerful economic and political forces. To be sure, hegemony in the present period depends on coercive practices.⁴⁴ However, it also depends on attaining and maintaining a basic level of consent. As such, the extent to which globalization is accepted must also be understood in relation to the consent garnered through the ideological and material (i.e. real improvement to people’s lives) triumphs of capital. This is one of the great contributions of Gramsci to political theory: he has shown that, contrary to fairly standard Orwellian presumptions on the ‘left’, domination in non-totalitarian systems does not typically work through a centering of control and an elimination of dissent.

The outcomes of these complex processes are by no means predetermined or predictable because inasmuch as they are mediated by pervasive structures of ideology and control they are also rooted in and supported by the consciousness and actions of agents.

The active politician is a creator, an initiator; but he neither creates from nothing nor does he move in the turbid void of his own desires and dreams. He bases himself on effective reality, but what is this effective reality? Is it something static and immobile, or is it not rather a relation of forces in continuous motion and shift of equilibrium? (Gramsci 1971, 172)

⁴⁴ Many observers have emphasized the need for force and compulsion to make the world conform to theory – often rationalized as “short term pain for long term gain”. Often, coercion that is implicated in control is silent; e.g. as exhibited by “overflowing prison systems; the coercion implicit in the proliferation of homelessness, poverty and hunger; and the coercion and intimidation associated with more aggressive policing, and with the explosive growth of private security systems and guards, as well as the relentless growth of ‘private spaces’, in which citizen’s rights are often sharply curtailed” (Bienefeld 2002, 210). In 2003, an entire issue of the *Monthly Review* (Vol. 55, No.3) is dedicated to “Imperialism Now”, delineating the U.S. struggle for hegemony and drive to “remilitarize world politics” and thus provides interesting accounts of the use of forthright coercive approaches to establishing hegemony.

According to Gramsci's perspective, it is the later. "Effective reality" is never a given, but is rather "a relation of forces in continuous motion" and for this reason that it is important to examine the contradictory effects of development and globalization as a (political) project with malleable and contingent ends rather than a neutral science with predictable ends (Sassoon 2001, 14). The possibility for the emergence of real alternative strategies (i.e. perspectives not bounded by a continuing sense of dependence on capital) capable of shaping change to the benefit of the widest sectors of society will depend on the development and communication of such a holistic paradigm. It is to a discussion of how this might be accomplished in the realm of development theory that we now turn.

1.4 TOWARDS A NEW, SYNCRETIC THEORY AND STRATEGY

How might we simultaneously apprehend both the global and transnational forms of capitalist accumulation *and* the symbolic forms, the local discourses and practices, through which capitalism's handmaidens –commodification, massification, and exploitation – are experienced, interpreted, and contested? (Watts 1997, 1)

This chapter has shown that answers to this question tend to variegate between the two theoretical extremes: one that focuses on macro-scale, global transitions in economic and political structures and another that focuses on micro-scale, local particularities, agency and subjective modes of experience. Regardless of the cleavages within the debate, there has been widespread agreement that a radical epistemological overhaul is essential. It is in this spirit that Watts is (implicitly) calling for a *dialectical* understanding of the interaction between local details *and* global structures – articulating how the 'outside' is integrally related to the constitution of the 'inside' and vice versa. Neither the modernist nor the post-modernist analytical/theoretical paradigms are adequate in this regard. Notwithstanding their separate strengths, insights and continuing relevance, post-modern approaches are routinely denounced as overly idealist and scholastic – "the semiotician's version of the ancient

metaphysics of *actio distans*” (Sanbonmatsu 2004, 192) – while structuralist theories are properly criticized for being overly reductionistic and deterministic. The latter theoretical extreme focuses excessively on macro-scale, global transitions in economic and political structures and the former focuses on micro-scale, local particularities, agency and subjective modes of experience.

The position maintained in this paper is that a dialectical understanding of the interaction between local, subjective experience and global, objective structures is needed in order to bring them into *simultaneous* viewing. This is a hermeneutic that protests theoretical extremism (in the form of either pure idealism or pure materialism) and instead calls for a perceptual and analytical framework that requires the integration of the speculative insights and contributions of both. Sanbonmatsu (2004) writes of the importance of just such a new, “radical pedagogy” which would function:

... literally to reveal or bring to light what would otherwise remain unseen – the hidden structures of meaning and power that shape our lives – and this can only happen by revealing the *whole*. Every so-called critical social movement seeks to *reveal the background itself* – that is, to make the background, as it were, *become figure*. (Sanbonmatsu 2004, 193)

Indeed, this is not a new idea. It has been the goal of every ‘radical’ or ‘critical’ movement. As enlightening as the explorations and criticisms of those social theorists and activists who have confronted the ‘constructed’ and exploitative nature of the hegemonic development paradigm are, they have not yet been successful in transcending it. Even the avowedly anti-theory stance of post-modern approaches can be associated with the genius of capitalism. Although it has directed important critiques at the modernist framework that serves as the logic of capital, its critique has been co-opted and/or selectively reinterpreted to suit the needs of the very system it is trying to overcome. Thus, although the post-modern paradigm has denaturalized development theory and praxis and therefore presented a significant challenge to the mainstream discourse, the response of capital was equally strategic insofar as

it has been able to maintain a relatively unequal balance of power by granting a sort of reward or bribe to its critics in the form of limited autonomy.⁴⁵

All of this is to say that the mere existence of alternative visions and radical critique does not mean that real change is likely or probable (and it is certainly not inevitable).

People who engage in these kinds of struggles achieve important gains:

They develop new capacities, new understandings of the importance of collective struggle. People who produce themselves as revolutionary subjects through their struggles enter into their relations with capital as different people; in contrast to those who are not in motion, they are open to developing an understanding of the nature of capital. (Lebowitz 2004, 25)

However, “all those actions, demonstrations and struggles in themselves cannot go beyond capitalism” (Lebowitz 2004, 25). As long as the continuing bases of social domination remain unthreatened, these struggles will practically signify relatively little. They may, writes Tetzlaff, “merely be part of the ritual of domination” (Tetzlaff 1991, 24). This has been the fate with, for example, social democracy. Rather than maintaining its focus on human needs and fundamentally challenging the logic of capital, social democracy has proceeded to enforce that logic and facilitate the conditions for the expanded reproduction of capital. The result has been a discrediting of Keynesian economics and the ideological surrender of people who looked upon it as an alternative to the neoclassical hegemony. Lebowitz writes:

The only alternative to the barbarism being offered became barbarism ‘with a human face’. With this acquiescence to the logic of capital, its hold over people was reinforced; and the political result was the popular conclusion either that it really doesn’t matter *who* you elect or that the real solution is to be found in a government *unequivocally* committed to the logic of capital. (Lebowitz 2004, 21)

The sort of pessimistic resignation or voluntarism Lebowitz is describing is very characteristic of the contemporary debates on globalization and development. Clearly, much

⁴⁵ As is discussed in section 1.3.3, allowing space for contention and debate about this can be conceived of as part of the essential protective nature of this ‘cultural hegemony’: “Capitalism can easily suffer those struggles that fail to address the social relations of profit accumulation. It is even in its interest to encourage them. They draw attention away from the prevailing economic structure and its effects. In allowing these struggles, capital also gives its subjects a sort of reward or bribe in the form of limited autonomy...” (Tetzlaff 1991, 24).

more is necessary than a radical epistemology that seeks to unveil the nature of development as an extension of capital and its roots in exploitation. Mere observation and/or concrete analysis are not ends in themselves but depend on how they can lead to practical activity. It is critical to remember that ideas about development are formed within a set of very real material relationships, activities and powers that are *not* inevitable. Too often, the focus in development research is restricted to a scale that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to apprehend the larger political and historical contexts within which its language, strategies and practices are produced.

A new epistemological paradigm that is capable of encapsulating the totality of social and natural relations and enabling a constructive engagement with the development project is a necessary first step in this regard. What this means practically in terms of research methodology is that it is essential that attention given to the minutia of lived, subjective experience is balanced with careful attention to the economic and the political realms. More particularly, what is needed is a ‘post-impasse’ approach in development theory that takes into account the operation and influence of discourses at micro- levels while also apprehending the power of macro-structural variables at influencing and sustaining these in order to maintain particular organizations of capital and power. Sanbonmatsu writes,

Without the ability to fill in the details of what Fredric Jameson calls the “cognitive map” of the empirical whole, each movement risks being blind to the necessary and sufficient conditions for social change... So long as each movement is seen as *fundamentally* distinct and separate from every other, then, it not only remains invisible, it also occludes its own historical significance – i.e., the full reach of its critique and the panoply of social changes required to alter the present facts. (Sanbonmatsu 2004, 198)

To the extent that capital is successful in allowing room for fragmentation and dissent within its own discourse, there is no basis for the kind of political and social unity that is necessary to establish a counter-narrative or discourse strong enough to challenge capital’s position.

Gramsci's notion of hegemony provides a way of discerning the unities in the differentiation that otherwise limits the impact of critical movements.⁴⁶ In so doing, it provides a perceptual framework through which to begin to understand the complex, obscuring nature of power (i.e. the mystifying nature of capital) and to imagine what political strategies are possible. His understanding of power does not deny the (local, subjective, 'micro-level') agency of humans and the possibility of new freedoms but nor does it fail to recognize that choices are being made within (trans-local, structural, 'macro-level') contexts of severe constraint. Individuals, social groups and even nations are not victims within this framework. They may be oppressed or exploited but this is based on bargains that are struck by even the most authoritarian regimes with their populations (Sassoon 2001, 11). A hegemonic power is, in this sense, different from one that is only 'dominant'. It is an eminently contingent power – it rests on the acceptance of relationships of implicitly or explicitly agreed upon terms.

The possibility for change, thus, rests first in apprehending and understanding these complex arrangements of power that operate based on the establishment of (usually non-consensual) consent within the social/cultural spheres. Gramsci's analysis of hegemony, which focuses both on structural factors and on forms of political struggle (with contingent and unpredictable ends), provides a very useful way of coming to such and understanding of the dynamics of social change and development. Although admittedly structuralist/materialist in approach, Gramsci provides persuasive case that any theory of radical politics (and thus any possibility for real transformation) depends on a firm belief and grounding in the objective, material world. However, he also denies the assumption that often

⁴⁶ His theoretical framework provides a way of establishing "what is identical in seeming diversity of form and on the other hand of what is distinct and even opposed in apparent uniformity...in order to organize and interconnect closely that which is similar" (Gramsci 1971, 190).

accompanies a very strict structuralist approach – that social change/development follows a predictable pattern based on inevitable historical forces. Rather, history is conceived of as a dialectical, contingent process. Similarly, he sees human consciousness or “forms of knowing” to be “embedded in...interrelationality, rather than merely either in the subject (subjectivism) or in the object (objectivism)” (Holub 1992, 141; cited in Sanbonmatsu 2004, 185). Gramsci’s framework is so valuable in the search for a new, syncretic theoretical framework because of his success in linking the material (objective) and ideological (subjective) bases of power.

With this kind of understanding it is clear that, contrary to the determinist utopias of modernists and post-modernists, “history has not reached a stagnant end, nor is it triumphantly marching towards the radiant future” but “is being catapulted into an unknown adventure” (Morin 1990, 102). Indeed, as the gulf between the official development discourse and popular opinion widens in the face of the increasingly obvious contradictions and failures of the external orientation imposed by neoliberal economic policy, interest in internal, “endogenous” models of development is growing.

The main objective of this chapter has been to discuss the limitations of the contemporary theoretical models of and debates about ‘development’ and to show their associations with larger structures of perception that are themselves tied to political and economic interests. The existence of critical discourses and dissent is widespread but the capacity of capital to endure fragmentation, absorb forces of opposition and recuperate (often stronger) is impressive. It has been argued that, in order to transcend these tendencies, a more holistic theoretical lens is needed – one capable of coming to terms with the macro- and micro- levels of social change and development. This is a conviction that guides the analysis that follows. At increasing levels of detail, the following chapters will

reveal how the power of the modernization paradigm remains very much alive within contemporary development theory and praxis. Chapter Two will reveal this to be the case within current theorizations and practices surrounding one of the most powerful cornerstones of neoliberal development policy (indeed, of capitalism itself) – i.e. the establishment of private rights in property. Chapter Three will examine the impacts that the prevailing discourse on land rights is having on the ground and in the lives of people who are effected by the policies conceived of and meted out by people who are convinced of their effectiveness, even if it means allowing ‘short-term pain for long term gain’. At both levels, interest is taken in the ways in which the dominant paradigm that promotes private ownership arrangements is legitimated and contested theoretically and practically by policy-makers and the ‘beneficiaries’ themselves. This outline proceeds through multiple levels of analysis in order to show their interrelationship and, hopefully, in so doing will contribute to the many existing movements that are attempting to free themselves of the local and trans-local structures that presently favour an arrangement of land, labour and capital that is in the interests of a small proportion of the world’s population.

CHAPTER TWO: Development Theory and the Tragedy of Property Rights

A stylized *fact*, and confirmed by a large literature, is that owner operated smallholder farms are desirable from both an equity and an efficiency perspective. Secure individual property rights to land would therefore not only increase the beneficiaries' incentives and provide collateral for further investment but, if all markets were competitive, would automatically lead to socially and economically *desirable* land market transactions. (Deininger and Binswanger 1999, 249; italics mine)

The World Bank researchers who authored this statement have used a very subtle albeit common means of substantiating their argument. Before making any assertions they lay the ground with a supposed "fact" that is ostensibly "confirmed" by a large (although notably unspecified) literature. Having established the validity of their position before even advancing it, the claims which follow can easily be taken to be unquestionably 'true'. Indeed, the causal lines of reasoning and implicit definitions embedded in this analysis seem eminently rational and uncomplicated: clearly, one might think, equity and efficiency are desirable, and if lack of security to land tenure owing to the absence of private property prevents these outcomes, then appropriate interventions are supportable and even necessary.

This analysis, however, runs counter to a voluminous literature that points to serious problems underlying the efficacy of market-based land reform.¹ Numerous critical scholars and researchers have argued that the underlying assumptions and casual relationships embedded within this sort of market-centric reasoning – i.e. private property is a prerequisite for investment and rural development – is either demonstrably wrong or only circumstantially valid.² Consequently, they argue that policy interventions based on them may fail to achieve expected results, *or worse*, function to amplify the very problems (e.g. inequality, conflict, poverty) they intend to address (Lund 2002, 2).

¹ The market orientation of land tenure arrangements involves the promotion of property transfer between willing buyers and sellers at market prices.

² See, for example, Atwood (1990); Bromley (1991, 1992); Lund (2002); Migot-Adholla (1993); Platteau (1996); Roth (1993); Bromley and Sjaastad (2000).

The existence of this critical literature, however, rarely influences the agendas or policy orientations of the main proponents of market-based land reform or, more specifically, the theoretical suppositions delineated by the influential *Property Rights School* (hereafter referred to as the PRS) of theory on which these policies are based and justified. Approaches to address the real and growing problems of population growth, land conflict and poverty through the imposition of private entitlements ignore substantial research findings that indicate that individual, tradable property rights do not necessarily increase livelihood security or ensure sustainable social and ecological development in rural areas. Furthermore, contrary to the assumptions of the property rights school, it has been shown that tenure security is possible when it is attained through various 'alternative' means (e.g. leases, permits and customary rights). Within pro-market literature, however, these views are ignored or paid only token acknowledgement. Why does this obviously contentious and demonstrably selective model of land reform continue to inform land theory and policy?

In this chapter, it is argued that the negligible impact that critical research has on the basic policy orientations and imperatives of major international organizations is a reflection of the *hegemony* of modernization development theories in contemporary thinking about development. As a foundational aspect of the broader, deeply-entrenched and powerfully-enforced logic of capitalism, these theories rationalize the advance of market forces and conceive of them as inevitable or beyond the control of actors concerned. The privatization of land and other resources, in this sense, is seen as a natural and inescapable step in capitalist development. The persistence and pervasiveness of modernist assumptions in development thinking, particularly as they are ensconced in property rights theory, legitimize exclusive visions of rural development and ensure that fundamental critiques and alternative visions of rural land reform appear misguided or unrealistic.

By conceiving of the contemporary property rights discourse as an aspect of a *hegemonic* ideology, the ways in which it has been able to strategically absorb or avert fundamental critique comes into view. It has been very successful at forcibly ('coercively') and ideologically (i.e. by eliciting 'consent') promoting and implementing its strategy at all levels of analysis. In this chapter, interest is taken in the macro-structural level and thus in the ways in which the prevailing discourse on property rights reflects and extends a particular philosophy (i.e. a modernist one, presently of neo-liberal orientation) on what is the 'right' or 'best' organization of the global economy and power.⁴⁹

To this effect, the chapter is divided in to four sections. **Section 2.1** examines the origins, logic, basic arguments and theoretical associations of the discourse on private property. It is shown that the emerging consensus that the privatization of land is the most effective way of addressing growing problems of population pressure, poverty and land scarcity has not developed in a vacuum. Rather, these prognostications reflect deeply-entrenched and durable notions of tenure security and development that are informed by particular interpretations of Western history. In **Section 2.2**, the influence of this discourse is examined in relation to changing orientation in theory and reform policies. The way in which the World Bank (undeniably one of the world's most influential multilateral development organizations) is contributing to this PRS-inspired transformation is explored through an analysis of its recently-released Policy Research Report, *Land Policies for Growth and Poverty Reduction* (2003) (hereafter, *Land Policies*). It is argued that although its conclusions and policy recommendations are said to rest on an objective analysis of a wide-range of empirical research on land relations and rural development, the information that is selected

⁴⁹ Chapter Three will examine how this discourse has been variously interpreted, absorbed and/or contested by populations directly impacted by it in the form of land and forestry policy interventions. In this way, the macro- and micro- level forms, impacts and limitations of this aspect of the hegemonic discourse on development are revealed and problematized.

tends only to reinforce deeply-held but often simplistic assumptions about the relationship between various forms of property rights, economic growth and human nature. **Section 2.3** surveys a small fraction of the vast literature by ‘commons scholars’ who have effectively challenged many of the basic assumptions of PRS. It is revealed that, despite important points of difference, there are many points of confluence between these two supposedly contrasting schools. This reality points to the unity of the hegemonic discourse despite dissent. Finally, it is proposed in **Section 2.4** that the persistence of PRS of theory and practice despite criticism is a result of its close affinities with the hegemonic ideologies propounded by a modernist, neo-liberal development paradigm.

2.1 THE PRIVATE PROPERTY DISCOURSE

A narrative tells a kind of story that like all stories is really a particular and vastly simplified picture of reality. To be compelling the narrative progression must seem not only natural, or at least inevitable, it must also seem desirable. When a narrative seems particularly desirable to a group of people, it is often repeated over and over until nearly everyone begins to think that it is not a story at all, but a description of reality. Conflicting narratives are eventually found wanting and are either marginalized or silenced even before they are told. For example, Said (1995) showed us, in his book *Orientalism*, how the construction of a pervasive cultural discourse about the ‘Orient’ (as opposed to the ‘Occident’/West) legitimized and made possible colonial administration in the developing world. Today, a similarly pervasive discourse is associated with the institution of private property. According to this representation, increasing population pressure along with market opportunities lead inexorably to the creation of private property rights and thus security of tenure, economic investment, growth, environmental stewardship, modern liberal

democracy and, in a word, ‘development’. There is really no alternative since where this “virtuous circle” is stalled (we are told by the World Bank), “conflict and resource dissipation” inevitably follow (World Bank 2003, 10).

Historically, of course, private property discourse is rarely so straightforward. As C.B. MacPherson points out, property is controversial because in any society it serves some general purpose of the dominant class, and this purpose changes over time. In order to maintain an ‘enforceable’ claim over property, the institution itself must be buttressed by a justifying theory that can convince large groups of people of its moral worth. As MacPherson puts it, “(P)roperty is not thought to be a right because it is an enforceable claim: it is an enforceable claim because it is thought to be a human right” (MacPherson 1979, 11). In other words, without a justifying theory, the right to property very quickly ceases to be enforceable.

In the case of private property – because it is so central to Western culture and capitalism – it may be more accurate to talk about discourse as a ‘regime of truth’, different parts of which have been told by different people or groups at different times and for different reasons but which retain a deeply emotive resonance within our collective consciousness. Drawn together, these diverse threads of argument represent a defence of private property in a single, though thoroughly variegated, discursive formation that is now exceptionally familiar (if not completely internalized) to many in the academy, government and private sector. Disaggregated, the constituent components of this discursive formation can be seen to rest on three essential pillars: (1) an interpretation of history in which private property is viewed as historically inevitable; (2) a particular understanding of human nature in which individualism, atomization and profit maximization trumps other values and forms of association leading toward collective solidarity and/or egalitarianism; and (3) a belief in

the positive correlation between democracy and property ownership. Viewed from this perspective, it becomes obvious that what is being described is more than any one textual reference, but rather a way that discreet textual discourses combine over time to form a compelling representation of reality.

In the World Bank's (2003) recent contribution to this literature, *Land Policies for Growth and Poverty Reduction*, we are told that a historical review – “although no substitute for the literature on the subject” – is important because doing so will provide policy-makers with the background necessary to help them “identify driving forces that underlie the evolution of land tenure arrangements over time” (World Bank 2003, 63). Presumably, knowledge of these underlying forces will help policy-makers impose private property tenure arrangements where they have failed to develop on their own accord. Despite the fact that the very first reference within this “historical review” cites two economists who postulate a theory of induced innovation (i.e. Hayami and Ruttan 1985), it is clear that, in principal, the exercise is worth undertaking. In this chapter, however, the “driving forces” in history that need recognition are not perceived as those “economic and political” forces identified by a theory of induced innovation, but rather the textual and ideological antecedents to the theory itself that make it so conveniently plausible in the first place. Accordingly, what is needed is what Foucault referred to as an *archaeology* of private property – in order to identify how and why private property emerged in seventeenth century Europe as a concept grounded in certain beliefs about historical progress, freedom and human nature – and a *genealogy* of private property discourse in order to reconstruct how these concepts are repeated over time by different people and in different contexts but always within the bounds of a discursive formation defined by certain consistent regularities (Foucault 1980; Sachs 1992; Watts 1995). What follows is an attempt to outline the essential features and referents for such a project.

2.1.1 The History of the Property Rights Discourse

One of the reasons private property discourse is so compelling is because it has such deep roots in Western political and philosophical thought. By the mid-seventeenth century one of history's foremost classical liberal philosophers, John Locke, had proposed in *Two Treatises of Government* (1662), a theoretical defence of the individual right of unlimited appropriation, grounded in his metaphysical conception of Natural Law. Embedded within this theory is what we now recognize as the modern idea of *progress* – that is, a linear progression from a 'state of nature' to a higher state of social order characterized by material abundance.⁵⁰ By associating private property with a linear concept of progress, human emancipation from material constraint and commodious living, Locke's theory set the tone for a private property discourse that, as we shall see, influenced the "founding fathers" in what would become the most powerful capitalist nation-state in history, the United States of America.

Locke began his narration with the claim that under the principles of natural law all of "mankind" owned property in common:

(W)hether we consider natural Reason, which tells us, that Men, being once born, have a right to their Preservation, and consequently to Meat and Drink, and such other things, as Nature affords for their Subsistence: or Revelation, which gives us an account of those Grants God made of the World to Adam, and to Noah, and his Sons, 'tis very clear, that God as Kind David says, Psal. CXV.xvi. has given the Earth to the Children of Men, given to Mankind in common. (Locke 1662, II, 25)

But because God intended "mankind" to use the Earth for its "subsistence", "benefit" and "conveniences of life", this necessarily implied that individuals must be able to appropriate certain parts of it as their own. This seemed entirely reasonable to Locke who argued that since "every man has a property of his own person" (Locke 1662, II, 27), then it follows that

⁵⁰ That scholars have traced the idea of progress itself is back to early Christian beliefs regarding divine Providence (Cowan and Shenton 1995, 31), simply attests to just how fundamental and deeply implicated the idea of progress is in Western culture.

the labour he performs with his body and hands must also be “his” property. For that reason, an individual can rightfully appropriate common property for “his” private use by mixing or joining with it “his” own labour in order to make it fruitful: “He that is nourished by the acorns he picked up under an oak, or the apples that he gathered from the trees in the wood has certainly appropriated them to himself” (Locke 1962, II, 28). From this perspective, our very existence is said to demand the institution of private property. As one observer put it, “To Descartes ‘I think therefore I am’ Locke...added ‘I am, therefore I own’”, since the individual owns himself and all that he creates (Pipes 1999, 26). It is through this union between common property and individual labour that private property rights are secured and value is created.

It is the idea that land should be the property of those who work it that makes private property seem so intuitively just. Yet on closer examination, it turns out that Locke is less concerned with securing land for the tiller than for the market. This is because Locke no sooner states his initial premise (i.e. that it is through labour that an individual can appropriate land from the commons) that he introduces a significant caveat: the value of land lies not in what it can produce, but rather in how much it can be sold for – its *exchange value*. Locke illustrates this when he compares the value of an English acre of land with the value of an acre of land in pre-colonial America. According to Locke, though the land might provide sustenance to the indigenous inhabitants and might even be of great fertility, an American acre of land is not worth a penny “if all the profit an Indian received from it were to be valued, and sold here” (Locke 1962, II, 43). The implication is clear: it is not physical effort nor for that matter any intrinsic quality of the land itself that gives it value, but rather something much more unique to seventeenth-century England; namely, commercial profit. In effect, Locke is saying that despite their occupancy, Native Americans had failed to

establish a right to the land because they had failed to add commercial value to it. Though they may have lived on it, tilled its soil and subsisted on its bounty, their land might as well have laid “in waste” since it had no exchange value (Locke 1962, II, 45).

The whole process of creating private property was supposed to unfold naturally where gradually increasing population or market pressures came to bear. The story, as Locke tells it, is the following:

Men, at first, for the most part, contented themselves with what unassisted nature offered to their necessities: and though afterward, in some parts of the world, (where the increase of people and stock, with the use of money, had made land scarce, and so of some value) several communities settled the bounds of their distinct territories, and by laws within themselves regulated the properties of the private men of their society, and so, by compact and agreement, settled the property which labour and industry began (Locke 1962, II: 45).

In America (and elsewhere), where the inhabitants had failed to follow this course of development, it behoved the more ‘industrious’ and ‘rational’ European settlers to appropriate land for their own commercial gain and, through their labour, increase the common stock of mankind. In appealing to a hypothetical ‘common good’, Locke’s argument proved incredibly useful to the upper classes because it not only legitimized the appropriation and enclosure of common property in both Europe and its colonial possessions, it made the ensuing social dislocation, exclusion and misery appear morally justifiable. It was, as always, a question of ‘short-term pain for long-term gain’.

Locke felt that property rights were so important that it should be the primary role of government to protect them (Locke 1962, II, 87-88). Although a correspondence is rarely made explicit between the ideas of Locke and more contemporary writings about individual freedom, his influence is plainly visible. This was certainly the case among the founders of the United States (U.S.), many of whom believed that the institution of private property was the linchpin guarding the new republic’s fragile democracy. The basic idea was expressed by Thomas Jefferson, who argued in his *Notes on Virginia* that yeoman farmers were “the chosen

people of God” (Peden 1955, cited in Yarbrough 1989). This is a claim Jefferson justified by noting that cultivation allowed a man the time to participate fully in public affairs – because he was his own boss he was beholden to nobody – and since he was able to sustain himself from his own labour, he was free to make political decisions that reflected his good conscience. Although the appropriation of the very land Jefferson thought would create a civic mindedness among his patriots came at the cost of a bloody and genocidal war against Native Americans (although at the time not recognized as such), he maintained the belief that its cultivation would produce a “genuine virtue”. As Jefferson saw it, “The moderate and sure income of husbandry begets permanent improvement, quiet life, and orderly conduct both public and private” (Jefferson 1758, cited in Yarbrough 1989).

Other of America’s founders agreed and following Locke and Jefferson sought to extend the coercive arm of the state to protect individual property rights. For example, James Madison argued in the *Federalist Papers* (Hamilton, Madison and Jay 1961; cited in Jacobs 1999) that “government is instituted no less for the protection of property than of the persons of individuals.” Alexander Hamilton and John Adams were even more explicit.

Property, they wrote,

...must be secured or liberty cannot exist. The moment the idea is admitted into society that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence” (Hamilton and Adams; cited in Jacobs 1999, 146)

Through the propagation of ideas like these, many Americans (and others) incorrectly believe that the U.S. constitution guarantees the pursuit of “life, liberty and property”, rather than the “pursuit of happiness”. In fact, private property is not mentioned in the US constitution until the Fifth Amendment (1791), which states simply: “...nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.”

Of course, these early textual referents are not wholly representative of the American founding fathers, or even the written corpus of Locke. What they do represent, nevertheless, is a normative and philosophical body of ideas and values that have been organized, adopted and internalized by a vast number of Western scholars, government officials and public figures. As such, they have become a matter of *common sense*. In more concrete terms, they have provided two essential services: first they laid the ideological foundation for future allied theories of private property and, second, they provided the necessary theoretical justification for dominant classes to make an “enforceable claim” on land that had previously been held in common.

2.1.2 The Property Rights School (PRS)

Today, the essential features of this justifying theory can be recognized most clearly in a body of scholarly literature belonging to the so-called PRS. When its proponents speak about property rights, they mean individual, tradable titles in land or other resources and they believe that individualized rights are an indispensable precondition of economic growth. This view is based on the conception that the transition from common property institutions to private property institutions in Western societies was a significant aspect of their development. Thus, it is assumed that when a society reaches a particular stage of development (i.e. high population growth and increasing scarcity and valuation of land) common property institutions will ‘naturally’ evolve in the direction of individual tenures.⁵¹ Some PRS scholars, like North and Thomas (1973, 1977), argue that the individualization of property rights was the single most important change that allowed for the “rise of the

⁵¹ The conceptual underpinnings of this proposition were most clearly spelled out in a seminal essay by Harold Demsetz (1967). The most notable application and apparent confirmation of Demsetz’s theories is that of North and Thomas (1973, 1977) in their study of European economic history and the evolution of property in land (see also Johnson 1972).

Western World”.⁵² In a statement notable because of its faith in economic/institutional determination, they write,

Efficient economic organization is the key to growth; the development of an efficient economic organization in Western Europe accounts for the rise of the West. Efficient organization entails the establishment of institutional arrangements and property rights that create an incentive to channel individual economic effort into activities that bring the private rate of return close to the social rate of return. (North and Thomas 1973, 1)

This statement is at once descriptive and prescriptive. They ascribe the rise of capitalism in Europe to the establishment of ‘efficient organization’, which involved both private property rights and institutions to support them. Furthermore, they imply that the “affluence of the Western man” is a reflection of these developments, which are therefore desirable and replicable through direct imitation.

Notably, PRS theorists argue that imitation, although perhaps desirable insofar as it will speed up the evolution towards development, is not in fact necessary. They argue that common property institutions represent the earliest form of property rights and that through a process of gradual change they will be surpassed naturally by more efficient private rights (once sufficient economic and demographic pressures come to bear). Springing from an institutional economics approach, thus, PRS theorists build their case based on two key notions: (1) that social and economic institutions evolve in order to maximize the economic efficiency; and (2) that private property is the form of land tenure involving the least “governance costs” – meaning costs associated with collative regulation of a resource. Analysts working within the PRS argue that increasing market penetration or population growth inevitably induce pressures that lean to a shift from common to private ownership –

⁵² This argument gets a lot of attention in PRS literature, but it is important to note that many historians and sociologists suggest that granting property rights such an elevated status in history *grossly oversimplifies* history and neglects the role of many other important factors, including the use of force and the very deliberate efforts of those in power to create, structure and nurture into existence the market economy and ideologies that sustain it (Polanyi 2001; Bienefeld 2002).

the idea being that either of these phenomena are sufficient to increase resource scarcity and thereby increase the market value of land. Focussing on this theoretical attribute, Platteau (2000) refers to the PRS as an *evolutionary theory of land rights*.

The idea of a proto-capitalism lying-in-wait for sufficient structural forces to free it from its feudal bounds is, however, a highly contentious idea that relies on even more dubious historiography concerning the transition in Europe from feudalism to capitalism. In his seminal essay, “Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe”, the historian Robert Brenner (1976) was among the first to deal a serious blow to prevailing orthodox theories of capitalist transition that relied for their explanatory power on either demographic or market imperatives; the former model (referred to by Brenner as “secular Malthusianism”) being premised on the notion that economic development conformed to long-cycle variations in population growth, while the latter focuses on opportunity arising from increasing proximity to commercial activity. Brenner persuasively attacked the theoretical foundations on which the two competing theories rested by demonstrating that their explanatory variables (either population growth or markets) produced different, indeed opposite effects in different countries.⁵³ While the ensuing “Brenner Debate” has so far produced no clear winner, it has raised important questions that are now widely acknowledged by scholars who study European economic history.

Yet despite the fact that the nature and causes of the ‘enclosure of the commons’ in feudal Europe from the 10th century onward are highly contested by historians, PRS theorists seem not notice. Instead, they focus exclusively on how tenure rights to land moved from being secure and uncontested to insecure and contested as a result of population pressures and resultant land scarcity and conflict. In this vein, North and Thomas posit: “The

⁵³ See Aston and Philpin (eds.) (1987) for a comprehensive overview of the “Brenner Debate”.

pressure to change property rights emerges only as a resource becomes increasingly scarce relative to a society's wants" (North and Thomas 1973, 19). Evidence for this is drawn from thirteenth-century England when population pressures enhanced the value of land, meaning "both lord and peasant had reason to seek more exclusive use of land and to place more restrictions on its use by others" (North and Thomas 1973, 12). In this conception, the erosion of feudal society and common property arrangements by the sixteenth century was a result of a "Malthusian pressure on resources" (North and Thomas 1973, 13).⁵⁴

Privatization is also hypothesized to occur in response to changes in technology and the opening of new markets (Demsetz 1967, 350). Demsetz cites the anthropological research of Eleanor Leacock regarding the Montagnais Indians to prove the same point: "Leacock clearly established the fact that a close relationship existed, both historically and geographically, between the development of private rights and the development of the commercial fur trade." He proposes that private rights over land, in this case, were developed in order to control hunting practices in response to the growing demand by the Hudson Bay Company. Prior to the growth of this new market, exclusive hunting rights were not necessary because "the external effects [of hunting] were of such small significance that it did not pay for anyone to take them into account" (Demsetz 1967, 351). The advent of the fur trade, however, increased the value of furs to Indians and, by implication, increased the scale of hunting (Demsetz 1967, 352). The implications are obvious:

Both consequences must have increased considerably the importance of the externalities associated with free hunting. The property right system began to

⁵⁴ In another publication, North and Thomas propose that the development of exclusive property rights over land and resources "provided a change in incentives sufficient to encourage the development of cultivation and domestication" during what they call "the first economic revolution" – namely, the transition from hunter-gatherers to settled agricultural societies (1977, 230). Their reliance on highly speculative anthropological data to support this assertion, however, makes it exceedingly difficult to evaluate the robustness of their interpretation. History is being interpreted here to support an untestable theory and, in effect, to extend the legitimacy of debatable PRS theory.

change, and it changed specifically in the direction required to take account of the economic effects made important by the fur trade. (Demsetz 1967, 352)

Both of these explanations of the transition to capitalism – one self-professedly Malthusian (North and Thomas) and the other reliant on the expansion of trade – suggest that the creation of tradable property rights was representative of a dramatic change that took place in the Western or ‘modernizing’ world’s notion of property rights. The supposedly ‘natural’ transition from common property systems to private ones is thought to be a reflection of the inner limitations of communal land ownership, which is unable to adapt to market or demographic changes. Demsetz writes:

The emergence of new property rights takes place in response to the desires of interacting persons for adjustment to new benefit-cost possibilities. The thesis can be restated in a different fashion: property rights develop to internalize externalities (*i.e. social and environmental costs of common property under increasing demographic and market pressures*) when the gains of internalization (*i.e. privatization*) become larger than the costs of internalization. (Demsetz 1967, 350, explanations in brackets mine)

Thus, the transition is seen as an *internal*, *natural*, and *rational* response to exogenous changes.⁵⁵ Simply put, PRS theory states that as land becomes scarce as a result of rapid population growth and / or the increased commercialization of agriculture, the value of land increases and collective landholders begin to feel uncertain about their (customary) rights. As a result, conflict over ownership of land, inheritance and land boundaries increase. People will naturally begin to demand more specific and secure property rights in land

⁵⁵ Platteau notes that this conceptualization of the evolution of land rights is informed by the ‘theory of induced innovation’. Its central idea is that “new institutions tend to evolve whenever changes of factor endowments, technical changes, or preferences that get reflected in price variations create discernable disequilibria between the marginal returns and the marginal costs of factor inputs, thereby giving rise to new benefit-cost possibilities to which old institutions are no longer attuned” (1996,34). These ideas are clearly recognizable in Demsetz’s statement quoted here. See North and Thomas (1977) and Johnson (1972) for clear expositions of this theory .

which, in response, will 'spontaneously' begin to evolve towards more individualized use rights that honour individualized, tradable titles (Platteau 1996, 49; Field 1989, 319).⁵⁶

The absence of private property rights, we learn, will unleash all manner of social conflict. At this stage, the need for Lockian-style governance is palpable. According to PRS theorists, the ensuing and ever-increasing conflicts over land will incur new social and economic costs (i.e. dispute resolution) for the State. The expected response of the government is to carry out administrative reforms, eventually involving formal registration of private land rights or land titling procedures in order to put an end to wasteful uses of resources and new social tensions. Once pacified with secure property rights, it is assumed that Jefferson's 'quiet' and 'orderly' yeoman farming class will emerge and that social and political stability will follow. Other expected 'benefits' from the security of tenure supposedly accruing from individualized, transferable property rights are equally tantalizing (and financially rewarding): they include the transfer of land from less to more efficient farmers; increased availability and access to credit; increased willingness and ability of owners to invest in their land and to manage it with future benefits and generations in mind; and overall, improved economic well-being (Bromley and Sjaastad 2000; Platteau 1996).

Private property, as such, is considered by PRS advocates to be an essential ingredient in economic development due to the incentives it provides for owners to innovate and invest in their land. Communal rights, by comparison, are believed not to provide these incentives. It is a small leap of logic for PRS theorists to suppose that under a common property regime, population or market induced scarcity will not only lead to neighbour fighting amongst neighbours, but will also produce harmful ecological and social effects in

⁵⁶ This could involve, for example, preventing or limiting holders of group or secondary claims to communal lands – such as women, pastoral herders – from exercising their traditional rights; extending cultivation and shortening fallow periods; etc.

the form of mismanagement and/or over-exploitation of valuable resources. It is assumed that because of a lack of certainty about individual rights and control over land usage by others, it is not in an individual's rational self-interest to invest in enhancing the value of collectively owned land.⁵⁷ Common property arrangements, as such, are seen as inherently inefficient and backward and, to be blunt, a recipe for ecological disaster.

This idea was masterfully articulated and entrenched with the publication of Garrett Hardin's (1968) influential article, "The Tragedy of the Commons".⁵⁸ Here, Hardin argued that a rational actor will maximize gains by extracting the highest possible surplus from the commons. To illustrate the point, Hardin creates a hypothetical rancher who will gain one unit of utility for every extra animal he grazes on the commons. Once the number of cattle grazing on the land passes its carrying capacity then the negative utility of overgrazing is shared by everyone. As a result, the rancher feels only a fraction of the negative utility and the difference between the gains and losses remain positive. Having calculated this, the rational rancher grazes as many cattle as possible. "Therein", writes Hardin, "is the tragedy. Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit – in a world that is limited" (Hardin 1968, 1245). As the costs of unregulated use are not borne by private property holders, the commons will be tragically exploited and ruined. If, on the other hand, Hardin's pasture was privately owned it is assumed that the scenario would be different. The difference arises from the economic incentive for the private owner to maintain the reproductive capacity of the resource in order to continue profiting from it. As

⁵⁷ Ostrom explains: "A farmer who owns his own labour, land and other factor inputs...is likely to see a direct relationship between investments and the level of benefit achieved over the long term. A farmer who belongs to an agricultural production cooperative, on the other hand, may see only a loose connection between personal contributions and benefits" (Ostrom 2000, 334). This 'loose connection' will, in theory, cause the common stakeholder to have limited incentive to invest in land.

⁵⁸ As Goldman argues (deferring to Feeny et al.), Hardin's perspective has "become part of the conventional perspective in environmental studies, resource science and policy, economics, ecology, and political science". He notes, further, that one finds it as a "foundational assumption" in new institutional economics, game theory, rational choice and action theories (Goldman, 1997, FN 2).

Machan puts it “the long run benefit for each herdsman of continuing availability of the pasture for his use would be worth the short-run costs” (Machan 2001, xv).

This discourse, in turn, is complemented and extended by the triumphalism of neo-liberal economic prescriptions in contemporary development thinking. Accordingly, it is believed that when individualized property rights do develop, the resulting combination of markets and security of tenure over resources will unleash entrepreneurial energy. The assumption about human nature, whether it is named or not, is always and everywhere the same: that human beings are rational utility maximizers who seek to increase their economic wealth above all else. This belief is apparently supported by “numerous empirical studies from different cultures and climates” that show “peasants, rural-urban migrants, urban workers, private entrepreneurs, or housewives... (all) act economically as producers and consumers” (Lal 1985, 11). Furthermore, as Ellsworth (and any introductory macroeconomics textbook) points out, the PRS assumes that “if everyone freely trades things based on their own comparative advantage, everyone will end up better off than they were before trading” (Ellsworth 2002, 9). Viewed from this perspective, even if some people suffer a loss (e.g. foreclosure of land because of inability to pay for titling), the transition to private property is justified because the people who gain are assumed to be more dynamic and efficient producers.⁵⁹ While there is no mention here of America’s original inhabitants, the immortal spirit of Locke plainly lives on.

Subsequently, for PRS theorists, tenure security and economic development is attainable *only* through the privatization of land. This is desirable as a means to the larger goal of encouraging the transfer or reallocation of land and other collective resources from less to more dynamic users, thereby encouraging economic growth, food security, and rural

⁵⁹ Put bluntly, Ellsworth describes this feature of PRS thinking: “Laziness and inefficiency should be punished by the tradable title system and efficiency rewarded by it” (Ellsworth 2002, 10).

poverty reduction and development. Contemporary examples of common property are considered, in this analysis, as remnants of the past that are destined to disappear as social and economic development progresses.⁶⁰ From the policy point of view, the PRS reduces security of tenure to the idea of a paper title that can be traded in land markets. As such, the PRS has an evolutionary and very partial view of property rights based on a particular and highly stylized reading of European history and human nature.

At its very core, however, the concepts and arguments posed by the PRS were and continue to be controversial and contested (e.g. in Atwood 1990; Bohannan 1963; Lund 2002). Claims by critics that these historical and economically-deterministic interpretations are overly deductive and unaccompanied by sufficient empirical analysis (Atwood 1990, 660; Coase 1937, 386) are largely ignored because of the widely held conviction that *development* requires the institutionalization of a capitalist system based on Western notions of private property in the means of production, wage labour, the market and the state as well as an institutional reorientation towards ‘modern’, rational values like universalism and individual achievement. The fact that these were involved in the “rise of the West” is taken to be proof of the legitimacy of the PRS’s evolutionary assumptions.

Clearly, ideas can be powerful shapers of history. As is postulated in following section, however, their potential for influence is harnessed most effectively when they are associated with the interests of influential political and economic institutions and arrangements of power.

⁶⁰ In this sense, common property systems in ‘developing’ country land tenure systems are interesting insofar as they are a reflection of ancient, pre-capitalist European property regimes (Demsetz 1967, Johnson 1972; North and Thomas 1973, 1976).

2.2 CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN LAND POLICY

Land reform has long been regarded as a key aspect of development strategies aiming to transform land ownership structures to reflect democratic principles of equitable access and to redress histories of dispossession and exclusion suffered by the poor during the colonial period. In recent years, a proliferation of research on the role that land plays in promoting economic growth and good governance has led to a renewed emphasis on the need for land reform to reduce rural disparities, improve agricultural productivity and food security, among other things. The forms it has taken and the motivations behind its promotion have, however, varied both in terms of time and place.

In the period immediately following independence, state-led redistributive land reform was an important social priority for many developing countries.⁶¹ However, the commitments of governments to equitable distribution of land through its “redistributions with speed” and to systematic monitoring of progress in poverty were relatively short-lived. There has been an appreciable shift away from government-implemented redistributive land reform toward reliance on the formal credit market and on property transfer, freely negotiated in the open market. Known as ‘market-based land reform’, this has become the dominant policy approach of developing countries since the late 1980’s.

The emergence of market-based reform as the dominant policy approach of developing countries was intimately associated with the advent of economic reform policies or structural adjustment packages by the World Bank and IMF. Market-based land reform (usually as part of a strategy for agricultural liberalization or rural development) is often a precondition to qualify for loans and aid from international funding agencies which is laid

⁶¹ El-Ghonemy situates this period roughly between 1940-1980, and calls it “the golden age of genuine land reform”, when reforms were enacted primarily in response to “a deep dissatisfaction with the abject poverty, inequalities and social instability” resulting from colonial policies.

out in donor-driven packages of macroeconomic reforms (El-Ghonemy 1999). As such, major international agencies (e.g. World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, International Labour Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development) and bilateral aid agencies (e.g. USAID, the Canadian International Development Agency, Department for International Development, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit), have emerged as sponsors of land tenure reforms in developing countries. As a major source of financing for many developing countries, they indirectly wield a lot of influence in designing the macro-economic policy of recipient countries.⁶² Policies for land market reform enter here, in “the context of evolving and credible government strategies for poverty alleviation”, and “appropriate agrarian reform strategies” (World Bank 1993, 11).

The main proponents of market-based land reform offer the same rationale for the transition from common property to private property as the classical PRS theorists discussed above. Given increasing demographic pressures, rising conflicts over land, and the need for increased food production to develop export markets, they believe that it is ‘time’ for the institutionalization of private, tradable property rights. However, this comes within a much broader package of ‘evolving’, ‘credible’ and ‘appropriate’ economic reform strategies.

The government, according to proponents of land market reform, has an important role to play in assisting this evolutionary process: it is expected to supply an institutional innovation in the form of property titles. In conformity with the evolutionary assumptions of the PRS, they purport that governments will be unable to resist the eventuation of this policy because demand by the vast majority of land claimants will grow when confronted by

⁶² Given the heavy dependence of many developing nations on primary agricultural commodities for large percentages of their GDP (e.g. sugar, coffee, cocoa, tea, fruit), and the vulnerabilities of rural producers to price fluctuations on international markets, a significant and growing amount of attention is being directed at developing strategies for rural/agrarian reform.

increasing population and economic pressures. A famous article by Thompson et al., which interprets the experience of Thailand, is often relied on to support this idea. They write:

The appreciation of land prices led to an increase in the demand for more systematic procedures for defining property rights in land. *The governments in fact responded to the demands and a new system of property rights gradually evolved.* In part, the new system evolved as a *practical solution* to the land disputes that became so common as land became more valuable...the new system of property rights reduced the divergence between the private rates and social rates of return on land development. (Thompson et al. 1986, 415-416; cited in Platteau 1996, 37; emphasis mine)

As such, governments and international donor and lending organizations justify support for market-based land reform, and structural reform packages in general on economic and efficiency grounds. It is believed that individual property rights will increase access to credit, encourage investment and growth, and reduce the social and ecological costs presumably associated with rights that are not clearly demarcated.

2.2.1 The World Bank's New Land Agenda

The World Bank's (2003) recent contribution to this literature in *Land Policies* elaborates its contemporary thinking on a range of issues pertaining to land, including land reform, land markets, land institutions and administration, rural credit, and customary tenure. It is the culmination of the World Bank's three-year review of its involvement in land reform.⁶³ *Land Policies* has prompted a great deal of discussion among policy-makers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academics, and the broader development community, as well as a general push to promote a "comprehensive and integrated approach" to land policy among them. Given the powerful influence of multilateral and

⁶³ The report was drafted in 2001 with the collaboration of multilateral and bilateral organizations (including the Department for International Development in the UK, the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit in Germany, and the United States Agency for International Development) and posted on the website of the World Bank's Land Policy and Administration Group for consultation thereafter. In the summer of 2002, the Bank held a series of regional workshops to receive feedback on the draft report from civil society groups and other interested parties, and to obtain technical input from key policy makers, academics, and representatives of civil society. Subsequently, many of the major bilateral and multilateral development agencies are revisiting their approaches to land issues (e.g. DFID, 2002) and some, including the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), are addressing land issues for the first time at the policy level (see Pestieau and Tait, 2004).

bilateral agencies in setting the agenda for 'development' in the South, there is good reason to believe that *Land Policies* will have a substantial impact on the resolution of land issues for many years to come.

The World Bank's last public pronouncement on land issues was the 1975 *Land Reform Policy Paper*. This earlier report analyzed land largely in terms of agricultural use and productivity and advocated the creation of land markets and the privatization of land. In critical reflection, the authors of the present report note that the 1975 paper "devoted little attention to the importance of land rights for empowering the poor and improving local governance, the development of the private sector outside agriculture, the gender and equity aspects associated with land, and the problems arising on marginal areas and at the interface between rural and urban areas" (World Bank 2003, xliv). *Land Policies* is presented as an attempt to "strengthen the effectiveness of land policy in support of development and poverty reduction" (World Bank 2003, ix) by summarizing and drawing policy-relevant conclusions from the results of recent research on land issues around the world.

The report begins by stating that the way in which land rights are defined is of fundamental importance for the emergence of markets, poverty reduction, economic growth, private sector investment, good governance and the overall welfare of rural populations (World Bank 2003, 1). The contents of the report revolve around three main tenets. First, providing secure tenure to land creates incentives needed for investment in land, "a key element underlying sustainable economic growth" (World Bank 2003, x). It is posited that, by enhancing the asset base of people whose rights to property are insecure or neglected, secure tenure to land improves the well-being of the poor. Second, the productivity advantage of small-scale farms makes the facilitation of the exchange and distribution of land important to expedite their access to land and the development of financial markets that rely

on the use of land as collateral. The report argues that the removal of impediments to access of formal credit and rental markets for small farm owners will generate equity advantages and establish the basis for a positive investment climate and the diversification of economic activity in the rural non-farm sector. Finally, it argues that governments have a role to play in the evolution toward more secure tenure rights and in creating appropriate incentives for sustainable land use to avoid negative externalities and the degradation of natural resources.

In contrast to the 1975 paper, *Land Policies* draws on a broad range of historical and micro-level empirical data in order to highlight the complexities of land relations. In doing so, it demonstrates the need for diverse approaches to land reform and development in ways that are economically, politically, socially and environmentally desirable. Consequently, *Land Policies* has been acknowledged by many scholars and development practitioners as a significant turning point for the World Bank's approach to land policy. The report moves beyond the familiar call for the privatization of land and the promotion of land markets that has long been a hallmark of the institution's structural adjustment agenda, recognizing instead that this kind of policy advice may not be appropriate in countries where market economies are functioning imperfectly or are not fully developed.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the report states that increasing tenure security in land does not necessarily require making land transferable through sales markets (World Bank 2003, 70) and that in some cases common property, rental or lease arrangements may be more appropriate than individualized tenure. For these reasons, *Land Policies* is widely applauded for acknowledging the limitations of past approaches to land policy that do not take into account the fact that patterns of land ownership, access, and use are not simply the product of the supply and demand dynamics

⁶⁴ It is noted in the report that, "researchers now widely recognize that in the presence of multiple market and institutional imperfections, 'first-best' policy advice that was based on an ideal world of perfect markets without transaction costs and structural rigidities is unlikely to be appropriate" (World Bank 2003, 6).

of an impersonal market, but rather the result of “political power struggles and non-economic restrictions” (World Bank 2003, 6). The extent of its attention to questions of equity (e.g. stronger land rights for women, herders, indigenous peoples and other historically disadvantaged populations) and human rights considerations is also viewed as a novel turn for the Bank.⁶⁵

However, despite these trends the World Bank seems extraordinarily non-cognizant of its own implication in a powerful, old and deeply-entrenched discourse on private property rights and, by connotation, its role in (both implicitly and explicitly) advocating one particular model of development: namely “the gradual individualization of property rights to land” (World Bank 2003, 32) on grounds that it “provides the greatest incentives for efficient resource use” (World Bank 2003, 22). Although it is nowhere stated in the report that privatization of land is the only option, it emphasises the need to speed up the natural evolution of more secure (and ultimately private) tenure systems for land. This evolutionary model of land tenure reform reflects Western notions of property rights that have been developed and codified over centuries in the postulates of the PRS.

2.2.2 *Land Policies: Reinventing the Tragedy of the Commons*

Calling forth certain well-rehearsed tropes regarding the historical inevitability of private property, its key role in the maintenance of democratic values and certain beliefs in human nature, *Land Policies* simply repackages an already existing discursive formation. Examined from this perspective, the report is less innovative than it appears to either the World Bank or its proponents, and is more clearly linked to an ideological project aimed at the elimination of alternative forms of land tenure.

⁶⁵ In the foreword of the report, the chief economist of the World Bank, Nicholas Stern, writes: “(D)ealing with efficiency will not automatically also resolve all equity issues” (World Bank 2003, xi).

The World Bank would undoubtedly object to the portrayal of its *Land Policies* report as a continuation of previous property rights discourses, preferring instead to highlight its *new* attention to historical specificity and market failure, pragmatism toward inherited and existing land tenure systems, and its sensitivity to the equity and gender dimensions of land relations and policy. Ostensibly, one of the great advances of the current report is its recognition that the “first-best” policy advice offered by the World Bank since the 1970’s has proven “inappropriate” since it was based on an “ideal world of perfect markets”. In fairness to the report, a great deal of ink has been spent attempting to backtrack from earlier interventions that sought the outright abolition of customary tenure in favour of land titling and registration (e.g. as in World Bank 1989). Yet this is hardly the radical break that we might suppose since *Land Policies* maintains that “formal and individual ownership title” is still the “option of choice” (World Bank 2003, xxviii). In the wake of twenty years of disastrous policy advice based on economic dogma, the Bank now seems willing to concede that while its recommendations are essentially correct, they may not be feasible under all circumstances: for example, under conditions where market demand for land is extremely low, where government corruption is extremely high, or where (having met a list of rigorous criteria) a group can make a compelling claim to a particular parcel of land. While the Bank’s acknowledgment of market failure and the existence of entrenched structural realities may appear to be an enormous step forward in its thinking, only the most superficial reading of *Land Policies* will pacify any of its critics. This is because despite its many caveats, exceptions and left turns, the Bank continues to believe that all roads (no matter what the route) eventually lead to individual, transferable property rights.

Among the most conventional assumptions made in *Land Policies* is the claim that land tenure systems evolve naturally from a relatively simplistic form of customary tenure to

a more developed tenure system appropriate to an advanced capitalist state. Making the distinctions between *traditional* and *modern* societies has been fashionable – particularly among American academics – since the social modernization theories of Max Weber and Talcott Parsons became popularized. That *Land Policies* falls easily within the modernization genre in which these distinctions are given the most credence is irrefutable. In a section titled “Evolution of Rights in Response to Changing Relative Scarcities”, the report states that “the precision with which resource rights are defined and the rigor with which they are enforced normally increases with the value of the resource, which is often closely related to population density” (World Bank 2003, 33). Of course, population density is only one possible factor that might increase scarcity. The development of markets or new technology that enables a more profitable extraction of resources from the land can lead to the same outcome. As *Land Policies* points out, one would therefore expect to find “...individualized forms of property rights with economic developments” (World Bank 2003, xxiv).

In this assertion there is absolutely nothing novel. As we have already discussed, PRS theorists have been making the same argument for ages. The point that should be emphasized is this: making distinctions of this sort is simply to partake in the creation of arbitrary abstractions. The salient feature of such an approach is its reliance on a teleological evolutionism that suggests the unfolding of a natural and unavoidable development process, while denying political agency to those who wish to follow a different path.

One might plausibly wonder how much imagination is required to envision an alternative institutional arrangement that lacks the trappings of private property, but in which the fruits of development might still flow. The reality, however, is that the World Bank shows little interest in exploring other productive land tenure systems, nor is such a question likely to occur to those who have internalized the property rights discourse. For example,

the notion that agricultural productivity can be increased under a customary land tenure system is a point *Land Policies* grudgingly acknowledges. According to the report,

...many customary tenure systems reward investment in visible land improvements either with more individualized rights to the land after the investment has been made or with secure rights to the flow of benefits from the investment itself... (World Bank 2003, 40)

Considering the popularity and extent of customary tenure arrangements in the 'developing' world,⁶⁶ it would be reasonable to ask how and under what conditions the former leads to the latter? Instead, *Land Policies* merely raises the possibility of an alternative development and then reverts to the position that only private property can induce investment. In this respect, the short-sighted and single-minded pursuit of one form of tenure over another becomes absurdly visible in the gap between the actual needs of developing countries and the ideological preferences of the World Bank.

One reason the Bank assumes that only private tenure can induce productivity-enhancing investment is because it believes that all human beings are motivated by greed. At the heart of this type of assumption is a familiar PRS worldview that clings to the notion that only individuals who stand to directly benefit from an investment are likely to make one (thereby promoting self-interest as the guiding principal in effective land management). To bolster this case, the Bank draws on a variety of empirical studies, all of which demonstrate that the institution of private property is directly related to increased productivity. Citing the case of China, for example, the report argues that "the transition from collective to private cultivation...has been associated with large increases in productivity" (World Bank 2003, 44). Contradictory evidence reporting equally impressive gains when China first became communist and collectivized production is never considered.⁶⁷ This sort of selective use of

⁶⁶ For example, the report states that in Africa only 2-10 percent of the land is held under formal tenure (World Bank 2003, xxi).

⁶⁷ See Ellsworth (2002) for an elaboration on this point with reference to other World Bank policy and research papers on land policy. She points out that many of the classic cases used to support the view that private

evidence helps to bolster the Bank's claim to authority among people who already agree with it, but leaves much to be desired in terms of scholarly rigor.

If private property increases the incentive to make productivity-enhancing investments in agriculture, the lack of private property is thought to lead to the non-sustainable use of natural resources. Why, *Land Policies* asks, would a farmer be willing to conserve soil fertility if he does not stand to directly profit from such a long-term investment? Calling forth the logic of Hardin's *Tragedy of the Commons*, the Bank provides the simple answer: s/he will not. According to the report, this is a point that supposedly both "conceptual models and empirical evidence" support (World Bank 2003, 41). Furthermore, *Land Policies* argues that in "many contexts" communal land owners will engage in purposefully destructive practices (e.g. clear-cut logging) as a strategy to gain property rights (World Bank 2003, 42).

Considering this logic, it appears human nature is incapable of employing anything but the most crass and short-term, profit maximizing calculus. A methodological individualism of this sort imposes an extremely narrow conception of economic interest, utility and value. While this may be a convenient and simple way to predict human action over a wide scope of issue areas, if it can do so only by circumventing the socially constructed meaning and significance of communal resources then its utility is bound to be limited in societies where customary tenure arrangements are the norm rather than the

tenure arrangements foster economic development and agricultural growth often have significant competing explanations. Ellsworth draws from other studies that indicate that the link between individual title systems and economic development is not universally held. For example, Klaus Deininger, a staunch supporter of the PRS, reviewed literature that supposedly proved the privatization = increased productivity and growth hypothesis in an influential study in 1999. Ellsworth points out that, on several counts, Deininger selectively uses empirical studies, or *parts* of studies, to support his argument. For example, he cites research from a region in Ghana where some evidence exists that private tenure rights improved productivity and sustainable use of land. The study involved three sites in Ghana, *but only one of the sites clearly supported the notion that secure tenure increases labour investments in agriculture*. The study sites that were not referenced in the report offered mixed results, and the author of the original research certainly did not come to the conclusion that private land rights unanimously and unambiguously result in these outcomes (Ellsworth 2002, 12).

exception. For now, this case will rest with the observation that in the real world, few people behave as if they live in a context that is devoid of social expectations and obligations and the norms of civil interaction that accompany them.⁶⁸

Another significant assumption made in *Land Policies* that extends PRS logic (and thus the logic of the modernization school of development theory) is that the institution of private property arrangements will accelerate the internalization of the liberal values enshrined in democratic political systems. It is not uncommon to find in the academic mainstream press a belief that African governing elites are “exploitative, selfish and corrupt” (Kitching 2000). For many, this affliction has come to represent the defining obstacle to development in the global South. Given the opportunity and a weak or ineffective civil society, they argue that bribery, theft and cronyism are simply the way business is done. The World Bank’s emphasis on governance issues has helped to solidify this perception and in the process focus attention on the *internal* rather than *external* causes of poverty, or their dialectic interaction. In *Land Policies*, the Bank adeptly exploits the prevailing Afro-pessimism by linking the emergence of private property relations with the promise of accelerated development. The Bank accomplishes this through a two-pronged strategy. First, it creates the perception that public lands and their regulation by government lead to corruption. In the words of the Bank, “appropriation of rents from land appreciation through discretionary bureaucratic interventions and controls remains a *major source of corruption*” (World Bank 2003, xxi, emphasis mine).⁶⁹ The Bank’s second prong is aimed at the poor and marginalized who stand to benefit from land privatization (oddly, the Bank

⁶⁸ Ostrom (2000), for example, shows from her own empirical (quantitatively measured) research data that commonly property regimes are not ‘unregulated’, as is often assumed by PRS theorists (she points to the frequent conflation between ‘open access’ and ‘common property’ systems). Her evidence suggests that, contrary to the rational-choice theory that individuals are profit seeking maximizers, collective regimes of property management are very often well managed because of collective interests in the resources they provide.

⁶⁹ No empirical evidence is presented to support this claim, but the Bank does cite numerous times a technical paper by one of its own researchers in an effort to legitimate its concern.

never mentions the benefits of privatization to the rich and powerful). *Land Policies* makes the argument that "...asset ownership strengthens the voice of the poor, who are otherwise often excluded from political processes, allowing them greater participation that can not only increase the transparency of institutions, but can also shift the balance of public goods provision..." Whether the Bank realises it or not, the discourse they are promoting is very old and carries with it the implicit message that only those people who own property are good citizens.

It is not difficult to see here how the theoretical deductions of the PRS are heavily relied upon to support modern market-based land policies. As Atwood (1990) and Platteau (1996) have suggested, this is likely a reflection of the (unacceptable) fact that there is very limited empirical evidence available to support PRS hypotheses.⁷⁰ The strength of the theories propounded by the PRS and, by implication, market-based land reform advocates, lay not so much in their empirical grounding as in their appeal to common sense or logic.⁷¹ As such, the fact that these policies have become so pervasive and accepted as a means of economic and social development may signify the *strength of the discourse, rather than the robustness or validity of the theories.*

However, as we have seen in relation to the broader 'development' ideology and crisis, no discourse is completely subsuming. There is a very large and growing body of writing and research that has evolved alongside of the reigning PRS discourse.

⁷⁰ As discussed above, empirical evidence for the PRS thesis that private rights are superior to common rights is primarily drawn from historical and anthropological records. Several authors have noted this deficiency. Atwood writes: "Economists' contributions have been theoretical and deductive, unaccompanied by solid empirical studies" (Atwood 1990, 660). Platteau writes: "(T)here is only a very narrow basis from which to assess empirically the relevance of the propositions forming the evolutionary theory of land rights" (Platteau 1996, 38).

⁷¹ In this line of argument, Ellsworth notes: "(N)obody offers serious empirical evidence for this kind of historical argument. They just make an 'isn't this logical?' argument rather than one anchored in an accurate accounting of history" (Ellsworth 2002, 22).

2.3 *THE DISSENTING VOICE: QUESTIONING BASIC ASSUMPTIONS*

There has been a considerable amount of literature that has evolved to challenge some of the fundamental assumptions of the PRS theory. These essentially marginalized writings are of tremendous importance given the fact that there are a wide variety of property regimes around the world, many of which may be preferable to individualized tenure arrangements based on equity, environmental and efficiency criteria. The dissenting literature makes clear, private property rights do not always lead to desirable outcomes for the poor. Nevertheless, the World Bank and other proponents of the PRS constantly claim that they will. This includes Klaus Deininger, the author of *Land Policies* and an eminent land policy researcher at the World Bank, who has been arguing for several years that:

(T)here is broad agreement that secure individual land rights will increase incentives to undertake productivity enhancing land-related investments (and that) establishment of such rights would constitute a clear Pareto improvement. (World Bank 1999, 35; brackets mine)

Even giving this statement considerable latitude, the claim that there is anything resembling a “broad agreement” is plainly not true. The first difficulty that many critics have with the PRS and its institutionalization in modern policy discourses regarding the supposed ‘desirability’ of market-based land reform is with the inconclusive and even flawed or distorted evidence that is produced to support its claims. The evidence that is often submitted to justify claims that private tenure systems “constitute a clear Pareto improvement” over common property systems has simply not been conclusive. For example, one commentator on the ‘evidence’ allegedly supporting private tenure concludes:

(T)he putative relationship between security provided by a modern land title and capital investment in land has simply not been established with sufficient precision to allow any explanatory value when confronted with conflicting evidence. (Ridell 2000, 6)

After a detailed survey of the literature, Platteau makes a similar observation regarding evidence about property rights from Africa:

In light of the facts and considerations (covered in this literature), it is not surprising that empirical evidence on the relationship between land rights and land improvements or agricultural yields in Sub-Saharan Africa is generally inconclusive. (Platteau 1996, 64)

Other authors offer similar observations regarding the inconclusive evidence correlating privatization of land with increased ‘security’, agricultural investment and growth. They argue that such causal linkages are far from conclusive. During their work in Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda, for example, Migot-Adholla et al. (1993) found that agricultural productivity did not vary under private land rights arrangements and suggest that factors other than land tenure are more constraining for agricultural development and food security in rural areas. They report that the fields they studied were generally acquired through non-market channels such as inheritance, gifts, and government allocation, and the land was held under a variety of tenure forms ranging from temporary use-rights to permanent use-rights. They found that people were more inclined to invest in their land if their use-rights could be handed down to or inherited by their children than if use-rights could not be transferred. However, they also emphasize that “there is no difference in the incidence of land improvements between ‘preferential transfer’ (i.e. rights to transfer to kin) and ‘complete transfer’ (i.e. the right to sell to whoever they wanted—full alienation) land”. Further, they found “no relationship between land rights and plot yields in Kenya and Ghana”, and that “the mode of acquisition had no effect on plot yields”. In fact, in another study of Rwanda, they found that “‘short-term use rights’ parcels were more productive than parcels in all other land rights categories” (Migot-Adholla, et al. 1993, 281-282; cited in Lund 2002, 14).

Bromley and Sjaastad (2000) go further in their refutation of PRS assumptions, revealing them to be nothing more than “prejudices pertaining to property rights”. This prejudice is reflected in a very selective and asymmetrical logic that mechanically confers blame for resource abuse to the property structure of the commons while, when found

elsewhere (e.g. on private property), simply attributed to external and cultural circumstances (e.g. taxes or rent seeking) (Goldman 1997, 9).⁷² Prejudice is also reflected in the cornerstone assumption of the PRS. Bromley and Sjaastad explain that the extent to which the transition from common property to private property rights represents a hypothesized shift towards more individual, specific and secure land rights are thought to be desirable, “they are only so because of the *normative* system out of which they arise” (Bromley and Sjaastad 2000, 365). They argue that communal rights to land can facilitate the provision of the same benefits as private rights, albeit through different institutional structures that are varied and less easily demarcated and defined (Bromley and Sjaastad 2000, 376). Thus, the fundamental PRS claim that private rights are ‘superior’ to common property rights is “nothing more – and nothing less – than an assertion that territorial boundaries are more efficient and therefore universally to be preferred when compared with other types of demarcation rules” (Bromley and Sjaastad 2000, 379).⁷³

Another problem with the PRS discourse that is regularly criticized its equation of privatization with tenure security. Land systems in most developing countries are characterized by the existence of multiple tenures: land may be used by several people in different ways for different purposes (e.g. farming, grazing, collecting fuel-wood, water, etc.).⁷⁴ Bromley and Sjaastad argue that *while titling may increase tenure security for the excluding party, the opposite must be the result for the excluded*. Thus, as Lund puts it,

⁷² In fact, contrary to the arguments of the PRS, Bromley and Sjaastad make the case that social and environmental externalities are frequently lower in common property arrangements because their effects are internalized within the group(s), which increases incentives to remain more socially and/or environmentally accountable than private owners would be inclined to be (Bromley and Sjaastad 2000, 376).

⁷³ Citing Bromley’s works on the prejudices of PRS (Bromley 1990), they also note that there is value judgment implicit in the argument that *efficiency* is a sufficient basis for superiority.

⁷⁴ In a World Bank Discussion Paper authored by Bromley and Cernea it is argued that the fundamental logical error of the PRS view is that property, such as land, is “misconstrued as an object” instead of as a “right to a benefit stream”.

When we talk about increasing tenure security, there is most of the time a corresponding aspect of increasing tenure insecurity as well, something that has a much less benign ring to it” (Lund 2002, 16).⁷⁵

In a well-known case study in the Gambia, for example, Carney found that the commercialization of wetlands/swamplands under various development project initiatives resulted in the shift from women having rights to cultivate and individually control the products of their labour on communally-owned lands, toward male rights of control over the products of women’s labour on those lands (Carney 1993). In this case, privatization of common resources worsened the relative position of women within the household. This has led many scholars and researchers to contend that, before any development intervention or policy is arrived at, close attention needs to be paid to the social complexity of territory and thus the ways in which community management systems organize access to land and other resources (e.g. Bromley and Cernea 1989). Privatization of land resources may not be a solution to rural poverty, increased equity and food security if, by definition, it means that the poor will have to suffer new exclusions and limited access.⁷⁶

There is, then, significant evidence to challenge the extravagant claims made by the defenders of the property rights discourse. Ellsworth puts it bluntly,

The fact is that the empirical evidence for the virtues and mechanics of the founding story of the Property Rights School is mixed for most parts of the world that don’t share the legal history of Europe and the United States. (Ellsworth 2002, 11)

While common property theorists generally agree that ‘tenure security’ is important and land reform necessary (given the legacy of highly discriminatory and inequitable colonial land

⁷⁵ See MacKenzie: “the manipulation of customary law is instrumental in increasing gender and, more generally, social differentiation” (1990, 609; 1993). Also Roth (1993), Atwood (1990), Ghimire (2002)

⁷⁶ It is not insignificant that land privatization has been cited as one of the main factors leading to the degradation of common property resources (CPR’s) and loss of access to them, particularly by the poor. Beck and Nesmith have estimated that common pool resources contribute US \$5 billion a year to the incomes of poor rural households in India, or about 12 per cent to the household incomes of poor rural households. They posit that figures from West Africa, while less available, suggest a similar scale of contribution to income of the poor of CPR’s (Beck and Nesmith 2001; Beck 2000). Given the evidence that CPR’s play an important redistributive role in rural societies (as they are of greater importance and relevance to the poor than the non-poor), the contemporary “enclosure of the commons” has adverse consequences for the poor.

policies) they urge that *there are alternative models of achieving these ends*. Privatization, they urge, is only one model and its benefits and outcomes are not universally predictable.

Commons scholars have engaged in an important dissenting discourse in order to challenge the widely-held assumptions developed in PRS theory. They argue that the fact that the PRS model has become the dominant framework for the planning and execution of land reform initiatives is disquieting because empirical reality suggests that individualized land right systems often increase rural poverty, exclusion and environmental degradation. Although this is an undeniably important observation and contribution of commons scholars, it is not clear that they have been able to transcend the deeply-engrained logic of the PRS themselves. In subtle and sometimes overt ways, the writings and advice offered very often indicate close associations with the interests and advice of PRS-inspired advocates.

2.3.1 Strange Bedfellows: PRS Theorists and Commons Scholars

The acknowledgement given in an influential report like *Land Policies* to the work of commons scholars indicates that this critical discourse has had some impact. The problem still remains, however, that quite often the arguments and alternatives that commons scholars propose in their studies, writings and advocacy do not often escape the legitimizing logic of the very discourse that they are attempting to go beyond. As Goldman puts it,

Although they may have divergent views on the social nature of property and resource use...they converge in their essential definition of development and modernity, i.e. why this topic matters in the first place... Although their collective self-image is one in opposition to the facile tragedy model, in fact, their assumptions and instrument-effects are quite similar. (Goldman 1997, 4)

In his article, Goldman does a very good job of situating the debates between PRS theorists and commons scholars within a critical, discursive context. He posits that, despite diverging points of view regarding the 'most appropriate' or 'best' arrangement of property rights,

there is a shared assumption that natural and human processes can be expressed in terms of their input to a nation's GNP. Despite the fact that many critics of the PRS express their concern for the need to accommodate distinctions among sites (because, they argue, no universal template can apply to the tremendous diversity that comprises the world's commons), their arguments tend to rest on comparative evidence that shows one property rights arrangement to be 'better' than another based on the capitalist norms of economy, efficiency, productivity and competition. "They ask", writes Goldman, "how commoners could produce more for less under different circumstances, such as with imported skills, capital, technologies, and management institutions" (Goldman 1997, 3).

Underlying this concern for efficiency and production is a shared concern among PRS theorists and many commons scholars for a new science of resource managerialism and expertise. The emergence and centrality of the subject of property rights within contemporary debates about globalization must be understood in the context of rapid and large-scale degradation of the world's air, water, forest, and biogenetic resources. Within this context, there is a struggle to understand how and why resources are being depleted and what interventions can and should be encouraged in order to conserve common pool resources. Although approaches certainly vary – both pragmatically and methodologically – the critique launched by commons scholars at the dominant PRS theory tends to be more focused on its technical inadequacies due to a lack of attention to the historically specific nature of property and local institutional arrangements.⁷⁷ What is obscured in this critique and the ensuing debates about the accuracy of data and the utility of knowledge is the

⁷⁷ For example, Bromley and Cernea propose that the development agenda (re)focus on building managerial capacity as the first step toward "sustainable productive use of natural resources" (Bromley and Cernea, 1989 cited in Goldman 1997, FN 37). Based on an internal evaluation of many World Bank projects, they "advocate a shift in emphasis from *things* to *processes*: Rather than design a project to improve a forest or grassland (i.e., things), design one to strengthen local managerial capacity (i.e., process)" (Goldman 1997, 9).

complicit acceptance of the larger project of development as an extension of capitalism.

This may be because the localized lens of analysis called for by commons scholars does not focus well on the dialectic relations between local and non-local structures and institutions (e.g. state, capitalist production relations), or because a 'reform-from-the-inside' approach requires (or *acquires*) some level of complicity. In either case, the way in which capital operates through power-knowledge relations is completely obscured.

To borrow an analogy from Polanyi (2001), mainstream scholarship on the commons has become 'deeply "embedded" in a wider, hegemonic intellectual climate that legitimizes access for domestic and foreign capital to more remote zones of resource- and labour- rich sites in the name of "making the commons work". Goldman writes:

Whether it be rapidly eroding coral reefs off the coasts of the South Pacific, famine in the pasture-lands of sub-Saharan Africa, rainforests in Latin America, or another failed World Bank development project, they are unified in their belief that the crisis on the commons must be universally tackled and rationalized by well-trained teams of international experts sensitive to local needs and ecological capacities. (Goldman 1997, 21)

He notes further that this most recent round of 'problem-solving' must be understood within the context of the historical imperialist processes. Thus, although commons scholars regularly attack PRS theorists for lacking 'self-reflexivity', the same accusation could be harrowed at many of them. Contrary to the always benevolent intentions pledged by the 'experts', their objectives are not to restrain or restructure capitalist economies and practices to help save the rapidly deteriorating ecological 'global' commons, but rather to restructure the commons (e.g. 'develop', 'privatize', 'make more efficient') in order to accommodate a crisis-ridden capitalism.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ As Goldman puts it, if this is the case, "the commons debate is worth mining not for insights into strategies for improving ecological and social conditions (however meaningful these strategies may be to differing interests) but for explanations of new forms of social control that can lead to intensified exploitation of all forms of nature, human and non-human. In other words, this body of literature can best teach us about the "commons project" as a hidden and not-so-hidden institution of domination and imperialism in North-South relations" (Goldman 1997, 3).

The central concern of many commons scholars with the problem of inequality and with the ways in which formal and informal rules create and reinforce unequal access to common pool resources (CPRs)⁷⁹ often translates into a practical concern for the development of policies that will take into account and work for the equal rights of marginal populations (such as women, ethnic minorities, the landless and the poor). This kind of critique is certainly important but it is also easily absorbed by the mainstream discourse which also has, as its main concern, the question of resource *rights*. Instead of questioning what practices are creating the circumstances that make the subject of tenure security so urgent in the first place, the question of how *rights* are defined has become the main area of contention and debate. The tendency to emphasize the importance of land *rights* often occludes the existence and functioning of deeper structures of power and exploitation.

To illustrate the co-optive power of the dominant ideology on property rights, the following section examines some of the factors that have not been taken into account in the rights-based approach to land reform presented in *Land Policies* and what implications these omissions hold for women (who supposedly stand to benefit).

2.3.2 Progressive or Regressive? A Gender Analysis of *Land Policies*

Within the *Land Policies* paper, women are directly considered only in relation to the lack of formal rights and access they have to land (World Bank 2003, 38). While attention to this is merited, it is important to note the disconnection that exists in the report between its

⁷⁹ Important contributions to this literature include the work of N.S. Jodha (summarized in Jodha 2001); Ribot (1998); Beck (1994); Beck and Nesmith (2000); Leach *et al.* (1999); Goldman (1998); Prakash (1998). The main argument of many of these scholars is that privatization of resource rights can reduce the welfare of groups traditionally dependent on common property regimes. It is in this vein that Baland and Platteau propose that, "As far as income distribution is concerned, what is worth stressing is that, historically, traditional users seldom get their rights of use recognized when privatization occurs. As a result, despite increased efficiency private property is presumed to bring about, their welfare must fall" (Baland and Platteau 1996, 176).

concern for women's *individual* rights and its main focus on the promotion of *household* landholding patterns that reflect the most efficient organization of production.

The main impetus for land reform, according to the report, is the reorganization of property rights not through government-implemented programs of redistribution but through reform of credit markets so that land markets will naturally favour the most efficient agricultural producers. According to the report, small-scale family farms have a natural "productivity advantage" over large farm operations that are reliant on waged labour (World Bank 2003, 81).⁸⁰ However, it is noted that the productivity advantage of family farms is not enjoyed by society because other factors – such as the ability to access capital and technology – are not equal between large operators and family farmers (World Bank 2003, 81). Noting that "imperfections in input, product, credit, and insurance markets" can affect the functioning of land markets and lead to outcomes "that deviate from what one would expect in a hypothetical situation of perfectly functioning markets" (World Bank 2003, 82), *Land Policies* advocates two necessarily related strategies: First, access to or (preferably) ownership of land by small farmers must be ensured because, without secure rights, there is little or no incentive for them to invest in land productively and/or sustainably. Second, because security of tenure would not be possible or sufficient if smallholders cannot access formal credit, distortions in the credit market that cause banks to favour large and medium farms over small ones need to be overcome.⁸¹

⁸⁰ This is because smaller family farms can adjust to "the vagaries of nature" (i.e. the weather, natural disasters, etc.) and "the spatial dispersion of the production process" (i.e. travel between scattered plots) without incurring extra costs (World Bank 2003, 81); and, because family labour has "higher incentives to provide effort" it does not need costly managerial supervision. Although the report fails to make this point explicit, the relative efficiency of family farms is also a function of the fact that family members (especially women and children) are not financially remunerated for their work.

⁸¹ Because the costs of and political impediments to foreclosing on smallholders' is high, financing is often unavailable or excessively expensive.

Thus, the PRS-inspired argument presented in *Land Policies* proposes that more secure rights augmented by policies that will address credit-market biases and imperfections will increase the incentive of small farming households to invest in and care for land sustainably, leading to private and societal improvement through subsequent growth and equity gains. The acknowledgement in the report that securing property tenure will not automatically lead to investment and ensuing benefits as long as there are distortions in credit and other markets is evidence of the increasing sophistication of the old PRS discourse. However, the persistent focus in *Land Policies* on technical, rights-based solutions to rural poverty (e.g., the removal of “policy-induced” credit market distortions so that land markets can function efficiently and award relative gains to small, land-poor farming households) is extremely problematic when one begins to look at the gendered division of labour, power and control *inside* the ‘household’ and, more broadly, within society at large. The assumption is that making credit accessible to small-scale farmers will lead to the automatic and natural evolution of tenure arrangements that favour the most efficient producer. In this case, the report makes clear, it is family farms that would stand to gain.

The question that must be asked now is *who within* the family farms will benefit. Astonishingly, despite the attention paid earlier in the report to the inadequacy of unitary models of the ‘household’ (World Bank 2003, 38), at no time does the report discuss *who* comprises this highly efficient, unpaid and supposedly willing workforce. Given the fact that women have been recognized widely as the principal producers in the agricultural sphere in the South, it can be deduced that the report is implicitly referring to the labour of women. The assumption therefore is that women’s “underutilized” (World Bank 2003, 82) labour will be available at no cost as an extension of their reproductive labour in the household. It is obviously problematic that the report is advocating policies to support the efficiency of small

farms if, as is often the case, their efficiency-producing productivity advantage is based on exploitative labour relations and the unequal position of women within the household.⁸²

On a related point, it is also worth critically assessing what the implications might be to women of using land as collateral to access formal credit. Given the fluctuations of commodity markets, it may be difficult for family farms to repay their debt if agricultural production is the primary means of income generation. Where this is the case, pressure on the productivity of unwaged female labour (the factor that supposedly makes small-scale farms more productive in the first place) will increase. This will result in the *extensification* of unpaid labour (e.g., the recruitment children) and the *intensification* of labour (i.e., longer hours). Furthermore, as is pointed out in *Land Policies*, the capital attained through the mortgaging of land will free up and enable members of the household to develop non-farm enterprises (World Bank 2003, 58). There is, however, a strong likelihood that men will be the ones who leave the farm and, by implication, leave women at home to farm mortgaged land alone. Commenting on this point, Manji warns that, “it will ultimately be women’s labour on the land which services rural debt” (Manji 2003, 105).

In sum, within the family structure of farming households, the impact of the policies for rural development and poverty alleviation presented in *Land Policies* are likely to be detrimental to the interests of women. Ironically, women are identified in the report as one of the main targets for assistance through policies to improve their access and rights to land. The focus in *Land Policies* on the need to secure the “equality of women’s land rights to those of men” (World Bank 2003, 38) is commendable, but essentially useless if women in their roles as labourers, co-owners and mortgagers is not taken into consideration. The report

⁸² Manji points out that where the term for ‘family labour’ was ‘non-contractible effort’, that “the idea of ‘non-contractibility’ takes the private sphere of the household to be characterized by affective ties of community, which give rise to solidarity between individuals”. In contrast, she notes that “the private sphere is often based on quasi-feudal domination and on coercion rather than freedom” (Manji 2003, 103).

entirely neglects to consider the impact of the gendered relations of power and privilege within the small-scale farming household, which are at the heart of its strategy for the empowerment of land-poor populations and overall social and economic development. When such factors are taken into account, the growth and poverty-reduction objectives of *Land Policies* become untenable insofar as they exclude or exacerbate the relative positions of the disadvantaged within households and larger society. By only considering the importance of removing policy-induced barriers to producers' *rights* to land, the report neglects to account for the many political, social, and economic factors that disadvantage women.

The mainstream discourse on property rights has, for a long time, been very effective at normalizing and institutionalizing destructive practices. This, as will be discussed in the next section, is due to its situation within the context of a larger hegemonic discourse on development and modernity. Even apparently progressive trends in the discourse must be carefully analyzed in order to unveil the many silences and also often unexpected alliances.

2.4 HEGEMONY OF A MODERNIST PROPERTY DISCOURSE

The most revealing and the most important common denominators that underlie all of the processes through which capital has restored its dominance in the global economy involve the systematic promotion of private property rights over public rights and the privileging of individual over collective social rights. (Bienefeld 2002, 219)

This chapter has revealed that the privileging of PRS-inspired land reform policies as a means of 'rural development and poverty reduction' is intimately associated with the assumptions underlying modernist, particularly neo-liberal, theories of development. It is assumed that global economic change and the demands of international markets and competitiveness have eroded any possibility for alternative visions of rural development or peasant-based agrarian reform. PRS theories, as part of this very pervasive modernist discourse on development, rationalize the advance of market forces and conceive of them as

inevitable or beyond the control of actors concerned. An *a priori* identification is made between ‘modernization’ and export-oriented, large-scale, industrialized farming on private units of land. Put simply, the basic premise is an impetus to and achievement of economic growth eventually reduces or alleviates poverty and the best way to attain economic growth is to seek integration in to the global capitalist economy through the liberalization of markets. Proponents of the PRS thus accord priority to economic efficiency in the market-determined allocation of resources in order to realize export-led growth. To this end, market-based land reform policies support the “freedom of the producer and of capitalists in the accumulation of land and income, irrespective of adverse distributional consequences and effects on the well-being of the poor” (El-Ghonmemy 1999, 2).

Plainly, it is very unlikely that one would come across a policy prescription justified in these terms. On the contrary, poverty reduction is usually amongst the main reasons cited for the privatization of land. But it is not something that is anticipated will be the direct result of the privatization *per se*. Rather, land reform is designed in association with a host of other rural and agricultural intervention strategies as a mechanism for realizing increased agricultural growth. In this formulation, it is anticipated that poverty reduction will be the natural outcome of an expected, all-round rise in real income. Concerns about equity, thus, are not in fact the primary concern of the PRS or, by implication, the objective of market-based land reform.⁸³ The discourse is thus justified through the assumption that granting titles to land will result in the transfer of resources from less to more dynamic farmers, resulting in a more efficient and sustainable use of resources that will benefit society at large. The impact that privatization of land (e.g. concentration of land, reduced access of poor to common property resources, etc.) at the micro-level is not considered important as long as

⁸³ Platteau notes that it is admitted that distribution of land will become more unequal, “but this is considered to be a *natural accompaniment to specialization and growth* from which everybody will benefit” (Platteau 1996, 37).

the overall, long-term result of rural restructuring is a rise in per-capita income. Private property rights in land and other resources, in this sense, are seen as an inescapable step in capitalist development.

What is not considered in or permitted by this rigid formulation is the fact that there are alternative visions of rural development. The emergence, over the past few decades, of anti-development movements and insurrections organized by marginalized populations in the South bears witness to this. In India, Mexico, Brazil, the Philippines, Indonesia and most other countries where international development institutions (professional and financial) have thrived, there are many radical movements seeking to reclaim power over land and resources. The same can be said of the feminist, anti-globalization, labour, race/ethnic, and environmentalist movements in the North. All of these struggles are being fought over the commons and are simultaneously challenging the legitimacy of the elite discursive practices of capitalist development and expansion (Goldman 1997, 24).

However, given the strong neoliberal institutional biases amongst the main organizations advocating, indeed requiring, agriculture and market based land reform in developing countries, the voices of those who do not share the same expectations and/or approaches are easily subsumed, pacified or disregarded.⁸⁴ The history of capitalist accumulation and expansion has shown that when inevitable crises of legitimacy (economic or otherwise) that expose the vagaries of the economic system and thus threaten the workings of 'development' arise, they are controlled or compensated for through constant extra-economic interventions. To borrow from Gramsci, capital responds with 'strategic concessions' of material and/or ideological forms.

⁸⁴ According to Ghimire, even those inside these organizations with more nuanced understandings of the effects of land market reform on the poor have "been increasingly sidelined" (Ghimire 2002, 264).

Within the realm of property rights theory and policy-planning, limited discursive and practical responses to dissenting voices can be seen in the direction of interest and resources to 'marginal populations', 'devolution/decentralization', 'community based natural resource management', 'sustainability' and 'good governance'. As was demonstrated in the gender analysis of *Land Policies*, the emergence of these interests and ideals is not necessarily evidence of a significant divergence from the main stream of capitalist development. On the contrary, the selective adoption and promotion of these principles by international institutions and states can be conceived of as a strategy to enhance or legitimize their power and role in facilitating the accumulation of capital. From this perspective, calls for progressive development are co-opted and transformed into rhetoric and simplified practices that become important instruments in waging what Gramsci called a 'war of position'; that is, an ideological struggle to win popular consent to the program of the ruling class.

Few critical movements can escape this emulsion because, despite their objections to the dominant paradigm, they often only seek retribution *within* the present political, social and economic organization of capital. This is due to one of the greatest strengths of capitalism – it has an extraordinary capacity to ally its need for constant expansion and accumulation with the needs and interests of individuals so that its reproduction is not endangered. This is largely accomplished by impressing the idea that the market represents *opportunity* and *choice* (i.e. one's relationship to the market is *intentional*; a matter of personal will). Accordingly, the idea is fostered that it is possible for people to transform the imperatives of the market when they are seen to be damaging or destructive in some way. This is the idea that keeps many development scholars, students, practitioners and activists busy. What is wrong with this conception is the fact that it neglects to take into account one

of the most distinctive and dominant (albeit disguised) characteristics of the market which is *not* opportunity and choice, but *compulsion*. Wood explains,

Material life and social reproduction in capitalism are universally mediated by the market, so that all individuals must in one way or another enter into market relations in order to gain access to the means of life. This unique system of market-dependence means that the dictates of the capitalist market – its imperatives of competition, accumulation, profit-maximization, and increasing labour-productivity – regulate not only all economic transactions but social relations in general. (Wood 2002, 7)

In this light, Luxemburg (1968) explains that, although capitalist accumulation appears to be a transparent and purely economic process, “the keen dialectics of scientific analysis” are required to reveal how “the right of ownership changes in the course of accumulation into appropriation of other people’s property, how commodity exchange turns into exploitation and equality becomes class rule” (Luxemburg 1968; cited in Harvey 2003, 8).

This conception of the hidden vagaries of capitalism starkly contrasts with contemporary ideas about globalization as a process that is unfolding from everywhere at once with no centre and no discernible power structure. ‘Accumulation by dispossession’ is not a thing of the past or a practice that occurs somehow outside of the capitalist system. It is still an ongoing process. State and transnational powers are frequently used to force processes of corporatization and privatization of hitherto public (e.g. schools) and common (e.g. land, vegetation, minerals, water, biogenetics, etc.) assets, even against popular will.

In order to lift the ‘ideological fog’ that pervades all aspects of the debates on globalization and development, the nature and history of capitalism must be fore-grounded. Conceptions of capitalism as an impartial and unstoppable force of nature are too lacking in historical specificity and concreteness to be useful in countering the dominant ideology. Indeed, writes Foster, “the very idea of capitalism is being shorn of all determinate elements” (Foster 2002, 1). As Luxemburg observed, however, it is often hard to determine how the stern laws of economic processes are operating “within the tangle of violence and

contest of power” (Luxemburg 1968, cited in Harvey 2003, 10). Accumulation by dispossession, notes Harvey, “can occur in a variety of ways and there is much that is both contingent and haphazard about its *modus operandi*” (Harvey 2003, 10). However, if one situates these fragmented and diverse happenings within the historical context of capitalist expansion, it becomes clear these divisive, predatory and unjust practices have been internalized by capitalism in order to preserve access to diminishing healthy resources. It also becomes clear that these practices are made possible because this competitive terrain is expressed ideologically (i.e. via a masking or normalizing of sources of destruction and dispossession). The basically unquestioned assumptions about property, human nature, the economy and history discussed in this and the previous chapter are expressions of this ideological mystification.

The conception of intimate processes of capitalism, like development and the move towards private property rights, as somehow ‘natural’ or ‘inevitable’ obscures their historical origins and the long and painful processes that brought it into and maintain its existence. It also simultaneously restricts people’s capacity to imagine or hope for alternatives in the future, for “if capitalism is the natural culmination of history, then surmounting it is unimaginable” (Wood 2003, 5). It is imperative, as such, that a counter-hegemonic contingency is wary of the origins and interests prompting the assumptions inherent in the presently hegemonic, modernist discourses of capitalism. As Wood puts it,

The question of the origin of capitalism may seem arcane, but it goes right to the heart of assumptions deeply rooted in our culture, widespread and dangerous illusions about the so-called ‘free’ market and its benefits to humanity, its compatibility with democracy, social justice and ecological sustainability. Thinking about future alternatives to capitalism requires us to think about alternative conceptions of its past. (Wood 2002, 5)

In many developing countries, a tremendous diversity of conceptions of development and property rights can still be found. The view that these property

arrangements are an obstacle to market development or the 'efficient' allocation of resources is based on particular views of development, history and, to the extent to which these views are institutionalized in international and national policy orientations, on distinct political choices rather than structurally predetermined inevitabilities. Fundamental critiques can only be partial in their effects as long as they continue to see the whole development project, the PRS school of theory, and the political, economic and socio-cultural discourses produced by the main institutions representing these ideas and practices as fragments within a larger hegemonic system with deep and extensive material and ideological root and interests.

The contradictions of capitalism, which have never been surmounted, are today present in more universal and more destructive form than ever before. Although the moment may be full of uncertainty, it is also one full of opportunity. The analysis in the following chapter of the ways in which the dominant discourse on property rights are practically impacting and being negotiated at a local level – within the context of the Indian Himalayas – is demonstrative of both of these poles.

CHAPTER THREE: Discourse, Control and Resistance in the Himalayas

Beinefeld's contention that "the promotion of private property rights is the central mechanism through which capital is seeking to gain relatively free and unrestricted access to all of the world's resources and markets" (Beinefeld 2002, 224) is undeniable when one takes into account such developments as the wide-scale privatization of intellectual and hitherto public assets, the wholesale commodification and privatization of nature in all of its forms and state downsizing. These trends, Harvey concurs, "indicate a new wave of 'enclosing the commons'" (Harvey 2003, 10). What makes the modern-day expansion of individual property rights to the detriment of public or collective ones "new" is that, contrary to the famous enclosures of 19th century Europe, they are not occurring through brute force or coercion but rather through subtle, ideologically-driven means. The hegemonic modernist, neo-liberal paradigm has made these developments politically acceptable by presenting processes of privatization as the "inevitable results of impersonal forces that people are both powerless and foolish to oppose and that will, in any case, serve their interests in the long run if they are wise enough to let them run their course" (Beinefeld 2002, 220).

This chapter will reveal the impact of this global push for privatization to support the expansion of capital into new terrains in one locality in northern India. The subject of privatization is not examined with regard to programs or policies for the outright individualization of property rights, but rather in relation to a much more politically acceptable form of this model; i.e. recent government-initiated attempts at devolution of rights to communities in the field of forest management. It is argued that because privatization policies have come to face with such opposition both practically (by the people

who stand to lose from them) and theoretically (by anti-tragedy common property theorists), the hegemonic discourse has been forced to find new means of legitimating and carrying out old processes of dispossession. Policies designed to devolve rights to 'communities' through 'participatory development schemes' are serving these ends very well and, in the process, unabashedly dispossessing already vulnerable populations of livelihoods and important means of production. Thus it is argued here that, although the formation of community forest groups in India (and elsewhere) is often represented as an important reversal of earlier processes of privatization and State control, support for these apparently progressive programs is in fact a way for the State to strategically enhance and/or legitimize its power and role in facilitating the accumulation of capital.

These dynamics are examined in relation to field work conducted in the north Indian mountain state of Uttaranchal and, more particularly, the village of Jardhargaon of its Tehri-Garhwal district. In **Section 3.1**, there is a discussion of the reasons presented by the Indian government and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for the relatively new interest in community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) policies with reference to, in particular, the promotion of "Joint Forestry Management" (JFM) schemes (i.e. where villagers and the government share the responsibility and benefits of regenerating degraded forests). Based on a wealth of South Asian research on this subject, it is argued that these supposedly progressive (i.e. more 'participatory' and 'inclusive') policies for development do not primarily represent an interest in poor, resource-dependent communities. It is argued that JFM is made politically feasible (despite repeated failures) because it fits well within the contemporary modernization discourse on development. In **Section 3.2**, some necessary historical information about the dynamic and the shifting rights and practices that constitute forest management in Uttaranchal is given in order to set the stage for the village case study

detailed in Section 3.3. Based on an analysis of transformation in the village of Jardhargaon, it is argued that the institutionalization of JFM schemes (like privatization) represents a significant shift from fairly inclusive communal rights to formalized systems of inclusion and exclusion. The proposed goal of poverty reduction is shown to have limited success within this case. In fact, new processes of exclusion and enclosure have exaggerated the already precarious position of more marginal members of the 'community'. In this vein, the impact of the 'devolution of rights' presented by JFM on the marginalized *Van Gujjar* pastoralists⁸⁶ of the study area is examined. From the perspective of *Van Gujjars*, the implementation of JFM constitutes an assault by the state on their livelihood based on the common modernization-inspired assumption that it is doomed to demise and eventual disappearance. Section 3.4 wraps up the analysis.

3.1 THE DISCOURSE ON 'PARTICIPATION' & 'DEVOLUTION'

In recent decades, the decentralization of policies and decision-making has emerged as a major strategy to achieve development goals, provide public services, and undertake environmental conservation in almost all developing countries. At its most basic, decentralization aims to achieve one or more of the central aspirations of just political governance: democratization, or the desire that humans should have a say in their own affairs. Among the many prescriptions that the 2000 *World Development Report* contains, decentralization figures as a:

...powerful (tool) for achieving development goals in ways that respond to the needs of local communities, by assigning control rights to people who have the information and incentives to make decisions best suited to those needs, and who have the responsibility for the political and economic consequences of their decisions. (World Bank 2000, 106)

⁸⁶ The *Van Gujjar* pastoral community has been practicing transhumance for centuries. Their seasonal migrations take them from (typically in late March) the forests in the plains of the Shivalik mountain range to the alpine grasslands (*bugyals*) of the upper Himalayas. As the mountain air turns (usually in September), they return with their herds of mountain buffalo to their winter homes in the Shivaliks.

As this implies, decentralization is usually synonymous with redistribution of power, resources, and administrative capacities through different territorial units of government and across local groups (Agarwal and Ostrom 2001). As such, decentralization can be seen as a strategy of governance prompted by external or domestic pressures to facilitate transfers of power closer to those who are most affected by the exercise of power.

The emergence of state-implemented community forest management schemes as alternatives to centralized ‘top-down’ management structures in India receives support from this popular discourse that champions a ‘bottom-up’ democratic process of governance and promises the empowerment of communities. In many countries around the world, popular support for “community-based natural resource management” (CBNRM) models emerged for several, related reasons. First, there has been increasing recognition that common property resources (CPRs) are vitally important sources of supplementary livelihoods and basic necessities for the rural poor in many parts of the world (including Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries). This has made coercive or market-based land reform measures politically unviable. This is due to, and compounded by, the fact that the degradation of CPRs has been linked to shifts away from community hands to state and individual hands (Agarwal 2001; Beck 2000). In addition, the emergence of successful examples of resource management with community involvement (Gibson *et al.* 2000; Ostrom 1994) provides people with alternative visions to reach common goals.

In the face of these realities and ‘discoveries’, the mainstream discourse on property rights has been forced to at least partially relax its almost dogmatic belief in the perfect efficiency of private property rights (which depend on perfectly functioning markets, which

typically do not exist).⁸⁷ Still, despite these allowances the operative question has not transformed significantly. It has moved simply from ‘what makes *individual owners* operate efficiently’ to ‘what makes *community stakeholders* co-operate efficiently’. As is the case in PRS arguments, the arbiter of success remains increased production and efficiency and not measurements of whether CBNRM interventions enhance the lives of disadvantaged sections.⁸⁸ When equity-effects are considered, Agarwal notes that they:

...often enter the equation less as a desired outcome than instrumentally: whether, for instance, socio-economic equality enhances prospects of cooperation. The implications of inequitable outcomes for disadvantaged sections are little examined. (Agarwal 2001, 1624)

The question of how to achieve institutional efficiency and cooperation at community levels has become a *major* preoccupation of many resource economists and development thinkers (e.g. Baland and Platteau 1996; Chopra *et al.* 1990) in recent years. In fact, the writings of many anti-tragedy and anti-privatization commons scholars slip easily into this genre of inquiry (see section 2.3). Their work has become strategically useful and is easily absorbed by the mainstream discourse on development which, seeking new ways to legitimate the expansion of capital, utilizes those aspects of their work that fit with its objectives (i.e. maximizing production and minimizing social objection). Sundar thus observes that,

(D)evolution, as a form of empowering non-state, independent, usually small-scale or local entities, *has both conservative and progressive ancestry* – in market-led structural adjustment policies as well as in anti-market new social movements. (Sundar 2001, 2008; italics mine)

In this view, the PRS and the relatively new and politically progressive ‘community property rights’ school share a great deal in common, both in terms of motive and effect. As Rangan notes, despite the apparent differences between neo-liberals who advocate market-driven

⁸⁷ It is for this reason that, in documents like *Land Policies* (World Bank 2003), the limits to outright privatization and the potential productive efficiency of ‘alternative models’ of property rights (e.g. community-based) are acknowledged.

⁸⁸ The major reasons cited for the promotion of decentralization and participatory development practices are their potential capacities to enhance equity, empowerment and environmental sustainability. However, governments usually describe their objectives in terms of potential efficiency effects (both in managerial and financial terms) (Agrawal *et al.* 1999). Although these objectives are not necessarily opposing, the concern for enhancing economic efficiency almost always trumps a concern for equality.

solutions and commons scholars who demand that civil society gain full ownership of the commons, “both share the view that the state must withdraw from the sphere of environmental protection and natural resource management” (Rangan 1997, 71). In other words, both market-led structural adjustment policies and anti-market social and intellectual movements share a drive for privatization of rights. However, due to the fashionable reputation of CBNRM schemes as democratic, equitable and sustainable alternatives to centralized management structures, the way in which privatization is constructed in popular discourse has shifted slightly. In this new formation, the main distinction between private and common property seems to rest simply and solely on the size of membership.⁸⁹ As such, the same kinds of problems that plague the exclusionary practice of privatization also characterize the formalized systems of common property regimes currently being promoted around the world in the name of ‘inclusion’ and ‘participatory development’.

For many observers, the emergence of these practices approaches as a priority for developing countries is understood as the triumph of democratic principles. Some have also correlated their emergence as signifiers of the demise of the nation-state (Fine 1999; Sunder 2001).⁹⁰ From these perspectives, the frequent discord between policy and practice is typically understood to be indicative of technical barriers to ‘real’ participation (e.g. inadequate administrative capacities at local levels, lack of ‘social capital’). What is missed in this picture is any conception of the subtle ways in which both ‘communities’ and the state are “mutually implicated in relations laced with power” (Li 2002, 276). In order for the motivations, impacts and implications of decentralization to be situated within the wider

⁸⁹ Effectively, the notion of ‘corporate’ (an extension of individual private property) has been transposed onto the definition of common property (Rangan 1997, 73).

⁹⁰ For example, Agarwal contends that the formation of community forest groups in India and Nepal in recent years “represents a small but notable reversalization of the earlier processes of Statization and privatization, toward establishing greater community control over forests and commons” (Agarwal 2001, 1625).

socio-political context they are enmeshed in, attention must be directed to *political questions* of why central governments initiate actions to take power away from themselves. In reality the extent and success of decentralization attempts may have as much (or more) to do with overarching political and economic motives and processes as with technical shortcomings. Contrary to the participatory rhetoric of its proponents, CBNRM strategies in India may be seen as a vehicle for intensifying state control over rural communities and resources.

3.1.1 Joint Forestry Management (JFM): State and Local Agendas

In India, unsustainable levels of deforestation and decline in CPRs reached crisis proportions in the early 1970's. The response of the state came in the form of "social forestry", which focused predominantly on promoting commercial species (e.g. eucalyptus) production through top-down processes. The failure and widespread protest to these projects called immediate attention to the problems inherent in non-participatory policy processes implemented through centralized government agencies that are inattentive to local needs and contexts. The resultant environmental, socio-economic and political crisis in India led the government, in conjunction with various international donor agencies such as the World Bank, to encourage states to implement forest policy through the formation of formal partnerships between local institutions and state Forest Departments (FDs) in the co-management of local forests, a policy that is known as "Joint Forest Management" (JFM). Since the JFM Resolution was tabled in 1990, these community forest groups have become the most widespread in India both geographically and in terms of forest area.⁹¹

⁹¹ Multiplicities of institutions constitute the terrain of forest management in India. There are Reserved Forests controlled by the Forest Department (FD); Civil Forests managed by the Revenue Department; and many 'community forest groups' (CFGs), including those managed by JFM forest committees; those managed by village 'forest councils' (*van panchayats*), and many more informal arrangements developed within local contexts. Since the last survey in 2000, the JFM structure was the largest documented type of CFG in the country. Twenty-two states passed JFM resolutions which allow participating villages access to most non-timber forest products and up to 25-50% (varying by state) of any mature timber harvested. With an estimated

JFM is essentially a ‘participatory’ tool designed to help implement the *National Forest Policy Resolution of 1988*.⁹² Joshi summarises it as involving

...formal partnerships between forest villagers and government forest departments through the formation of forest protection committees (FPCs) for the protection and management of state forests. (Joshi 1999, 1)

The theory behind JFM is that a decentralised system – designed to satisfy both the state’s demand for revenue maximization and forest preservation, while simultaneously attempting to accommodate demands for participation and the needs of local communities – is most effectively achieved by making local communities themselves responsible for the policing of village forests in return for a share of the profits on sale of timber extracted by the FD.

A major problem in devising management rules for an entire country is that the “effectiveness of management depends on an enormous number and range of variables that centralized decision making simply cannot take into account” (Agrawal & Ostrom 2001, 490). JFM therefore places discretion for rule-making with each state FD. Practically, the devolution of rights to communities under JFM predominantly takes the form of delegating certain responsibilities and rights not to lower levels of government such as the *panchayats*, but to newly created “participatory committees” (i.e. ‘Village Forest Committees’ or ‘Forest Protection Committees’) which, according to JFM rules, actually bypass local governance structures. Due to the fact that these supposedly ‘participatory’ JFM forest committees are directly governed by state-framed rules (e.g. in terms of membership, meetings, etc.) and are funded directly by the state or various multilateral and bilateral donors, they have come to

36,000 JFM groups, they were estimated to cover 10 million hectares (mha) or 13.3% of the 76 million hectares administratively recorded as forest (Bahuguna, 2000).

⁹² The objectives listed in the 1988 Resolution include the maintenance of environmental stability, conserving the natural heritage and biodiversity, checking soil erosion and denudation, checking the extension of sand dunes, increasing tree cover, meeting subsistence needs, increasing productivity, economising on the use of forest produce and the need for creating a massive people’s movement to achieve all these objectives (MEF 1988, Section 2.1). Clearly, some of these aims are conflictual. While the Indian government may have been able to mediate conflicting claims over the forests through “non-specific policy statements, such as the Forest Policy Resolution of 1988...there was no attempt to reconcile conflicting objectives, and the framework for implementation remained discretionary” (Vira 1995, 40).

“occupy and ambiguous status between government organizations...and ‘people’s organizations” (Sundar 2001, 2010). Thus, although the existence of community-managed forests is formally recognized, they are still treated as units of forest management that must conform to regulations about use and must be officially identified, licensed and monitored by the FD. As Li puts it in the context of similar CBNRM programs in the Philippines,

This legal strategy is clearly different from, and possibly counter to the logic of CBNRM as a system in which property rights *by definition* emanate from communities. The Local Government Code locates control firmly in the hands of state-derived administrative units, and encourages people to look towards and work with “the state,” rather than extrastate community-based structures and practices, to strengthen their hold over resources and improve livelihoods. (Li 2002, 275; quotes are citing Lynch and Talbott 1995, 117)

In this light, Li interprets the impulse behind support for CBNRM by state authorities and resource bureaucracies over the past decade in terms of a “shift in territorializing strategies and state priorities” (Li 2002, 274), rather than as an indication of a reversal in long-standing inequalities in property rights.⁹³ Referring similarly to the Indian context, Sundar writes,

(T)he form of devolution takes in the Indian forestry context has often served merely to reduce costs and responsibilities for the state, while extending the reach of the administration and donors to new areas. In the process this reshapes communities to reflect more closely state, donor and market ideologies, and transforms existing bases of “social capital”. (Sundar 2001, 2008)

When one begins to do a little bit of digging beneath the rhetoric of JFM, it becomes possible to view it as a production of a struggle to maintain the legitimacy and interests of the state and capital in the face of new social, political and economic demands and challenges. The language of community, participation, empowerment and sustainability has become widespread within the international development discourse and its institutions. To view the emergence of CBNRM strategies in developing countries apart from these larger trends is to ignore the deep and subtle ways in which communities, states, NGOs and

⁹³ She points the timing of the emergence of the popularity of these new policies as an indication of this; noting that communities were offered new forms of tenure in national forests “only after the best and most lucrative opportunity in the uplands, namely timber extraction, had run its course” (Li 2002, 270).

individuals are mutually constitutive and thus implicated in relationships laced with power. The simple and clear environmental and social justice hook and popular appeal of CBNRM strategies is strategically useful for states attempting devolution in line with international mandates. The strength of this new turn in a very old discourse on property rights is that the ‘exclusive’ objectives of some actors and interests can be achieved without sacrificing the politically attractive ideals of ‘community’, ‘inclusivity’ and ‘participation’. However, while some people stand to benefit from CBNRM provisions like JFM, others “find themselves re-assigned to a marginal economic niche that corresponds poorly with the futures they imagine for themselves” (Li 2002, 266).

Because JFM has tended to ignore the rights and needs of various groupings *within* rural communities, it has come under increasing criticism (e.g. Agrawal 2001; Agarwal 1997, 2001; Campbell *et al.* 2001; Gauld 2000; Li 2002; Sundar 2001; Sarin 2001). By constructing its beneficiary ‘communities’ as harmonious and uncontroversial sites of intervention, the relationships of power that characterize them on the inside are obscured.⁹⁴ This kind of simplification obscures the ways in which JFM legitimates and exacerbates existing inequalities within and between various community actors.⁹⁵ It is also a large part of the reason why JFM is coming under critical fire. Numerous case studies of JFM indicate that they have not been as successful in practice as they are rhetorically and on paper.⁹⁶ As such,

⁹⁴ Although JFM plays an important role in drawing attention to the ways in which the many people living in, drawing from and/or dependent on India’s reserved and protected forests are marginalized and largely misunderstood as a result of negative stereotypes. However, the replacement of these Hardinesque images (i.e. of ‘backward’ peasants recklessly destroying resources) with the image of a coherent, stable, harmonious and environmentally responsible ‘community’ creates new simplifications and problems.

⁹⁵ In many cases, for example, state-level autonomy in functioning has enabled a principal-agent relationship between FD officers and local JFM Forest Committee heads, reducing accountability from above and below and encouraging patron-client relations between the FD and local elites. In other words, a top-down process has evolved at the local level, where elites are unchecked from below. As will be demonstrated in the case study that follows, pastoralists and the poor find themselves excluded from the process, and are denied their customary rights.

⁹⁶ For example, Sundar constantly comes back to the observation that despite the supposed goals of devolution – e.g. enhancing civil society participation, increasing governmental accountability – the outcomes of processes

there is a growing sense that these practices may not serve the interests of the populations projected as their beneficiaries. This is evidenced strongly in the irony that, as Sundar points out, “People’s organizations across India, which have long struggled for devolution, are now opposing formal devolution initiated by government as illusory” (Sundar 2001, 2019).

In India, a wave of opposition to supposedly ‘participatory’ development practices in forest resource management structures has emerged as a result of the perception that, in practice, the schemes only serve to legitimate new enclosures (e.g. the displacement of marginalized populations from national parks, sanctuaries and ‘encroached land’) and to secure greater power and income for elite members of forest communities and the FD (see Agarwal 2001). Thus, in contrast with the examples set by the self-initiated people’s organizations and movements that inspired it, the superimposition of JFM on existing structures – as a form of centralized decentralisation – threatens to undermine some of the features that have enabled the very diverse interests that comprise a ‘community’ to be accounted for. As will be demonstrated in the case study below, the shift from older tenure and management forms (which typically recognized the use rights of all village residents) to the more formal structures of inclusion and exclusion initiated through JFM policies represent the creation of new rights in communal land which, like existing ones in private land, are elite and exclusive.

3.2 TENURE SECURITY & PASTORAL LIVELIHOODS IN UTTARANCHAL

The purpose for the field work conducted for this study was to evaluate recent attempts at devolution of forest management through JFM in one district of northern India.

often wind up benefiting primarily elite groups. She observes that, “Attempts at devolution from above often end up being subverted by entrenched bureaucratic interests. In the forest case, they are also limited by a legal framework that was designed to serve the interests of revenue” (Sundar 2001, 2019).

Succinctly put, I posed the question: *Does the formal institutionalization of community-based property rights through JFM in Uttarakhand offer increased tenure and livelihood security for pastoral communities?*

In order to historically contextualize my analysis of the dynamic and the shifting rights and practices that constitute forest management in my case study site, the Jardhagaon village of the Tehri Garhwal district, a description of some of the main institutions of forest management Uttarakhand is warranted.

3.2.1 Changing Forestry Management Institutions in Uttarakhand

Multiplicities of institutions constitute the terrain of forest management in Uttarakhand, including Reserved Forests and Protected Forests controlled by the Forest Department; Civil Forests managed by the Revenue Department; and Village Forests managed variously by village 'forest councils' (*van panchayats*) and, more recently, JFM forest committees. Of these, the focus of this case study was on Village Forests and the changing institutions that have been derived locally or via government mandates.

Although JFM has been replacing *van panchayats* (VPs) and various other (legally unrecognized) common property institutions, they still play an important role in management in Uttarakhand. Today, more than 3000 VPs formally control the use of about 35 percent of the forests in Uttarakhand. VPs, which emerged in 1931 as a consequence of a long process of struggle waged by the villager communities, are unique to Uttarakhand and form one of the earliest examples of co-management of forest resources by the state and local communities.⁹⁷ Through the *Van Panchayat Act - 1931*, villagers were given the right to

⁹⁷ The presence of the British in what is today the independent state of Uttarakhand in the 1840's is a convenient point of departure for delineating the history of forest management through the *van panchayats*. Between 1840 and 1917 the British brought more than 60 percent of the entire forest area of Uttarakhand under their control for commercial exploitation. In the process, the customary rights of villagers were greatly limited through new rules that restricted lopping and grazing rights, prohibited expanded cultivation and increased the labour extracted from the villagers (Guha 1999). The colonial state accomplished these radical changes in *de facto* property rights through coercive measures that spurred widespread and sustained popular resistance.

craft the specific rules that govern withdrawal of benefits from their forests.⁹⁸ In 1976, the Uttar Pradesh government brought VPs within the ambit of the Indian Forest Act and framed a set of rules to govern them which greatly limited the rights of VPs to independently manage their forests and allowed drastically more intervention from civil authorities. Although controversy was sparked by these measures, people “reconciled to their new situation, making the most of what came their way” (Sethi 2001, 17).

However, the replacement in 2001 of the ‘*Panchayat Forest Rules - 1976*’, with the ‘*Uttaranchal Panchayati Rules - 2001*’ by the government of Uttaranchal has been met with staunch resistance by villagers.⁹⁹ According to one critic, the new ordinances give the FD “sweeping powers” to control VP forests “in a similar fashion to the pre-1931 era when the Britishers had first reserved forests” (Kaushal to author, Dehradun, 2003).¹⁰⁰ Since these new provisions have been made, the VPs in Uttaranchal can be properly treated as an instance of co-management (as opposed to an example of village-level proprietorship) because villagers must now rely on state officials in several respects: (1) FD officials must be

Government officials had hoped that the protests would simmer down and the hills residents would “gradually become accustomed to the rules as gazetted and that control may be tightened as years go on” (FGC 1922, 2), but the local populations dashed these hopes. The incessant, often violent protests by village communities forced the government to appoint the Forests Grievances Committee (FGC) in 1922 to look into the demands of the local populations. Following its recommendations, the state passed the *Van Panchayats Act* (Forest Councils Act) in 1931, which permitted villagers to form relatively autonomous management committees and bring back under their control significant areas of hill forests. See Ballabh and Singh (1988) for details of the rules and provisions of the *Forest Panchayat Act, 1931*.

⁹⁸ They could create monitoring, sanctioning and arbitration devices to resolve the vast majority of disputes within the local space, elect leaders from the community, select guards to enforce rules, fine rule breakers, manage finances, and often deploy surplus earnings for the public good within the community. All of the VPs in the hills were thus formally empowered to initiate rule-making procedures and implement the rules they crafted so as to use and protect their forest resources in accordance with their needs.

⁹⁹ See Sethi (2001, 18) for details of the rules and provisions of the *Uttaranchal Panchayati Forest Rules, 2001*.

¹⁰⁰ Handing over charge of VPs to the FD is explained by R.S. Bist, a Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) in Haldwani and one of the founders of the new regulations, “The civil administration seemed to have no time or interest to look after *van panchayats*. The FD, on the other hand, has the technical capabilities and the desire to tend the forests. So the new rules move us in the right direction” (Bist to author, Haldwani, Uttaranchal 2003).

involved in management and implementation planning;¹⁰¹ (2) the local FD must be consulted before harvesting such forest products as resin and timber; and (3) although the use of surplus money from the sale of usufructs is to be used by VPs, the FD now has complete control over it;¹⁰² and (4) the VPs rely on revenue officials for enforcement of rules and sanctions if some villagers refuse to follow local directives (Government of Uttarakhand 2001).

The emergence of the *Uttarakhand Panchayati Forest Rules – 2001* coincides with the emergence of JFM schemes in Uttarakhand. Whereas in some Indian states JFM was instituted following public demand (Sundar, Jeffery and Thin 2001), in Uttarakhand it emerged through state and donor-driven initiatives. Suspicious of objectives driving these processes of transformation, many view the new VP restrictions as the first step in:

... a larger game plan to further constrict forest village councils by bringing them under JFM... The idea is to create more VPs, include them in the JFM fold and tout them as successful cases to be presented at seminars and before funding agencies. At the same time, the authorities gain more control over the forests. (Interview with Varna, head of Jadhargaon *Van Suraksha Samiti*)

During my stay in Uttarakhand, many NGO workers and villagers involved in or aware of the JFM structure and initiatives had this kind of pessimistic and apprehensive attitude. Concern was consistently expressed that, despite its participatory framework, the involvement of villagers in decision-making is greatly reduced under JFM. Furthermore, many expressed the opinion that the main interest in JFM (on the part of both government agencies and some well-positioned locals) is funding. One of the bureaucrats interviewed in the state forest department put it bluntly, “The government needs money and one way it can get it is in the

¹⁰¹ A Five-year Composite Management Plans must be sanctioned by the Divisional Forest Officer and implementation plans are entirely the responsibility of the Forest Ranger. In addition, all bye-laws must be approved by the Divisional Forest Officer. In the past, all planning was done by the VP.

¹⁰² Sundar notes that “money coming in for devolution policies often help to strengthen and enrich further the agents of the state” (Sundar 2001, 2015).

name of forests” (interview with anonymous FD officer, November 2003). Similarly, the leader of the VP in Sarna described the institution of JFM as follows:

The 486-hectare VP of Sarna was brought under JFM. They made micro-plans and composite plans. Village involvement was, however, reduced to a farce. We were lured by the money but there were strings attached. Consequently, we have ended up paying for the grass we cut from what were our VP forests. Now the FDs writ runs large and we have to grovel before its officers for our rights. (Devi; cited in Sethi 2001, 19)

In the context of these kinds of experiences all over Uttaranchal, locals and many NGO workers are frustrated that the new *panchayat* rules and JFM are consistently touted as ‘participatory’ devolution schemes by state agencies. The demise of the existing cultural systems of management (which in fact inspired the idea and popular appeal of participatory forestry management policy in the first place) via the new *panchayat* rules of 2001 and the emergence of JFM is seen by many as an assault on and progressive withdrawal of rights rather than a recognition and formalization of them. It is expected that instead of achieving stated goals (e.g. supporting rural livelihoods through greater tenure security, forest regeneration, sustainable management, participation, etc.) the new measures will enhance conflict, inequity and consequently the degradation of forest lands and resources.¹⁰³

The extent to which this has been the case in Jardhargaon village is examined in the following section. Although JFM is still early in the implementation stages in the village, the story of its emergence and the effects it has already wrought are instructive. This recent and

¹⁰³ According to a joint study prepared by RLEK and the National Law School of Indian Universities, Bangalore (2002), Uttaranchal has nearly 65 percent more forest cover than its mother state, Uttar Pradesh, which has a mere 4.46 percent coverage. This is attributed to the “self-imposed rules and traditions of hill communities and not because of Central or state forest or wildlife laws”. The study proposes that hill people have devised certain “exemplary practices” for the use of forests which prevent exploitation of resources and over the years these practices and customs have evolved into a body of knowledge which results in vast forest cover. At the 5th “Open Forum” organized by RLEK and PRAGATI (Dehradun, July 13, 2003), women *panchayat* members from all the 13 districts of Uttaranchal prepared the *Doon Declaration* for presentation to the Government of Uttaranchal and the Central Government. It is stated therein that, “It is an appalling fact that by the creation of parallel bodies the state government is disrupting the spirit of forest conservation by the local communities.... Instead of devolving powers to the panchayats, the government is creating parallel bodies in the form of *Van Panchayats*, Joint Forest Management Committee's etc. The government should immediately stop this and hand over the powers and responsibilities over the natural resources to the panchayats”.

particular history is important not only because it conveys a great deal about the damaging practices, exclusionary impacts and the implicit silences and simplifications of JFM. The study also reveals the ways in which it is being negotiated and contested by varying parties with different interests and stakes in the forest and its resources.

3.3 CASE STUDY: THE IMPACT OF JFM ON THE VAN GUJJARS

During the winter of 2003/2004, I set out to examine the extent to which the recent (2002) institutionalization of JFM in Uttaranchal, which devolves “legitimate proprietary rights”¹⁰⁴ to communities, has increased or decreased livelihood security (i.e. secure access and power over forest resource use and management), especially among marginal populations (i.e. the *Van Gujjar* pastoralists).¹⁰⁵ In theory, the legal recognition and

¹⁰⁴ “Proprietors”, according to a conversation I had with an NGO representative to clarify its meaning in this particular context, have full access, withdrawal (right to enter an area and obtain resources), management (right to regulate use patterns) and exclusionary (right to determine who will have the right of withdrawal and how that right can be transferred) rights. This is not a ‘private ownership’ arrangement because individuals are denied the right to sell/lease, withdrawal, management or exclusionary rights. Nevertheless, the legal recognition of community rights provided via JFM constituted a significant step in the direction of privatization insofar as, in theory, rights are formally ‘devolved’ from state and central governments to local communities.

¹⁰⁵ The information for this case study was gathered between late October of 2003 and late January of 2004. During this period, I was based for different periods of time at the Dehradun office of the NGO, Rural Litigation Entitlement Kendra (RLEK). This organization works closely with the *Van Gujjar* pastoralists and has close ties with both government forestry departments and local communities. After several weeks spent conducting informal interviews at the NGO offices and the collecting secondary research materials in the city of Dehradun, I began to join colleagues from the NGOs on excursions to meet with village community members and *Van Gujjars* involved in and/or impacted by JFM and those battling against eviction and for their rights within Rajaji National Park. Due to the unfortunate brevity and relative infrequency of these visits, much of the data presented here comes from secondary sources and interviews at the NGOs and the state FD. Detailed information about the *van panchayat* systems and the recent institutionalization of JFM in Uttaranchal (particularly around Rajaji National Park) was available through the Forest Department (henceforth FD) in Dehradun and at the resource centre at RLEK. Originally, I was going to seek room and board with a *Van Gujjar* family in order to facilitate a form of ‘participatory observation’ research methodology. This would have, theoretically, provided me with greater access to aspects of the life-world of pastoralists as well as opportunity to gain further insight into the social dynamics of their households and communities. There were several obstacles I encountered to this whilst in India. First, it was not an opportunity that naturally presented itself when I was there. Because of the sporadic and spread out nature of my visits, I was never able to establish the kind of rapport with a family that might be necessary before such an invitation to be extended. I have the sense that the fact that I was a *videshi* (foreigner/outsider) placed me at a distance from the community. The language barrier was another very obvious barrier and hiring a translator (due to limited finances) did not seem like an easy solution. My own (very basic) competence at Hindi did help me during some of the very informal interviews I conducted, but the dialects spoken by the *Van Gujjars* and other community members I sought to speak with (i.e. representatives of the *van suraksha samiti* and JFM forest committees) made it difficult to communicate. Despite practical limitations, every effort was made to interview a substantial and widely

formalization of community rights granted through JFM will enhance ‘tenure security’ over resources and increase ‘livelihood security’ for forest-dependent populations. This real world case study challenges this common PRS-inspired assumption and reveals that the question of *who* will profit from enhanced tenure security needs to be attended to before any more sweeping judgments are made about the ‘equity’ and ‘participatory’ benefits of a devolution scheme like JFM.

My original intention had been to visit several “JFM villages” near the Rajaji National Park (RNP) for comparative purposes. Various practical limitations made this impossible. However, through contacts at the Rural Litigation Entitlement Kendra (RLEK), a prominent NGO based in Dehradun, I was able to visit the village of Jardhargaon, in the neighbouring Tehri-Garhwal district, on several occasions. This village was a good site for this investigation because it initiated a JFM project in 2001 and it is the winter home of some *Van Gujjar* pastoral families.¹⁰⁶ This case site is also unique and valuable because it is one of the few villages where they have lived for several decades and, thus, have been involved in existing local common property arrangements.¹⁰⁷

Although most of the *Van Gujjars* in Jardhargoan are not year-round residents, they have long been integrated within the complex local systems of forest use and maintenance. I

representative population of pastoralists and other community members who were involved in the formal and informal institutions implicated forest management. This case study research was never meant to produce statistically meaningful quantitative data.

¹⁰⁶ During field visits, my observations revealed a long, complex and very dynamic history of forest management in the area. The Reserved and Civil (*Soyam*) forests that surround the community have long been utilized by different users for very different products and purposes. Local governance structures make provisions for seasonal variations in production and the different livelihood needs of the groups that comprise the community. As such, they allow for an overlapping system of rights in which varying members have rights over the same products at different times.

¹⁰⁷ This is also the case in the RNP, but the place of the large numbers of *Van Gujjars* in the boundaries of this proposed national park are under intense dispute. Since the early 1980’s, they have been subjected to forced evictions and resettlement programs as FD and park officials attempt to rid them from the protected forests.

was interested in assessing the impact of JFM on the *Van Gujjar*.¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately, very little research is available on this pastoral group. Their interactions with the forest department have been documented to some extent (e.g. Kazmi 2002; Prashant 2003; RLEK 2005, 2005b; Srivastava 2002; Vira 1993), but their relationships with the village communities they encounter during migrations remain under-researched and undocumented. This is a significant observation because, due to the increasing conflict between the *Van Gujjars* and forest authorities, more and more members of the nomadic community are moving their temporary winter homes from protected forests to villages like Jardhargaon which have long-standing rights to ‘civil’ or ‘village’ forests. If the *Van Gujjars* are already marginalized within village institutions, it is highly questionable if the new, state-directed programs designed for cohesive and stable ‘communities’ will lead to more inclusive and equitable outcomes for them.

In addition, more research on the effects of JFM will be important for those *Van Gujjars* and other marginal groups who choose and are able to remain in Protected Forests. The new Congress government in Uttaranchal is planning to initiate ‘community forest management’ programs in the future. Assuming the future involvement of *Van Gujjars* in the resettlement colonies on the boundaries of the RNP and within it, research is desperately needed on what forms of devolved ‘community rights’ function to include their interests.

¹⁰⁸ I came with many questions, including: if they were marginalized within the decision-making bodies of formerly informal common property rights systems, what are the impacts of the legally inclusive JFM – will they be further integrated (as promised) or marginalized? What is the effect of JFM on the ‘security’ of pastoral livelihoods and what does this say about the valuation of their livelihoods in general?

3.3.1 The Conservationist Agenda and *Van Gujjar* Dissent

In the region this case study was performed, the (still conditional) creation of the Rajaji National Park (RNP)¹⁰⁹ in 1983 ignited a continuing battle between the approximately 5,500 *Van Gujjars* living in the proposed park area and FD authorities. Since that time, the livelihoods of *Van Gujjars* in Uttaranchal have become increasingly insecure. Many, like those living in the village of Jardhargaon, have thus sought alternative arrangements which would allow them to continue to live as pastoralists without such dependency on the FD. Those who have not moved are presently facing increased pressure from conservationists (who are interested in formally establishing the RNP as a tiger and elephant sanctuary) to move to the “resettlement” colonies of Pathri, Gaidikhata and Dhaultappa in the Haridwar district. Many human rights groups (like the Rural Litigation Entitlement Kendra) have pointed out that continuing efforts to forcibly evict the *Van Gujjars* from the park are in direct contradiction to promises made by the state government in the *Common Minimum Programme* which states:

The Uttaranchal administration will take all measures to reconcile the objectives of economic growth and environmental conservation, particularly as far as tribal communities dependent on forests are concerned. The Eviction of tribal communities and other forest-dwelling communities from forest areas will be discontinued. Cooperation of these communities will be sought for protecting forests and for undertaking social afforestation. The rights of tribal communities over mineral resources, water resources, etc. as laid down by law will be safeguarded. (RLEK 2001)

The ‘measures’ that have been under consideration since the election of the present Congress led government of Uttaranchal in 2002 include “the revision of land settlement

¹⁰⁹ Originally three separate sanctuaries, the Rajaji National Park was created through the amalgamation of the Motichur and Chilla forests in 1983. It was named Rajaji after the famous freedom fighter, C. Rajagopalachari, or Rajaji in short. The park occupies approximately 820.42 square kilometers of the Shivalik ranges. It has a complex ecosystem, rich in wildlife; it is home to approximately 23 species of mammals, 315 species of birds and 3 different human habitations within its perimeters (i.e. the *Taungyas*, the *Gothivas* and the *Van Gujjars*). See <http://www.rajajinationalpark.com> for more details (viewed last by author in January 2005). Although the final notification to declare it as a National Park is still to come, it is already operating informally as one and is regularly referred to as “Rajaji National Park”.

such that at least 20% of the land areas presently under reserved forests is to be de-reserved and handed over to village communities” (RLEK 2002). These promises are consistently reiterated by state representatives at public events but, as yet, there have been no definitive steps taken to enact them. When ministers and FD officials do speak of ways to involve “tribal and other forest-dwelling communities” in protecting and rehabilitating forests, it is always with reference to devolution to *van panchayats* (operating according to the 2001 rules) or JFM committees. For example, the Uttaranchal Minister of Forest, Environment and Urban Development, Nav Prabhat, frequently emphasizes “the need for JFM to include *Van Gujjars* living in the jungles of this state for centuries” (Prabhat to RLEK staff, Dehradun 2003).

It is interesting to note that, although the present Congress government attempts to appeal to populist sentiments regarding ‘participatory’ development (i.e. planning that will include tribals and *Van Gujjars* in the management of forests), they have practically done nothing to stop the process of forcible eviction and rehabilitation efforts.¹¹⁰ While giving lip service to the ideal of conceding rights to and acknowledging the capacities of *Van Gujjars* to manage the forests, the real focus of present government intervention is on “rehabilitation” programs – i.e. relocation outside of the forests and providing social development assistance in these areas to help “prepare (the *Van Gujjars*) to meet the demands of the 21st century” (Prabhat; cited in *Hindustan Times* 2002).

Nevertheless, because the staunch resistance of the *Van Gujjars* living in RNP is beginning to draw so much national and international attention (issuing an increasing ‘crisis of legitimacy’ for the state or Uttaranchal), it is only a matter of time before concessions will

¹¹⁰ On February 12, 2005, despite clear cut orders from N.K. Joshi, the Director General of Forests and Special Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests (GOI) to halt the eviction of forest-dwellers, several *Van Gujjar* families were forcibly evicted from the Motichur range of RNP by destroying their homes (Kazmi 2005).

have to be made. Given the popular interest in and resources available for ‘participatory’ development schemes like JFM, it is quite likely that this is the mechanism that will be used to fulfill promises to hand over twenty percent of reserved forests to “village communities” for “cooperative management” and “social afforestation”. If this is the case, it is very important that already existing programs are examined critically to ascertain their impact on marginal populations like the *Van Gujjar*.

On the basis of field research in the village of Jardhargaon, the argument made below is that JFM actually concedes very little in the way of rights and primarily functions to enmesh communities more securely in state regulatory regimes. Although some villagers are enjoined to participate in guarding and reforestation, more marginal groups have no role in decision-making and are assumed to need continuing education and guidance from the FD. Furthermore, by ignoring the heterogeneous and unequal nature of communities, JFM functionally institutionalizes new structures of inequality and exclusion. This has significant consequences for the *Van Gujjar* and other already marginalized groups within communities and forests that need to be considered before these programs for ‘development’ in and around the Rajaji National park and resettlement areas are so readily endorsed.

3.3.2 Study Site: The Village ‘Community’ of Jardhargaon

Jardhargaon is a village in the middle Himalayan ranges, in the Tehri Garhwal district of Uttaranchal.¹¹¹ It is spread across six kilometers and is comprised of about fifteen hamlets each consisting of ten to twenty houses. The enormous Reserved and Civil Forests¹¹² above

¹¹¹ It is located, more specifically, in the Hemvalghati (the valley of the river Hemval) region of the Tehri Garhwal district. From the nearest road head, one has to walk on a small pathway for three kilometers to reach Jardhargaon, which sits at an altitude of approximately 1,500 metres.

¹¹² The Reserved Forests of Uttaranchal are formally controlled by the FD while the Civil Forests are controlled entirely by village governance structures. The function of Reserved Forests is sustained yield production, while that of Civil Forests is village and household consumption. In terms of controlling access, the regulations for Civil Forests are established by *van panchayats* or other governing bodies (e.g. the VSS in

the village extend over several hundred hectares and are densely populated by many species of oak, rhododendron, chestnut, pine and other trees. The village is dependent on these forests for many basic requirements, including wood for fuel, fodder and leaf-litter for animals, grounds for grazing, medicinal plants, fruit and wood for building.

Landholdings in Jardhargaon are, on average, only about 1.5 acres. As such, agriculture (primarily the production of rice and wheat) and animal husbandry is conducted mainly for self-sustenance. In recent decades, a trend of outmigration of men from the village to New Delhi or Dehra Dun in search of more lucrative employment has accelerated. This has placed additional responsibilities on the women of the village, but by default it has also meant that their participation in the village economy and politics is quite high.¹¹³ In other words, women are still out collecting firewood and fodder, but they also participate actively in the local institutions mediating forest management and other village affairs.

The village is home to approximately 2,500 people. Of this population, there are approximately 380 *Van Gujjars* (i.e. they constitute about fifteen percent of Jardhargaon) who treat the village as a temporary winter settlement; returning to the village from the upper reaches of the Himalayas in late September and leaving again in late March. In terms of internal differences in the community, only about 200 of the entire population are *rajput* and the remaining are *dalit* households. The *Van Gujjars* are treated as *dalits*, but because they are Muslim they do not properly fit within the Hindu caste system.¹¹⁴ If anything, being Muslim puts them at a disadvantage in a majority Hindu population. As Mastuq Lambardar,

Jardhargaon), while Reserved Forests are controlled by the FD via auctions, production contracts, and rents (for commercial extraction). In the case of non-commercial extraction in Reserved Forests, the FD requires labour contributions in exchange for village rights and allows concessions of forest resources for household needs.

¹¹³ It is also quite remarkable to note that the enrolment of girls in the village schools is about fifty-two percent higher than that of boys (village teacher to author, December 2003).

¹¹⁴ The caste structure of the predominantly Hindu population of this region is expressed in a twofold division into high caste groups (*brahmin* and *rajput/ khatriya*) and low caste artisan groups (the so-called '*doms*' or *dalits*).

the 82 year-old leader of the *Van Gujjars* commented, being Muslim makes them a “minority among the minorities” (Lombardar to author at RLEK offices, January 2004). Their minority status is augmented by the fact that they are not formal landholders, are not legally recognized by the government (i.e. as SC/ST)¹¹⁵ and because their livelihoods – dependent on seasonal migrations – is one that that is otherwise ‘not normal’ or highly esteemed in the village. Like the *dalits*, the *Van Gujjars* are clustered together on the outskirts of the village near or within the Civil (*Soyam*) Forest; i.e. on land that is held in common by the village.

Although a number of authors have observed relatively low levels of stratification and consequently much less rigidity in inter-caste relationships in Uttaranchal (Guha 1999; Agrawal 2001), this case reveals that it would be false to assume that class and caste differentiation in Uttaranchal is non-existent. Although the social and ritual distances that characterize inter-caste relations in other parts of India are not as prevalent in Jardhargaon, close inspection reveals that distinctions in status still do exist. Nevertheless, the presence of a higher degree of community solidarity may be an important factor facilitating the success of local forest management institutions. However, as will be seen below, JFM has replaced these more equitable and participatory frameworks with one that is far more exclusive. In so doing, JFM has had a significant impact on the very nature of community life in Jardhargaon.

3.3.3 Shifting Formal Village Institutions

The healthy and dense forests above Jardhargaon are the result of a community mobilization and management. According to popular memory, the forest and local water resources were completely denuded as a result of over-exploitation from commercial felling.

¹¹⁵ In Uttaranchal, the customary rights of the *Van Gujjars* have never been recorded or recognized. Whilst the *Van Gujjar* of other Himalayan states have benefited from being included in state listings of Scheduled Caste (SC)/Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC), the *Van Gujjar* of Uttaranchal are not included. Therefore, they “have been overlooked in terms of development priorities and benefits provided by the government” (Vira 1993, 9). As the *Van Gujjars* of Uttaranchal are not recognised as SC/ST or OBC, their welfare is left almost entirely to the discretion of the FD upon whose land they subsist.

In 1980, a meeting was called in which the village population decided to form a *Van Suraksha Samiti* (henceforth VSS) in order to mobilize the entire community to restore its forest and water resources.¹¹⁶ The VSS today is a twelve member council and its members are elected by consensus. Four of its members are women, two of whom are also members of the locally formed *Mahila Mangal Dal* (women's welfare committee). The rest of the council is comprised of men, two of whom come from the *Van Gujjar* community. That the *Van Gujjars*, who comprise only fifteen percent of the population, comprise about sixteen percent of the membership is notable and indicative of the valuation of their participation in village life and forest management. It is also important to note that, during interviews, villagers and committee members themselves emphasized that that the high presence of women and *Van Gujjars* on the VSS does not indicate only nominal representation. As one *Van Gujjar* put it,

We are all active and open participants at meetings because we see that we have to be working together to protect the forests and keep the forests well. *Doms*, women and *Van Gujjars* are all part of the *Van Suraksha Samiti*. (*Van Gujjar* VSS member to author, January 2004).

This kind of comment does not give cause to assume that all members in the committee are equal, but it is significant that a relatively marginal member of the *Jardhargaon* should speak so optimistically about their participation in a village institution such as this.

After the creation of the VSS, the forest was declared closed (*'bandh van'*) and the process of regeneration began. Over the last two and a half decades, it has once again become a dense forest.¹¹⁷ Although its visibility and importance has declined since JFM was introduced into the community, the VSS continues to play a role in forest management. Its rules, for example, to ban grass-cutting in the Civil Forest between the months of August

¹¹⁶ I regret that I was not able to attend a VSS meeting when I was in *Jardhargaon* because they are presently being held relatively infrequently (approximately one every two or three months) and I was not there for one.

¹¹⁷ The villagers' daily needs are now easily met, because as there is a larger forest cover, there is also more dry wood available, and the green branches (*'kachchi lakdi'*) are not threatened. The distribution of dead wood for house building and weddings is also regulated according to need.

and December so that the grass can regenerate is still maintained. This strategy is feasible because there is enough grass around the houses for village cattle to graze during these monsoon months, thus obviating the need for fodder collection in the forest.

During this period, special provisions were made for the *Van Gujjars* buffalo. Prior to the introduction of JFM, the VSS permitted the *Van Gujjars* to use the village quota for grass extraction in the Reserved Forest to graze their buffalos. This concession was made, according to VSS members, because the *Van Gujjars* rely entirely on their buffalo for their livelihoods. One former VSS member interviewed explained:

We were concerned that if we did not think of the needs of the *Gujjars* there could be conflicts that would put the forest in danger. Nobody was threatening this but the costs of monitoring would go up if some concessions were not made for the *Gujjar* buffalo. Where else could they go? There is enough forest here to meet the needs of everybody in the village and more. The VSS members agreed that avoiding conflict was important to keep it this way. (Former VSS member to author, Jardhargaon, December 2003)

In exchange, the *Van Gujjars* agreed to collect dung for local fuel and agricultural fertilization and take on the otherwise collective responsibility of Forest Guards. In order to maintain the health of the Reserved Forest grasslands, they were closed in February for two months (grass extraction rights moved back to the Civil Forest). Even when most of the *Van Gujjars* left in late-March, grass-cutting in the Reserved Forest remained restricted by VSS rules.¹¹⁸

These dynamics indicate that the creation of community institutions of this kind is not inspired by considerations of a pure transactional nature or by a simple computation of material interests. The principles and procedures that characterize their functioning suggest norms of fairness and reciprocity where the use rights of all village residents are recognized.

The VSS remains in existence, but it occupies a quite distinct domain which is unrecognized by the state to the extent that it has no legal status. The introduction of a

¹¹⁸ Only one member from each family is allowed to cut one head-load of grass per day and most of this is stored for the dry months to come.

formal JFM program has had a significant impact on the VSS and community life. In theory, it attempts to replicate just this kind of ‘community’ model and formalize its rights but in practice it subsumes and overtakes it.

In 2001, Jardhargaon and many other villages in the district saw the constitution of a JFM project under official aegis. The emergence of JFM in Jardhargaon accompanies concern about the state-wide decline in the density of the reserved oak and chir pine forests.¹¹⁹ It also coincides with the emergence of the new *panchayat* rules of 2001 and the recent national and international craze about CBNRM (see section 3.1). In other words, the decision to create a JFM program in Jardhargaon was not based on an evaluation of local forest conditions or need for new, better-functioning forest management institutions. Rather, it emerged in confluence with larger interests and ideals that, although touting the importance of ‘local communities’ and ‘participation’, had nothing to do with either. One resident of Jardhargaon asked plaintively:

How can this government change the rules without any notice or discussion on the issue? The Forest Department has appropriated the powers of the local administration. It wants to eat into what we have protected for so long. (Woman VSS member to author, Jardhargaon village, December 2003)

Like other JFM groups in India and Nepal, the one in Jardhargaon has a two-tier organizational structure including a general body that draws members from the whole village and an executive committee, or “Village Forest Committee” (VFC), of between 9-15 people. The later meets about once every month and includes the general body about once every year. In terms of composition, it has (until the time of the field visit) no member in common with the VSS.

¹¹⁹ This is true despite a ban on felling that was issued in 1981. According to Nanda, the availability of timber remains almost the same as it was when the forests were exploited commercially (Nanda 1999, 80). This may be attributable to the emergence of what is referred to locally as the ‘timber mafia’, which comprises forest contractors who engage in the illegal felling and theft of trees from reserved forests. This group is also notorious for its involvement in other illegal activities, including the brewing of cheap, illicit liquor, which supports a significant social problem in Uttaranchal hills (Rangan 1998, 219).

As Agarwal has noted with reference to female representation in JFM, “Having a voice in the executive committee is important since this is the site for discussions and decisions on many central aspects of community forest group functioning” (Agarwal 2001, 1628). The JFM rules for Uttaranchal do not specify a minimum number of women for either the general body or the VFC (Agarwal 2001, 1627) and there are most certainly no rules specifying the representation of pastoral or low caste groups. Compared to the VSS, the participation of village minorities in the two JFM bodies is remarkably low. While present in the general body, they are barely represented in the VFC. Despite their numerical dominance in the community (comprising close to 76 percent) there are only five *dalits* on the committee of twelve people while the *Van Gujjars* are not represented at all.

The reasons cited for this locally vary. A number of *dalits* and *Van Gujjars* spoken to complained that the disproportionate representation of *rajputs* in the VFC is itself worthy of suspicion. The approximately 20 households that belong to the *rajput* caste typically stay away from community activities. “They would never meddle in forest management nor participate in putting out the fires”, reported one *Van Gujjar* VSS member. Due to the fact that most of these families are more prosperous because of the remittances received from family members who have migrated, they are not nearly as dependent on the forest as other community members and therefore have, in the past, chosen not to get involved.

When the village is demanding a road, they can be depended upon to cooperate, but in matters relating to the daily life (*jan jeevan/pashu palan*) of ordinary village folk, they are not interested. Some of these people work as contractors, and though they do not have the courage to speak out openly in VSS meetings (where they are outnumbered), they do try and influence decisions when it serves their interests. This is why I think they are so interested in the joint forestry project. The others suspect that these people have political connections and so are interested in the money to be made from a successful joint forestry management project. (*Van Gujjar* VSS member to author, Jardhargaon, January 2004; brackets mine)

A common protest against the VFC is that its officials, although elected by the village, “begin to see themselves less as representatives of the people but identify more with FD

officials” (VSS member to author, Jardhargaon, January 2004). Since the VFC was set up, the VSS has become visibly slack, because “all the villagers expect the VFC to do the work” (VFC member to author, Jardhargaon, January 2004).

The lack of transparency and accountability is the main cause for unhappiness with the JFM structure. There is, of course, little popular awareness of what the new *Uttaranchal Panchayati Forest Rules - 2001* (which govern the JFM rules for Uttaranchal) entail, but there is a perception (contrary to the objectives of the act) that everything is decided ‘from above’. This metaphor – ‘*oopath se*’ – represents the distance between the decision-maker and those for whom, or even on whose behalf, decisions are being made. It also represents the beneficiary as a passive subject rather than the empowered participant in the decision-making process that was the object of decentralization. Hence, while it is apparent to all that resources are flowing in from above on a scale they never did before, these are seen to be bedeviled by the commissions and kickbacks that are entailed and the lack of transparency that exists regarding its use. In other words, the organizational framework and the resources are both seen as flawed as a result of being dictated ‘from above’. As such, the popular perception regarding the VFC of the JFM project is that the functionaries of this body prefer to listen to the district magistrate and FD officials before their electors. The VSS, by contrast, is seen as a better model because it represents what in development literature is called a ‘bottom-up approach’ (*niche-se*).

3.3.4 The Exclusion of the *Van Gujjars* in Rights and Practice

The formal institutionalization of forest management is often based on a conceptual assumption of ‘community’. Too often those ‘communities’ are defined within the confines of a village, characterized as homogenous, organic units, which have evolved independent of exogenous forces such as the state and market. However, the reality in Jardhargaon

confirms that communities are hierarchical, heterogeneous and conflict-ridden rather than homogenous and harmonious. Communities are therefore better conceived by “focussing on the multiple interests and actors...on how these actors influence decision-making and on the internal and external institutions that shape the decision-making process” (Agrawal & Gibson 1999, 630). Pastoralists are one group that is rarely considered in conceptions of ‘community’, but they are integral to the social, economic and cultural make-up of forest communities. ‘Community’ as conceived by JFM is, amongst other things, settled, and hence excludes pastoralists in its design (Sundar 2000).

In Jardhargaon, JFM rules newly place the process of creating a village institutional structure and plan for forest management, which was previously led by the village itself, in the hands of ‘spearhead teams’ consisting of three FD staff and two contracted NGO ‘motivators’. The micro-plans created arise out of little or no consultation with existing forest councils such as VSS, and almost inevitably no consultation with migrant forest users such as pastoralists. Such a process and design of decentralisation almost inevitably falls prey to Smith’s predicted outcome of elite capture (Smith, 1985),¹²⁰ and marginalizes pastoralists who, insofar as they are not permanently settled in a village, are not included in the initial ‘participatory’ processes.

JFM places legally devolved proprietary rights to the forest with the members of the VFC. As is the case in Jardhargaon, they are based on spatial units of governance (e.g. village or hamlet) and hence tend to exclude the more transient *Van Gujjars*. Whereas the VSS in Jardhargaon was autonomously initiated and recognized the use rights of all village

¹²⁰ Smith predicts that processes of democratic decentralisation are likely to result in “simply play[ing] into hands already powerful because of wealth and hereditary status” (Smith, 1985, 193). Sundar backs up this argument by suggesting that, “Well-off villagers who have alternative sources of fuelwood on their farms and can avoid using the forest for a while often stand to gain through JFM. They acquire shares in timber that can be grown because of the abstinence exercised by poorer villagers, who suffer heavy opportunity costs through giving up a head-loading or even through the labour time spent in protection” (Sundar, 2000, 269).

residents, including the *Van Gujjars*, the VFC was instigated by village elites in cahoots with FD officials who chose to start afresh, rather than register the existing VSS that that predated JFM. Agrawal and Ostrom note that, because of the “substantial powers forest officials have in forming, registering and dissolving local committees, many villagers perceive the process to be arbitrary and biased” (Agrawal and Ostrom 2001, 497). Due to this nature of JFM, many communities have refused to participate in the program for fear that it will not accommodate the special needs and rules they have found necessary for forest protection. However, it is has become difficult for communities to resist. The *Uttaranchal Panchayat Forest Rules-2001*, for example, reduced the necessary signatories for application of the registering of a VFC from one third of the village to one fifth of the village (Rural Litigation Entitlement Kendra 2002). This is why it was so easy the minority *rajputs* in the village to apply for and register a VFC and then decide, in association with the FD, how the community forest will be managed.

The new power of the FD to intervene in village forest institutions and management puts the *Van Gujjars* of Jardhargaon in a sadly familiar and disadvantageous position. Prior to settling in this relatively non-conflictual territory over thirty years ago, their welfare was almost entirely dependent insecure access to forests that are under the jurisdiction of the FD.¹²¹ Due to the fact that the FD has long attributed forest degeneration (at least partly) to pastoral practices, attempts at their forcible eviction and/or ‘rehabilitation’ have constantly threatened the livelihoods of *Van Gujjar*. Their historical and present-day relationship, as such, can only be described as conflictual and discriminatory.¹²² Given these circumstances, it is not difficult to imagine that the interests of the *Van Gujjars* of Jardhargaon, like the

¹²¹ This is still the case for the majority of *Van Gujjars* in Uttaranchal. See section 3.3.4 for details.

¹²² The interests of the *Van Gujjar* have never been a priority for the FD. Their administrative mission and responsibilities include the protection, management and reforestation of Reserved and Protected Areas – not the assurance of rights of an indigenous pastoralist group that is not even formally recognized by the state.

interests of those in the proposed Rajaji National Park, are not a priority for the FD, even in the context of a supposedly “joint” management strategy.

These dynamics are reflected in the effects accruing from the fact that JFM provisions do not require VFCs to be inclusive of all users. It is presumed that all users can gain voice by ignoring the rules set down by the council and approaching the FD to contest fines or rules they consider inappropriate in some way. This may be the case for users who maintain other reciprocal economic and social relations with members VFC. However, whether this argument holds for users who have a limited economic or social relationship with the committee, or who have a poor relationship with the FD as arbitrator, is more debateable. It is doubtful that the *Van Gujjars*, who are already in conflict with the FD, could turn to the state regarding conflicts with villagers over CPRs and expect the state to act as impartial arbiter. In this circumstance, the VFC may have nothing to lose by attempting to exclude aggrieved and underrepresented parties from the forest completely and assisting the FD in their attempts to do so as well.

As such, not being formally represented in the VFC is not the only hurdle to ‘participation’ for the *Van Gujjars*. Nevertheless, because they (and others) are not included in the membership of the VFC, they are excluded those benefits accruing from participation in various schemes. As a result of the introduction of JFM in Jardhargaon, the *Van Gujjars* have lost important rights of usufruct. For example, the new VFC rules effectively closed off formerly common grazing lands, especially in the Reserved Forest. This move has been legitimated on grounds of conservation and follows FD regulations more strictly than VSS regulations which formerly made special provisions for the *Van Gujjars* to graze cattle in the Reserved Forest when the Civil Forest was closed for regeneration (see section 3.3.2). The enclosure of this right to the commons makes the livelihood of the *Van Gujjars* insecure

(even potentially unviable) in Jardhargaon because when the Civil Forests are closed between September and December (i.e. just when they return from the high Himalayan pastures), they have no place to graze their buffalos. This has resulted in two main forms of response: (1) those families with larger herds have started to migrate locally to “neighboring” (some are more than five hours away) pastures and forests; and/or (2) some *Van Gujjars* are reported to be ignoring this Reserved Forest rule and are grazing cattle ‘secretly’.

Implicitly, as such, these transformations and exclusions are forcing the *Van Gujjars* to either comply and radically transform their chosen source of livelihood or not comply and potentially convert formerly functioning common property regimes into *de facto* open access regimes. The latter form of response is not atypical in these kinds of circumstances due to the fact that most of those who are reliant on common property in some way are relatively poor (see Beck 2000) and the ‘development’ schemes which promote their enclosure fail to provide viable alternative livelihood options. To the extent, thus, that the *Van Gujjars* do not comply with new VFC rules that endanger their livelihood, the declared ‘sustainability’ objective of state-led JFM scheme will be defeated.

In addition to being excluded from former rights of usufruct, the *Van Gujjars* are also not included in the sharing of revenue, they do not benefit from employment opportunities generated and they receive no benefits from the relatively substantial amounts of external aid the VFC receives.¹²³ Indeed, these schemes have transformed the nature of participation, involvement, conflict and dependency in the forest management process of Jardhargaon. Chakravarty-Kaul reflects that,

¹²³ Unfortunately, I was not able to find out what the sources of funding were for the Jardhargaon VFC in particular. There was a significant amount of money made available for their formation in the Tehri-Garhwal region in 2001, but the reports I could get my hands on did not show the distribution between the various villages that applied for it in that year. Locals and RLEK staff spoke of the ‘substantial amounts of funding’ that were made available to the JFM committee in Jardhargaon. Unfortunately, this is all I have to go on.

The State, for reasons of administrative expediency and ambiguity in matters of common property, has recognized the rights of one group and has allowed it to exploit another in a different position... Far from repairing these gaps and encouraging institutions of self-governance, policies such as Joint Forest Management (have) done the opposite. (Chakravarty-Kaul 1998, 14; brackets mine)

Indeed, JFM has not been able to replicate the ‘participatory’ structures it is named after and which existed (at least to a much greater extent) in the village of Jardhargaon before its initiation. The VSS, which was characterized by its autonomy combined with a balanced system of co-management between the village council and the state, successfully involved the participation of the local *Van Gujjar* population. Under JFM this autonomy has been considerably circumscribed, which has enabled the FD to become the dominant partner in managing the Civil and Reserved forests of the village.¹²⁴

That the forests maintained by the VSS in Jardhargaon were kept in at least as good a condition as the best Reserved Forests managed exclusively by the FD is testimony to the fact that, in principle, ‘participatory’ forms of management and common property systems can be a productive, sustainable and efficient alternative to centralized or private property arrangements. What is more, the fact that the *Van Gujjars* have passed through the forests of Jardhargaon on their migrations for centuries and, in more recent history, have lived in them and helped to care for them, suggests that settled and transhumance livelihoods can co-exist quite comfortably. However, there is no evidence that development schemes like JFM have successfully captured and carried forward the best qualities of these arrangements. If indeed there is strength in the local forest management capacities in Jardhargaon, then it is the introduction of state-directed development structures that are responsible for depleting

¹²⁴ The World Bank appraisal document does not recognise autonomous village councils (like the VSS) as primary stakeholders. Instead, it uses the language of “beneficiary”. Their active participation is also not assured within the *Uttaranchal Panchayati Forest Rules – 2001*. Rather the onus and authority to initiate the process and create the structures of JFM is placed with the FD. For example, Clause 5 of the Agreement states that, “If the beneficiary fails to carry out any of the directions issued by the Forest Officer for forest management or any of its binding obligations, the Forest Officer shall carry out at his discretion any or all the works regarding forest management departmentally” (Sarin 2001, 8).

it. In Jardhargaon, JFM has brought forth special interests that are powerful enough to bend decision-making processes to elites' advantage rather than the common good.

3.4 RESISTANCE AND CHANGE

Although the environmental hook has been useful in gaining allies, support and donor funds, I am not convinced that this limitation is a necessary one – that it is *only* on this basis that uplanders can gain more secure rights to the resources upon which they depend. For this reason, I believe it is important to keep questioning the hegemonic claims of environmentalism, the ways in which it threatens to delimit discursive frameworks, define the boundaries of what is possible, and make “simple common sense” out of some partial truths, thereby legitimating continuing inequalities in power and well-being. (Li 2002, 278)

The strength of the PRS discourse is undeniable and its legacy can be seen overtly playing in many contemporary approaches to land reform, especially as they are currently propounded by powerful international development organizations and the national governments of developing nations. The emergence of land tenure reforms as prominent items on the agendas of national governments and international development agencies in recent years is justified on the grounds that insecure land rights may be an important contributor to rural poverty, inequality, conflict, and resource degradation. More subtly, however, they emerge as part of structural processes of globalization and liberalization which make the goal of ‘decentralization’ central to development planning.

One of the main objectives of this chapter has been to reveal the fact that the ideas and theories advanced by the PRS are not only academic – they have had and continue to have far-reaching implications insofar as they are used to legitimate new enclosures of the commons in developing countries. A second objective was to demonstrate that this end is necessarily being accomplished in new and subtle ways due to the fact that old mechanisms for enclosure (e.g. coercion, MBLR) are, in certain contexts, no longer politically viable. At base, the question driving this research was whether the relatively recent emergence of apparently progressive CBNRM programs function to serve the ends they propose or simply

as strategic and ideologically-driven concessions of limited rights in order to quell popular dissent and, ultimately, serve the interests of capital.

Unfortunately, this study reveals that the appearance of one such strategy in India is not indicative of a genuine attempt to devolve power to communities. The language and ideals of ‘participation’ and ‘decentralization’ are politically appealing to contemporary development audiences and its ‘beneficiaries’, which inspires not only belief in them but also their advocacy. However, as legal strategies, devolution and CBNRM programs like JFM impose severe limitations and are typically not compatible with the interests of everybody in the marginal ‘communities’ they supposedly set out to address. This case study has shown that although community forest rights under JFM are *theoretically* far more secure (i.e. they are legally recognized), *in practice* they are really only more secure for some.

Traditionally, local rights in Jardhargaon were enforced through customary law specific to the locality and the various groups dependent on the forests. These rights were not codified when the government-implemented JFM program granted the community ‘more secure’ tenure rights to the forests above the village. As such, the local JFM policies do not take local rights into account when framing development and conservation policies, which has led to the expropriation of ‘community rights’ for many in the population and their redistribution to vested, elite interests. Thus, reiterating what Lund wrote of the PRS, when one speaks about increasing ‘tenure security’, “there is most of the time a corresponding aspect of increasing tenure insecurity as well” (Lund 2002, 16). While some people in Jardhargaon benefit from JFM policies that anchor legal rights to specific identities, sets of practices and territorial units (e.g. ‘communities’), others like the *Van Gujjars* find themselves (re)assigned to marginal positions. JFM, thus, effectively “segments the social and physical terrain, and allocates rights and obligations on a differential basis”,

and thus “runs the risk of replicating old patterns of discrimination in new, environmental garb” (Li 2002, 278).

When the current drive for decentralization is viewed as part of larger national and international imperatives to centralize control and ownership in the hands of rational and efficient producers, its motives appear far less benign. The struggle of capital to replicate old, divisive, exclusionary and inherently inequitable ideologies of ‘development’ in new and politically acceptable forms is constant. In the context of ever-faster enclosures of common spaces in the name of ‘development’ (e.g. privatization, hydropower, protected areas and biospheres, tourism, timber extraction, etc.), those peripheral communities and individuals that do not have the means to respond or participate productively are resigned to the ‘dustbin of history’. The resistance of many of these groups to their apparent invisibility and exclusion is not, as the modernist paradigm would have us believe, just the last dying gasps of a numerically reduced, politically impotent and spent social force, “fated to disappear in the slums, squatter settlements and informal economies of...burgeoning centres” (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, 88). It is, in fact, their resistance that makes the ideological and objective processes of concentration and centralization of resources, capital, trade, and government aid a constant “struggle”. The subject of the constant struggle is over the content and direction of modernization and its outcomes are always unpredictable. In other words, although neoliberal modernists impute irreversibility to processes of centralization and concentration (i.e. constructing them as a technological or historical imperatives), in reality they are always contested and subject to change.

The struggle between these structural processes and agency is complex because, within any given hegemonic paradigm, they are mutually constitutive. Due to the fact that the ongoing reconstruction of hegemony in different countries depends on maintaining

substantial *consent* to government projects, the sustenance of the dominant structural processes of globalization cannot be explained as merely the result of the domination of powerful economic and political forces. In other words, although many modern examples of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ do indeed occur via direct coercion (e.g. the enclosure of RNP and forcible eviction of *Van Gujjars*), to the extent that such measures illicit significant public protest they are not sustainable, long-term strategies for control (at least not in non-totalitarian regimes). From a Gramscian perspective, thus, control cannot be understood without considering limited, strategic relinquishment of control that may lead to real improvements in people’s lives.

Can the populist JFM strategies of Uttaranchal and elsewhere in India be seen as an example of this kind of strategic concession? Evidence suggests that it can indeed be viewed in this way. It is ‘strategic’ because the interests of the state (i.e. reduction in costs and responsibility while extending reach of administration and donors into new areas) and at least some influential people within the targeted ‘communities’ are met. In addition, the whole idea of ‘joint forestry management’ is very politically useful in the face of protests by populations like the *Van Gujjars* of RNP. Constant demands that the state “regularize” their rights to settlement in the park are quelled by promises by state ministers and FD officials that efforts will be made to do so via JFM programs (e.g. Hindustan Times 2002). The case of JFM, thus, can be seen as an example of both a limited material and ideological concession by the state.

It is important to emphasize that the argument here is not that JFM – and the larger hegemonic discourse from which it emerges – is a Machiavellian scheme to manipulate and control people. Although ‘decentralization’ and ‘participatory’ rhetoric are important instruments in waging what Gramsci called a ‘war of position’, the terrain in which these

struggles are fought and the ways in which the conjectures of the dominant paradigm are assimilated or contested by different agents are varied and the effects are always complex, contradictory and unpredictable. Thus, local studies of change accruing from interaction with these larger ideological forces are important because they reveal their power *and* their fragility. As local institutional arrangements transform in response to internal and external pressures and transformations, new opportunities, obstacles and barriers present themselves.¹²⁵

Thus, the institutionalization of JFM in Jardhargaon – and CBNRM programs elsewhere in India and the world – can be viewed as “a form of above class struggle that invites a response from below class struggle over the content and direction of modernization” (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, 98). The fact that the program has had such an obvious deleterious impact on the lives and livelihoods of so many members within the community will lead to new struggles. The refusal of the *Van Gujjars* of the village (and all over the state of Uttaranchal) to accept a marginal status in the face of such an enormous structural advantage is one of the things that made working with them so satisfying. What is to come from their local resistance is unclear. It is clear, however, that their success will be contingent on the emergence of a larger counter-hegemonic resistance.

¹²⁵ Indeed, as Li put it, community forestry presents a “fertile ground for cooptation and dissent” (Li 2002, 275).

CONCLUSION

We need a revolution to reverse the right-wing revolution that has shifted power so radically and so unwisely into the hands of private property and finance and that has undermined public authorities, collective rights, and the very ideals of an encompassing citizenship that implies a shared, mutual responsibility for one's fellow citizens. (Bienefeld 2002, 212)

The last few decades have been characterized by a number of important changes in economic policy throughout much of the world. As restrictions on international investment flows and tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade started to fall in the late 1970s, many economists and politicians began to boast that economic globalization would yield a capitalist utopia. The collapse of communism in the late 1980s and 1990s seemed to confirm this possibility – or, as many started to believe with more conviction, *inevitability*. Thus, conforming to the view that capitalism is the natural condition of humanity that will (also naturally) deliver a ‘convergence’ of rich and poor countries, Francis Fukuyama proclaimed “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution” (Fukuyama 1992, xi). However, unlike the participants of the growing global justice movement sometimes referred to as the ‘anti-globalization’ or ‘anti-capitalist’ movement, Fukuyama seems completely untasselled by his own admission that “social inequalities will remain even in the most perfect liberal societies” (Fukuyama 1992, 292).

Indeed, contemporary figures on income distribution and standards of living between and within countries confirm this belief and are cause for great alarm. For example, in the 1970s in the United States, the bastion of economic development and liberal democracy, the top 0.01 percent of taxpayers had 0.7 percent of total income (i.e. they earned ‘only’ 70 times as much as the average). In 1998, the same population received more than three percent of all income. This means that the 13,000 richest families in America had almost as much income as the 20 million poorest ones; those 13,000 families had incomes

300 times that of average families (Piketty and Saez, cited in Krugman 2003, 3). These rising inequalities are mirrored on the international stage. According to one World Bank study “the average income in the richest 20 countries is now 37 times that in the poorest 20. This ration has doubled in the past 40 years” (World Bank 2003, 7). Milanovic’s study of world income distribution indicates that inequality has increased from a Gini coefficient of 62.5 in 1988 to 66.0 in 1993 – “by 1993 an American on the average income of the poorest 10% of the population was better off than two-thirds of the world’s people” (Milanovic, cited in Wade 2001, 3). A study using the same data set but a different methodology by Dikhanov and Ward confirms similar trends and finds that:

(T)he share of world income going to the poorest 10% of the world’s population fell by over a quarter, whereas the share of the richest 10% rose by 8%. The richest 10% pulled away from the median, while the poorest 10% fell away from the median, falling absolutely by a large amount. (Dikhanov and Ward, cited in Wade 2001, 4).

Admittedly, there are many statistical and methodological disputes around how to accurately gauge, analyze and compare income in and between different countries (e.g. whether income should be measured in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms or by using exchange rates, and whether countries should be weighted by population) and different econometric techniques often yield vastly different results.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, most evidence on trends in world income distribution support the claim that world income inequality has increased appreciably in the past half-century and faster in the past quarter century (Wade 2001; Beck 2003; Weisbrot 2001). This has led many critics to report things like:

¹²⁶ For example, Wade writes, “If countries are treated equally and average income is measured in PPP terms, most studies find that world income distribution has become more unequal in the past few decades. If countries are weighted by their populations, the world’s PPP income distribution over recent decades shows little change” (Wade 2001, 2). However, he notes, although it seems obvious that countries should be weighed by population, for some purposes it makes sense to weight countries equally (e.g. to test theories of growth, or to assess the effectiveness of policy advice on how to raise growth rates). In addition, he notes that although many assume PPP measures are always superior to use of exchange rate as a measure of purchasing power, they “have their drawbacks as well. Different measures of measuring PPP...yield different results”. Also, because estimates of PPP only go back to the 1970s, longer-run analysis is difficult and “incomes based on actual exchange rates may be a better measure than PPP of relative national power and national modernity – matters of more interest to sociologists and political scientists, no doubt, than to economists” (Wade 2001, 3).

No one would deny that capitalism has brought with it historically unprecedented material advances. But today it is more obvious than ever that the imperatives of the market will not allow capital to prosper without depressing the conditions of great multitudes of people and degrading the environment throughout the world. We have now reached the point where the destructive effects of capitalism are outstripping its material gains. (Wood 2002, 197)

Similarly, Bienefeld writes:

(M)ost working people around the world are experiencing increasing social and economic insecurity, very large numbers are seeing declines in wages and incomes, and virtually all are witnessing a steady decline in the social and economic infrastructure. (Bienefeld 2002, 219)

A growing anti-globalization movement bears witness to and tries to draw attention to these realities. How is it that these voices do not translate into concrete policies or a more generalized public concern? Why is there so much confusion (and occlusion) surrounding the impacts of globalization and so little attention paid to the issue of rapidly growing global inequality? How is it that international organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) stand as such staunch supporters of globalization when neither one has devoted significant resources to clarifying its impacts with regard to measures of global inequality? As Beck puts it, “How can one explain the contradictions between the growing poverty of ever-increasing sections of the population and the growing ignorance about this problem?” (Beck 2003)

These are the kinds of questions that inspired this study, which has attempted to reveal and understand, within particular discursive and practical nexuses, how certain ideas about what constitutes ‘development’ are maintained and legitimated despite repeated failures, growing relations of inequality and movements of resistance to it all over the world. The outlines of an answer to this central question were drawn with the help of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, loosely complimented by a Foucauldian-inspired methodology of discourse analysis. In accordance, it was argued that development cannot be properly understood except with reference to its ties to larger social, political and especially economic structures of power and interest. To argue that development is closely associated with and

best understood in relation to immanent processes of capitalist expansion and concentration – “like the operation of the capitalist market as *imperative* rather than as *opportunity*” (Wood 2002, 7) – may seem a statement of the obvious. But the point is that within the productions of development itself, this context tends to either (conveniently) get lost or is made completely determining (as in much critical Marxist/neo-Marxist development theory). In both cases, insofar as ‘development’ is conceived of as a natural and inescapable law of motion with a basically predetermined destination, failures can be graciously overlooked (i.e. attributed to some technical or human error that can be resolved) and alternatives viewed as ‘unrealistic’ and misguided.

The conviction that there is and can be no alternative is deeply-rooted, especially in Western culture. Thus, even those who attempt to challenge the social and environmental injustices attributable to the prevailing economic order will often limit the full reach of their critique by disassociating the evils of globalization or neo-liberalism from “the essential and irreducible nature of capitalism itself” (Wood 2002, 1) and the modernization-inspired ‘development’ industry that functions to legitimate and support them. Thus constructed as an intentional practice rather than an immanent process, development persists and remains popularly associated with benevolent programs of ‘assistance’ and ‘trusteeship’.

Having established development as the falsely-imagined compassionate face of capitalism in Chapter One, the discussion in Chapter Two proceeded to examine topic that has long been central to development theory and practice – namely, the subject of privatization. The classical, Western discourse on private property rights was outlined and its legacy in legitimating the present push for privatization in land and most other resources was discussed. The findings here supported Bienefeld’s observation that,

Such developments as privatization, state downsizing, diminished representativity, and so forth are altering the material foundations for the social solidarity that has to be the object of

any counter-hegemonic ideology. Unfortunately, this makes the task of rebuilding the social, political, and ideological foundations needed for a more coherent, more humane, and more predictable development process increasingly difficult. The problem is not that this is not known. It is that certain powerful interests have chosen to distort the lessons of history so that they can continue to shift power towards private property rights, while claiming that their actions are designed to promote “development”. (Bienefeld 2002, 228)

It was revealed in this practical context how even strong critiques of the privatization model are effectively subsumed by the mainstream discourse. This supported the case made in Chapter One that the maintenance of a hegemonic ideology does not require complete consensus. In fact, its resilience and stability is entirely dependent on its capacity to respond (materially and ideologically) to voices of dissent that emerge during crisis periods.

The discussion in Chapter Two of the extraordinary capacity of the hegemonic ideology of development to co-opt exigent critiques and turn disunities into consensus set the stage for reporting on a case study of a currently popular variation on ‘privatization’ – i.e. ‘decentralization’. In Chapter Three, it was shown that the devolution of legally-recognized and thus supposedly ‘more secure’ rights of tenure to land and resources among forest-dependent communities (through internationally-condoned development programs like JFM) in India did not lead to the outcomes promised. The varied impacts of JFM on the villagers and forest-management institutions of Jardhargaon, a small village in the mountainous state of Uttaranchal, were examined and shown to have similar motives and effects to neoliberal policies for privatization. Thus, far from securing more secure rights and livelihoods, the legalization of JFM institutions in Jardhargaon exaggerated pre-existing inequalities within the community and created new systems of inclusion and exclusion.

Thus, mirroring larger trends towards the concentration and centralization of resources and privilege, populist policies like JFM can be seen as a fragment of the larger, hegemonic discourse on development. Presently, however, these kinds of policies are headlining development discourse and practice and this is certainly not because they are

being forced on populations. On the contrary, the already politically and socially marginalized populations (like the *Van Gujjars* of the proposed Rajaji National Park) that most likely stand to lose from these policies tend to see them as a limited, but hopeful opportunities. Indeed, as my case study demonstrated, they are certainly no more than this. It is argued that these kinds of policies are better viewed as very partial concessions that are strategically granted in the context of increasing popular and international demand for decentralization and participatory development strategies.

Having established the existence of a very powerful, flexible and naturalized hegemonic discourse on development that supports, indeed legitimates, the extension and deepening of inherently exploitative and inequitable relations of production and power, the question becomes *are alternatives possible?* Many social and political theorists are very pessimistic when it comes to this question. Those of both orthodox Marxist/neo-Marxist and postmodern persuasions often fall victim to the same ‘inevitability’ thesis of the modernist and neoliberal approaches they are criticizing. As Tetzlaff observes, too much recent scholarship seems to say, “Okay, *we* can’t change the world, but not to worry; the dominant system is so full of holes that things are going to get better anyway” (Tetzlaff 1991, 32). This kind of optimism of the intellect and pessimism of the will is, in effect, the same as being satisfied with or resigned to the perception that capitalism is the natural culmination of history instead of an outcome of a dialectical competition between its structural necessities and those antithesis cultural and political struggles for alternative futures. Commenting on this view, Petras and Veltmeyer write,

(Structuralists) turn the struggle for resources and markets into a technological imperative rather than a form of above class struggle that invites a response from below class struggle over the content and direction of modernization. Briefly put, neoliberal structuralists deny the importance of human agency... Structuralists in this regard...tend to engage in a one-dimensional line of reasoning rather than a dialectical approach, which combines analysis from two converging directions: on the one hand, the objective process of concentration and

centralization of capital, trade and government aid, and on the other the subjective organization against this process, in the form of the internal cohesion and mobilization of peasants and labourers. (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, 96).

We return, thus, to the call throughout this study for a holistic theoretical paradigm that is capable of perceiving the “whole ensemble of social relations and its patterns of significance through time” (Sanbonmatsu 2004, 198). The question of how to construct a united, collective will was paramount in Gramsci’s work and key to his theorization of how this can be achieved was a ‘radical pedagogy’ that necessitates the instruction of people in epistemology (i.e. ‘denaturalizing’ existing ‘facts’). Deferring once again to Sanbonmatsu’s recent work,

Radical pedagogy...functions literally to reveal or bring to light what would otherwise remain unseen – the hidden structures of power that shape our lives – and this can only happen by revealing the *whole*. Every so-called critical social movement seeks to *reveal the background itself* – that is, to make the background...*become figure*. (Sanbonmatsu 2004, 193).

The present hegemonic ideology depends on and survives by supporting structures (e.g. social and political fragmentation) and ideologies (e.g. ‘development’) that can successfully occlude perception of the actual, interrelated mechanisms of repressive power. One of the first steps in overcoming this obstacle for theorists, movement activists and strategists is to cease to conceive of ‘structures’ (i.e. the dominant ‘system’/the market) and ‘agents’ (i.e. ‘civil society’; individuals and ‘communities’) as independent and separate for, in reality, they are interdependent and mutually constitutive. If resisters become cognizant of their relationship to the structures of dependency and control that are being challenged, they can be very powerful and absolutely necessary initiators of change. If they continue to perceive themselves – and their diverse causes – as somehow ‘independent’, they become much easier prey for co-optation.

If it is true that the strength of an ideology depends on the extent to which people accept its legitimizing discourses, it behoves us to remain constantly cognizant of its

mechanisms and contradictions. While some of the most powerful international organizations currently advocate that unrestrained capitalist development is the solution to all problems, other voices with equal practical legitimacy suggest that it must have more to do with equality, redistribution of wealth and power and the reduction of poverty. While the views of the latter often have little direct impact, there are conjunctures that permit the possibility of incremental reforms that will be of value to the oppressed and impoverished.¹²⁷ If resistance and control are the two poles in a spectrum that constitutes reality, it is absolutely essential that we “put Gramsci back on his feet”; supporting a pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will.

The unities beginning to emerge around these different vectors of struggle are vital to nurture, for within them we can discern the lineaments of an entirely different, non-imperialistic, form of globalization that emphasizes social well-being and humanitarian goals coupled with creative forms of uneven geographical development, rather than the glorification of money power, stock market values and the incessant accumulation of capital across the variegated spaces of the global economy by whatever means, but always ending up heavily concentrated in a few spaces of extraordinary wealth. The moment may be full of volatility and uncertainties; but that means it is also a moment of the unexpected and full of revolutionary potential. (Harvey 2003, 18)

¹²⁷ This could be understood in terms of Gramsci’s notion of the need for a subtle “war of position”. Rather than smashing the state in a military insurrection led by a vanguard elite, Gramsci calls for the “mass party to engage in widespread and protracted intellectual militancy across the whole of civil society”. In other words, brute force, or domination, is not enough – the revolutionary class must win the consent of other classes to achieve radical transformation.

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