

Discourses of postmodern epistemology: radical impetus lost?

Martin Müller

Department of Geography, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster,
Germany and Development Studies Committee, University of Cambridge, UK

Abstract: Exhibiting a highly divisive agenda postmodernism has created profound chasms across scientific communities. In development studies its radical impetus has translated into the postdevelopment perspective which violently repudiates the modernist development project. This paper crystallises two distinct discourses of working upon the epistemological raw material of postmodernism: an *exclusivist* discourse, which reinforces the chasm by isolating postmodernism, and an *inclusivist* discourse, which fosters mutual engagement between modernism and postmodernism. I contrast the trajectory of this inclusivist discourse in development studies to the hegemony of an exclusivist discourse in geography and find the preponderance of an inclusivist discourse to yield a higher *radical potential* and produce a kind of *hybrid development research* that is neither modern nor postmodern. Concluding I suggest that the relationship between modernism and postmodernism be thought of not in an exclusivist way as two competing paradigms, as it is often done, but rather as of two poles of negotiation between which a future sustained engagement should occur to enrich the theoretical and practical body of the discipline.

Key words: discourse, geography, hybridity, postdevelopment, postmodernism, radicalism.

I Postmodernism: the beginning or the end of a radical mission?

While *postmodernity* as the ontological manifestation of the postmodern condition in art, architecture or culture has seldom been questioned, the epistemological position of *postmodernism* has been subject to multiple contestations. This is not surprising considering its downright radical agenda. Postmodernism was described as marking the beginning of an era,

when there is suspicion of reason and of the very idea of universal validity claims that can be justified through argument. There is a rage against humanism and the Enlightenment legacy. ... [Postmodernism] eschews all metanarratives. The spirit of our times is one of

deconstruction rather than reconstruction.
(Bernstein, 1985: 25)

Postdevelopment takes up the radical thrust with which postmodernism made its entry onto the stage of social sciences, with an intention that is nothing short of revolutionary. It advocates 'a new way of looking at the self and the world or, in other words, an epistemological turn' (Rist, 1997: 244).

Postdevelopment indicts modernist development discourse for annihilating cultural difference, subjecting local communities to the economic Western logic of the market and creating poverty instead of eliminating it and calls for the abandonment of the modernist

development paradigm (eg, Escobar, 1995b; Rahnama and Bawtree, 1997; Esteva and Prakash, 1998). In the 1990s postdevelopment managed to tear down the modernist stronghold in development studies and was recently commended as 'one of the most significant developments in the field of development studies over the last decade' (Rapley, 2004: 350).

The shared prefix 'post' as well as frequent references to postmodern theory in postdevelopment writings suggest, somewhat deceptively, a common epistemological understanding of postmodernism and postdevelopment. The relationship between the two is highly complex, however, and postdevelopment cannot be simply conceptualized as a mere application of postmodern epistemology to the development area. In fact, if anything, postdevelopment's epistemology could more aptly be called 'poststructural', since it is mainly concerned with breaking up and transcending structuralist elements that produce and reproduce meaning in the field of development. While the epistemological apparatus may not be fully fledged in all cases, most authors – postdevelopment or not – concur that, at least in its radical intentions, postdevelopment does parallel postmodernism.

Development studies has recently seen a burgeoning literature that shows critical constructive engagement with postmodern epistemology in its postdevelopment incarnation and tries to funnel its critique to move development theory forward beyond postdevelopment (eg, Simon, 1998; Blaikie, 2000; Nustad, 2001; Brigg, 2002; Ziai, 2004). Hence, it does not come as a surprise when John Rapley, in a recent progress report for *Progress in Development Studies*, avers: '[P]ost-development thought is likely to continue to increase in influence for years to come. Theoretically, it is still in the avant-garde' (Rapley, 2004: 353).

Adopting an interpretative-hermeneutic approach, I distill two distinct textual strategies of working on the epistemological raw material postmodern thought provides: in *exclusivist* discourses postmodernism is pushed

to the side or lets itself be pushed to the side by mainstream theoretical discourse and is dismissed as impertinent to the theoretical development of the discipline. In contrast, *inclusivist* discourses embrace the challenge of postmodernism and display open engagement with the postmodern impetus, including it in further discussions of the discipline's theoretical base. They do not represent postmodernism as a monolithic position that can either be accepted or refuted but rather carefully disaggregate the multiplicity of epistemic positions that have been lumped together under the label of postmodernism. By doing so, these engagements arrive at a more differentiated and contextual view of postmodern epistemology and are able to distinguish different approaches according to the epistemological value they add to the discipline (eg, Pile and Rose, 1992; Lehmann, 1997; Wynn, 1999; Blaikie, 2000; Munck, 2000; Storper, 2001; Ziai, 2004; Simon, 2005).

To this discursive lens of examining different roles of postmodernism I add a disciplinary lens, which is set to contrast discursive strategies in development studies with those found in the discipline of geography. In geography the contribution of postmodernism to the theoretical advancement of the discipline has recently been belittled as a 'theoretical playpit for academics to amuse themselves' (Hamnett, 201: 167). Postmodernism and its ilk have been blamed by some authors for many ills that beset the discipline of geography, first and foremost for policy irrelevance, lack of social criticism and theoretical vacuity (eg, Rees, 1999; Hamnett, 2001, 2003; Martin, 2001).

Conversely, in development studies, the postdevelopment critique of the modernist development project has mostly been commended, even by critics of the postdevelopment position. By incorporating postmodern epistemologies into mainstream theoretical discourses, development studies has managed to create a largely *inclusivist* discourse that openly accepts the postmodern challenge and recognizes it as a pertinent epistemological proposition. I find that by doing so, development

studies retains much of postmodernism's radicalism, which it is able to translate into a new strand of hybrid development research.

II Working on postmodern epistemology

With its original radical agenda postmodernism has often divided the academe into self-declared 'postmodernists' and 'the rest', with epistemological skirmishes and battles flaring between the two sides. Its critique of metanarratives and of the ideals of the Enlightenment rendered postmodern epistemology fuel, especially to those academic disciplines where perceptions of being mired in a modernist impasse grew. For modernism an adversary fledged who did not only, as previous adversaries had done, critique aspects of it, but instead *tout court* rejected the project of modernity, turning it like a weapon back onto itself, yet without proposing any immediate alternative.

Within academic disciplines different textual strategies of working on postmodernism emerged. After all, the concept of postmodernism is not a found object with predefined, unchangeable features, but a manufactured artefact; its meaning is not definitive but is assembled through an interweaving of many different narratives. Some textual strategies are more concerned with the ontological implications of postmodern thought and how to grasp the changed realities of postmodern life in academic research. Others focus on epistemological aspects and their consequences for the self-definition of the discipline.

This differentiation of strategies spawned a multiplicity of postmodernisms that are still grouped under the heading of 'postmodernism' but oftentimes share similarities in name only. Quite clearly, the umbrella term 'postmodernism' is hardly able to adequately convey the nuances implied in these different streams of postmodernism and, as such, it has become somewhat hollowed-out and meaningless. Nonetheless its frequent use indicates that it still has currency, most of all for its discursive value, by being able to function as a

strategic resource in discussions of the discipline's theoretical base.

Within these discussions, discourses of postmodernism acquire a dynamic in their own right, sometimes completely debased from the original body of postmodern philosophy. Postmodern discourses reproduce themselves – patched together on the basis of combinations and recombinations of previous texts – and grow into generally accepted ways of thinking of postmodernism. New texts are mere products of an intertextual weaving, as are their interpretations by readers. The fluid and relativist nature of the postmodern perspective that can accommodate a plethora of epistemological positions lends itself readily to be read in differing ways and thus can be moulded to support varying intentions. While in some discourses the diversity of the many postmodern epistemological positions is retained, in others the once diverse postmodernisms become a discursified, unitary whole again, indiscriminately lumped together and fashioned with attributes such as 'nihilistic' or 'irrelevant'.

Framed in discourse theory, discourse can be understood as 'an institutionally consolidated concept of speech inasmuch as it determines and consolidates action and thus already exercises power' (Link, 1983: 6). Discourses can be interpreted as constructing a specific meaning and knowledge of postmodernism that is fashioned with authority through means of social practice. Discourses are therefore material realities *sui generis*, which determine individual and collective actions. They bind together groups of people in society or unite epistemic communities in academia. These formations of ideas, images and practices – discursive formations *à la* Foucault – linguistically produce the object about which they speak in an act of enunciation (Foucault, 1969). They have the power to shape theoretical developments in whole disciplines and turn into generally accepted truths of the role postmodernism should play in discussions of the theoretical body of the discipline. Within discursive frameworks

certain practices and positions are legitimized and reinforced whereas others are discredited, nullified, excluded. Such exclusions are constitutive of the nature of discourse (Link, 1983; Jäger, 1999, 2001).

In this paper I adopt an interpretative-hermeneutic approach in order to conceptualize discourses as an intentional act of enunciation with which actors pursue certain goals. This instrumental approach contrasts with poststructuralist notions of discourse that rebuff the agency of self-governed individuals in discourses and, rather, with the constructive primacy of language, view individuals as an artefact of linguistic production (Mattissek and Reuber, 2004).

My analysis in this paper loosely relates to techniques of critical discourse analysis pioneered by Siegfried Jäger (1999). He developed a five-step analysis that draws on ideas from hermeneutic text analysis and especially emphasizes the role of ideological-purposive elements in texts. He refers to academic discourses as specialized discourses and thus accentuates their distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* general, societal discourses. Academic discourses derive their power from the hegemonic position from which they are deployed: academic publications are the most lucid example of the production and propagation of discourses through acts of enunciation which bear the authoritative stamp of approval of an epistemic community. Although the underlying discursive body, ie, the textual raw material, is relatively small, it is fashioned with exceptional authority by virtue of its mode of production.

In the subsequent analysis I move beyond the conceptualization of postmodernist versus modernist discourses to identify textual strategies of dealing with postmodern epistemology in discussions of the theoretical base and advancement of the discipline. In development studies and geography I distinguish two competing discourses: in *exclusivist* discourses postmodernism is pushed to the side or allows itself to be pushed to the side by mainstream theoretical discourses and is dismissed as impertinent to the theoretical development of

the discipline. In contrast, *inclusivist* discourses take on the challenge of postmodernism and display open engagement with the postmodern impetus, thereby including the discourses in further discussions of the discipline's theoretical base. Through this novel mapping of discourses of postmodern epistemologies, I endeavour to create a difference that destabilizes and breaks up the received opposites of 'modernism' versus 'postmodernism'.

III Exclusivist discourse of postmodern epistemology

I Development studies

In the discipline of development studies postdevelopment selectively embraced the postmodern epistemology and forged it into something immediately relevant for the field of development. Epistemologically, development critics such as Escobar (1984/85, 1995a), Esteva (1987), Ferguson (1990) or Rist (1997) draw on the concept of the power-knowledge-discourse nexus in development, which denounces the notion of an empirically verifiable reality or truth but in its place assumes linguistically constructed representations that serve as vehicles to exercise discursive power in a subject-object relationship. The heavy reliance on Foucauldian notions of discourse and the yet unrefined instrument of discourse analysis add to the fuzzy and premature impression postdevelopment leaves with some authors when it tries to integrate theory and practice (Brigg, 2002). Nederveen Pieterse renders a similar assessment of postdevelopment's theoretical base when he writes that it is not 'consistent and besides, as a recent approach, postdevelopment thinking is not theoretically developed' (2000: 176).

Ziai (2004), however, limits this critique to certain works, while he commends others for their theoretical acuity and generally advocates a careful disaggregation of the writings that have come to be known unitarily as 'postdevelopment'. He distinguishes between neopopulist variants of postdevelopment, which, following Hoogvelt (2001), he also calls

anti-development, and sceptical variants, which look for a way of transcending modernity instead of denying it. Similarly, Simon (2005) points to the convergency between some recent postdevelopment literature and other radical positions in development studies. He argues to the effect that interpretations of postmodernism have 'progressive potential . . . in the context of the global South' (Simon, 2005: 23) and sees the postmodern influence in development studies and its postdevelopment manifestation pushing increasingly towards postcolonialism.

While epistemological discussions on postdevelopment, postmodernism and their relationship are now fairly common, postdevelopment initially was a movement that gained momentum through development practitioners at the very grassroots level of development projects. It started off as a radical reaction to the development dilemmas modernity presented: the hegemonic economic discourse of the North is perceived to cause Westernization and homogenization in 'developing' countries and annihilate cultural difference, pushing cultures into a position of marginalized subalternity (Escobar, 1995a/b). This totalizing development discourse constructs and deploys from a hegemonically superior position a linguistic notion of development that legitimizes extant development practice and cements the status quo of power relations (cf. Müller, 2005b).

Postdevelopment spurns development, not only on the grounds of the results that it failed to deliver but also on its intentions. However, it is not looking for alternative development 'as a deodorant' to cover the stench of development (Esteva, 1985: 78). In this aspect it is unique among all the calls for different development: it constitutes a searing rejection of the dominant regime of development. Not in order to supplant development with yet another paradigm but instead to deconstruct the whole notion of development altogether (Sachs, 1992; Latouche, 1993; Rist, 1997).

With the complete deconstruction of development, postdevelopment is, in order to

remain consistent, not able to offer any way to move forward and denies any concept of development invested with teleological character. This leaves the postdevelopment perspective treading a precarious path: any effort at reconstruction would compromise the validity of the preceding deconstruction and again assemble a new narrative, whereas refusing to reconstruct exposes it to the criticism of being nihilist, anti-political or amoral. Notwithstanding this, numerous writings do affirm cultural difference, grassroots movements or 'the local' as counter-hegemonic elements; yet not as reconstructive moments (Escobar, 1995a, b, 2001; Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997; Esteva and Prakash, 1998). Therefore postdevelopment 'parallels postmodernism both in its acute intuitions and in being directionless in the end, as a consequence of the refusal to, or lack of interest in translating critique into construction', as one critic puts it (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998: 361).

In 1995 Michael Watts stated that 'there exists an environment in which capitalist triumphalism and post-modern alternatives have hardened into rigid, incommensurable forms' (Watts, 1995: 61). However, surprisingly few outright dismissals of the postdevelopment stance as being irrelevant or useless crop up. Critical responses often refer to Escobar's provocative monograph *Encountering development* (1995a) and associated works (Lehmann, 1997; Nederveen Pieterse, 1998, 2000). According to Nederveen Pieterse, postdevelopment shows a fundamentally reactionary nature, where the rejection of the concept of development equals an endorsement of the *status quo* and the cultural uniqueness claim amounts to a compartmentalization of the world denying any responsibility between cultures within the scope of such concepts as global citizenship (Nederveen Pieterse, 2000).

Similarly, postdevelopment was met with downright disapproval for its sometimes overgeneralized indictment of the West and the concomitant technological and political achievements that are thought to have

ratcheted-up living standards at least in some countries. The conceptualization of poverty and deprivation in developing countries as a purely Western construct was considered an anti-ethical stance and underwent critical scrutiny, as did its celebration of 'the local', which tended to ignore other scale levels and local inequality (eg, Gasper, 1996; Corbridge, 1998; Mohan and Stokke, 2000). Postdevelopment was reproached, often though not exclusively, from the Marxist flank, on the basis of substituting realism with constructivism and its inability to connect discourse to real practice (eg, Kiely, 1999; Peet and Hartwick, 1999; Veltmeyer, 2001).

2 Geography

Not unlike the effect it had in development theory, Marxist critique of postmodernism has also played a major role in mainstream geography. With David Harvey's *The condition of postmodernity*, 1989 saw the publication of what is often regarded as the most seminal book on postmodernism by a geographer. In the spirit of Jameson (1984, 1989) Harvey interprets the evolution of postmodernism as a symptom of, and thus concomitant with, the 'emergence of more flexible modes of capitalist accumulation' (Harvey, 1989: vii). He rebuts any fundamental epistemological change that the postmodern thought might carry, but instead aims at making postmodernism 'accessible to historical materialist analysis and interpretation' (1989: 307). Thereby he incorporates it into modernist neo-Marxian rationality to reconstruct a thoroughly modernist theoretical framework now fortified with postmodern bits and pieces stitched together, ranging from time-space compression to the concept of difference (Dear, 1991; Harris, 1991).

Harvey's book provoked reactions from the feminist side (Deutsche, 1991; Massey, 1991) accusing him of ignoring the evolution of feminism as an articulation of Derridean *différance* in his totalizing vision of the postmodern culture. Furthermore, he omits any mention of the issue of nature and environment. Thus,

despite writing a monograph about postmodernism and its emphasis of difference and otherness, he constructs a thoroughly modern image of postmodernism. Not surprising, then, that Dear attests to Harvey's 'inability to deal with difference' (1991: 537).

Harvey's work has become a citation classic far beyond the boundaries of the discipline and has shaped the discussions on the role of postmodernism in geography. However, it does not reflect the breadth of mostly hostile exchange between Marxist-inspired geography and postmodernism. As early as in 1988, when the confrontation between self-styled Marxists and postmodernists flared up, Julie Graham (1988, 61ff) distinguished variegated strategies of reacting to the advent of postmodernism. There is, for example, the incorporation of postmodernism into Marxism, which steers broadly into the direction of post-Marxism; it keeps a materialist ontology but departs from some dogmatic positions of classic Marxism such as methodological exclusivism and the capitalism/socialism dualism (Corbridge, 1989, 1993: 451; Soja, 1989).

Others welcomed what they saw as a renewed emphasis on locality research, a channel through which postmodernism would bring fresh air to Marxist geography while changing little on the epistemological side (Beauregard, 1988; Cooke, 1990). This is viewed highly critically by Graham (1988) who sees Marxist geography succumbing to the privileging of class above all else and instead argues for a non-essential Marxism. Lovering (1989), on the other hand, dismisses postmodernism as a temporary fashion and rebuffs any postmodern infusion into Marxism since 'postmodernism has no special claim to the experiential aspects, the "life-world" perspective' (1989: 9).

In the course of the 1990s outright rejection of postmodernism and its exclusion from discussions of the theoretical base grew to become the salient strategy of dealing with postmodern epistemological legacy in mainstream geography. Shrestha considers postmodernism in geography a 'faddish pursuit' that

lacks 'foundational grounding or substance' (Shrestha, 1997: 715) and banishes it to the realm of verbal play. Hamnett (2001) blames postmodernism for what he perceives as an increasing replacement of, first, relevance by irrelevance, second, reality by representation and third, social criticism by theoretical critique (Hamnett 2003: 3), and thus raises three main concerns that are frequently voiced by representatives from the exclusivist camp.

One key deficiency of postmodernism is thought to be the lack of transferability and generalizability of insights generated by research under a postmodern epistemology that favours case studies or deconstruction of texts and emphasizes the contextuality of knowledge and the uniqueness of micro-narratives (Markusen, 1999). This postmodern attention to difference evoked the notion of fuzziness and of theoretical and linguistic obfuscation in the exclusivist camp. Hamnett's (1997: 127f) indictment reads 'social irrelevance' and 'separation of theory and language from substantive content'. Even worse, postmodern epistemology in human geography is accused of contributing to the neglect of social problems such as poverty, housing deficiencies or unequal access to public and social services, of ignoring the 'real world' (Martin, 2001: 196). Because of the absence of a moral component in postmodernism it is reproached for not addressing class problems and indirectly legitimizing inequality and exploitation. It is likened to 'a sort of intellectual massage with little social conviction to the cause of struggles against poverty' (Shrestha, 1997: 712).

The second tendency Hamnett opposes is postmodernism's linguistic deconstruction of modernist reality into representations of reality. In the exclusivist camp this has increasingly come to be interpreted as the negation of the existence of any reality outside the text (Martin, 2001: 196) or of the advocacy of absolute relativism where one is compelled to jettison any scientific truth claim and the pretence at judging in any normative way (Hamnett, 2001: 163). Clinging to and

advocating a notion of the existence of 'reality' or 'materiality' as opposed to postmodernism's focus on discourse is one strategy of shutting out postmodernism from the house of policy where its influence is thought to be detrimental and lead to a fundamentally a- or even anti-political stance (Shrestha, 1997; Martin, 2001).

Finally, some exclusivists take issue with the often dense and blurred style of writing, sometimes disparaging it as "'tribal" communication' (Shrestha, 1997: 710) that is geared towards a limited audience. The highly abstract level at which arguments are usually developed renders them open to the accusation of doing theory for theory's sake without any discernible concern or link to practical issues. A stronger version of this critique conceptualizes postmodernism as anti-theoretical. Rees puts it like this:

Postmodernism has been seen to erase the difference between truth and error, theory and nonsense. At the extreme it appears even to glorify anarchy as a methodology. (1999: 105) . . . Postmodernism can be compared with "anything goes" as an epistemology, and can be characterized as antitheory and antisience. (1999: 109)

This dreaded hostility to theory is probably the point where the postmodern perspective is most directly addressed as impertinent to the modernist epistemology. Exclusivists implicitly ask the question of what would happen if postmodernism usurped power and in the face of the gloomy consequences call for an outright rejection of postmodernism (Shrestha, 1997).

IV Inclusivist discourse of postmodern epistemology

The prominence and currency of an exclusivist discourse in geography stands in a somewhat marked contrast to the reception and modelling of postmodern thought in development studies. Although, as we have seen in the previous section, the wholesale rejection of Development by postdevelopment enjoys some popularity, a greater number of publications now take up the postdevelopment

critique and move on to reconstruct new, different ways of thinking of development.

One of the most salient features of the inclusivist discourse of postmodern epistemology is its ability to assess postmodernism in a highly differentiated way to avoid the trap of essentialization by disaggregating the variegated epistemological positions assembled under the label 'postmodernism'. This becomes obvious when critics carefully discern between some aspects of postdevelopment that they deem detrimental and others whose contribution to the discipline is considered productive.

David Lehmann, probably one of the most outspoken critics of postdevelopment, concedes, for instance, that 'post-modernism may turn out to be as much of a landmark as dependency was, and may go intellectually deeper than neo-liberalism' (Lehmann, 1997: 569). In a similar vein, Ronaldo Munck (2000), in his appraisal of the role of postmodernism in Latin America, brilliantly elucidates the enabling and disabling moments of the various incarnations of postmodernism. He welcomes the epistemological break postmodernism brings about but advocates against overly particularist and localist notions that elide global processes. While he assesses the Zapatista movement in Mexico as empowering and embodying a postmodern spirit, he also calls attention to the Senderistas in Perú as 'the darker side'.

Two of the most eminent contributions to an inclusivist discourse, while displaying a critical distance to the postdevelopment perspective as a paradigm, turn its critique to good use to further theoretical development in the field (Simon, 1998; Blaikie, 2000):

... [T]he postmodern critique of development could lead to a more politically astute and practical reconstruction of certain aspects of 'development'. (Blaikie, 2000: 1033) postmodern critiques should be examined and evaluated in terms of the discursive resources they provide to this end. (Blaikie, 2000: 1034)

Undoubtedly residing in a modernist world view, Blaikie nevertheless attempts to bridge

the chasm between modernism and postmodernism in development. He does not portray postdevelopment as monolithic a perspective as other authors tend to do from an exclusivist vantage point, but differentiates between sceptical and affirmative groups within postdevelopment. By doing so he is able to identify some common ground on which affirmative postdevelopment and the neopopulist paradigm of development practice converge and may benefit from mutual engagement. As the most salient features, the awareness of power relations and their impact on knowledge construction and deployment and the encouragement of local, anti-hegemonic action characterize Blaikie's argument. He finally arrives at the conclusion that postmodernism in development possesses the potential to draw on its discursive resources, the building blocks obtained from the deconstruction of modernist development, to reassemble 'the modernist project of development in a more accountable, diverse, and just way' (Blaikie, 2000: 1047).

Simon's (1997, 1998, 2003) line of reasoning travels down a similar route: originating in safely modernist waters he sets out to explore the scope for productive engagement with postmodernism in development studies. He recognizes the validity of postmodern ontologies when he finds 'a growing acceptance of heterodoxes, diversities, and multiple systems, explanations, and modes or scales of institutional organisation' (Simon, 1998: 234) and thus points to an evolving hybridity of approaches in development studies. Though mentioning his caveats concerning the extreme versions of postmodern epistemology – cultural relativism and disengagement from policy, in the face of the indisputable postmodern turn he unearths several avenues along which postmodernism could be rendered a concept beneficial for analysing and acting on the situation in developing countries. Among these are the conceptualization of development as being in flux; as being continually negotiated in the vortex of global, national and local, a focus on greater contextuality in

research and writing and the ability to grant 'space and time to different voices, categorisations, world views, explanatory systems, and identities' (Simon, 1998: 240).

These two syntheses are by no means isolated examples of an inclusivist engagement with postdevelopment thought. Both more recent and earlier examples can be adduced that chant a largely similar tune. In the early 1990s there were expressions of hope that the advent of postmodernism could revitalize the discipline of development studies and enable the theoretical reframing of North–South relations (Slater, 1992). Rather early, Gardner and Lewis took up this cue in anthropology and proposed an anthropology of development that digests the postdevelopment insights and acknowledges the necessity of a change. Thereby, they suggest, anthropology will be able to move on to a theoretically more reflexive praxis of the discipline that re-addresses poverty and global inequalities as the key problems in development (Gardner and Lewis, 1996: 20–25, 155–68). Yapa similarly takes issue with the central concept of poverty and considers the virtues and relevance of a theoretical reframing from a postmodern perspective (Yapa, 1996).

More recently, in defence of postmodernism in development, postdevelopment was found to be guilty on false grounds by Nustad (2001) when many authors blame it for lacking instrumentality. For, if remaining consistent within its epistemology, delivering instrumentality could never have been the business of postdevelopment anyway. Thus, the postdevelopment critique of development can be seen as having value in itself, all the more without a future programme. Even so, Nustad asserts that indirect applications for development practice can be deduced from postdevelopment, accentuating particularly its aptitude to show up the constraints imposed on developers that shape the way in which they conceptualize development problems. Brigg (2002), in contrast, departs from an analysis of the epistemological deficiencies of postdevelopment's Foucauldian elements

to fabricate a more profound and nuanced view of power relations in development and speaks out against an all too rash dismissal of postdevelopment (433f). In one of the most recent contributions on this topic Ziai (2004) delivers a trenchant critique of postdevelopment, taking it to task on a number of grounds while at the same time taking up what he considers the productive elements of it and crystallizing them further towards a manifesto of radical democracy.

All in all, not only do a significant number of publications seem to be quite sympathetic to the epistemological value of postmodern thought, but they also have clear-cut conceptions of how to translate postmodern ideas into research practice and thus move them beyond the realm of lofty theorizing. As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Müller, 2005a), numerous case studies in development show a postmodern imprint, even though postdevelopment or postmodernism are not directly cited as theoretical perspectives. These works are indications that postmodern ideas have already filtered through to development practice, even if they are not explicitly addressed as postmodern or postdevelopment (Rocheleau *et al.*, 2001; Curry, 2003; Goldman, 2003; Rew, 2003; Matthews, 2004; Townsend *et al.*, 2004). Thus, unconsciously, postmodernism has found its way into a kind of development practice that, on the one hand, does not buy wholesale into the extreme epistemological propositions but, on the other hand, clearly does exhibit uniquely postmodern features. The synthesis that arises from this cross-breeding is neither truly modern nor postmodern. Instead it could probably most aptly be called *hybrid* practice in which postmodern strains are intertwined with modern ones.

Drawing on ideas contained in Blaikie (2000), Nustad (2001), Power (2003) and Simon (1998) and an analysis of the case studies mentioned above, Figure 1 depicts elements of postmodern-inspired, hybrid development research. It becomes clear that hybrid development research bears the marks of postmodernism when it eschews dominant

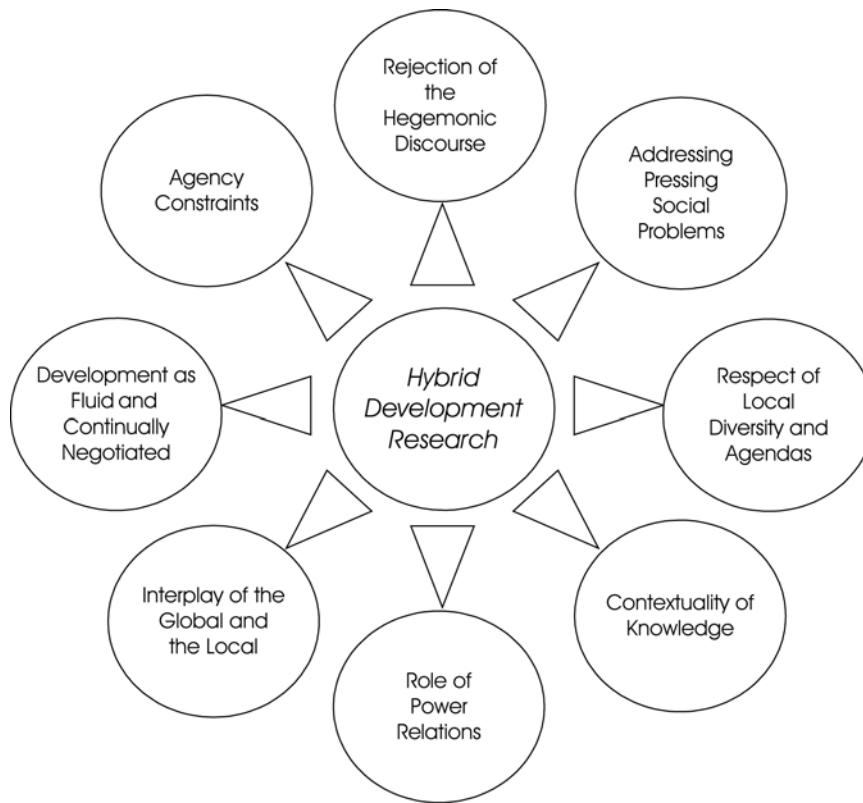


Figure 1 Elements of hybrid development research (from Simon, 1998; Blaikie, 2000; Nustad, 2001; Power, 2003)

metanarratives and takes sides with the subaltern, when it emphasizes the relativity of knowledge and views development as a continually negotiated concept. But, equally, at the same time it renounces the temptations of what could be seen as the vices of unbridled postmodernism: the rejection of reason and any kind of theory, or pure relativism and the absence of social criticism.

In this vein, an inclusivist discourse transcends the two traditional epistemological oppositions and amalgamates elements of both to arrive at a hybridity that could not be discovered earlier. Through the disruption of traditional discourses and the remapping into new categories new ways of thinking of post-modern epistemology can be imagined.

V Discussion: radical ambitions fulfilled?

This paper has examined differing discourses on the role of postmodernism in the two disciplines of geography and development studies. In this section I bring the evidence together and reconsider the extent to which postmodernism has lived up to its declared radicalism. From this stock-taking I then move on to the conclusion to draw inferences as to what the future role of postmodernism should look like if it wants to retain or regain some of its radicalism.

Postmodernism's initial radical thrust was formulated succinctly by Barney Warf in 1993: '[P]ostmodernists typically seek not to replace one discourse with another, but to

dismantle the very notion of discourse' (Warf, 1993b: 183). Curiously, this echoed the inaugural article of the radical journal *Antipode* from 1969: 'We do not seek to replace existing institutions with others which will inevitably take the same form; rather, we look to a new ordering of means in accordance with a new set of goals' (Stea, 1969: 1). How can we grasp and evaluate this radicalism? Three basic criteria could serve as indicators (adapted from Wisner, 1970). First, radicalism must grapple with radical subject matter, ie, it must address social ills. From this derives, second, the call for pertinence. Third, and finally, it must aspire and be able to bring about disciplinary changes.

If we plot the discourse of postmodernism in development studies against these criteria, it becomes obvious that it ranks high on each scale: it deals with global social issues such as poverty, inequality or marginalization; its pertinence is not disputed even by critics of the postdevelopment perspective, as documented by the rich exchange between the two groups; it does explicitly refer to elements in modernist theory and praxis it wants to change. Therefore, in order for postmodern radicalism to be borne out and have an impact, the importance of an inclusivist reception or, in the words of Michael Dear, the acceptance of the challenge of postmodernism cannot be overstated.

Without much doubt, the radical potential of postmodernism has been recognized and harnessed to a significantly greater degree in development studies than in geography. In contrast to geography, the exclusivist stance of postdevelopment rarely questioned the pertinence of postdevelopment critique but merely lamented its unwillingness to engage in a 'creative destruction' (Nederveen Pieterse, 2000: 186). Stinging reviews of Escobar's *Encountering development* (1995a) and its epistemology at the same time recognize that there rightly is a case for a postmodern ontology in development studies (Lehmann, 1997). Even harsh critics of postdevelopment as 'mis-conceived' and 'flawed'

(Nederveen Pieterse, 2000: 188) do acknowledge its merits and achievements and attempt a reconstruction from deconstruction (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001). Therefore it does not come as a surprise that the exclusivist attitude towards postdevelopment has increasingly diminishing returns, prompting searches for a new paradigm or new conceptual territory (Hart, 2001).

Postmodernism in its postdevelopment incarnation therefore displays an extraordinary liveliness that defies all premature obituaries of the type David Ley (2003) has written. He reports matter-of-factly that the concept of postmodernism is outlived and is gradually leaving the academic stage: with the number of citations of 'postmodernism' on the downslope he sees the life cycle of the concept drawing to a close. In mainstream geography, however, postmodernism increasingly seems to run into a dead end, which does indeed warrant Ley's harsh judgement of the demise of postmodernism: the exclusivist discourse is currently dominating over inclusivist attempts to harness the postmodern impetus as an enrichment for the discipline.

It was already back in 1992 that Pile and Rose lamented the 'marginalisation of postmodernism by geographers' (Pile and Rose, 1992: 124) and critiqued the characterization of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism as a tug-of-war where one has to choose between one side or the other. This exclusivist stance conceives of postmodernism as a threat or possible replacement to the modernist paradigm and, in the face of dreaded policy irrelevance or relativism, dismisses it out of hand altogether. The loss of perceived pertinence as critique of existing practices or of the existing paradigm, however, is where postmodernism also loses its radical impetus. If it is not only seen as irrelevant for policy but also as irrelevant for the theoretical development of the discipline, its death is irrevocable.

The increasing rejection of postmodernism is perhaps also a reaction to what is perceived as an uncontrolled burgeoning of self-declared

postmodern literature that exhibits only tinges of, if any, pertinence to geography. After all, it is especially those accounts that incinerate vociferous rebuttals and whose role in shaping the exclusivist discourse that should not be ignored (Peet, 1998: 241ff). Several contributions in the fourth issue of volume 14 of *Society and Space* in 1996 (Doel, 1996; Massumi, 1996; Muecke, 1996), for instance, have invoked reactions relegating them to the realm of verbal play and intellectual display (Hamnett, 2001). More recent examples can be found that seem perfectly apt to be interpreted as fuel to Hamnett's critique of social irrelevance and to further divide postmodernism from epistemological debates in the discipline (eg, Olsson, 2000; Smith and Doel, 2001; Doel, 2003).

It has not always been this way: postmodern relativism, one of the favourite targets of critics, was relativized by Dear, who makes the point that 'there are very few real relativists out there' and that relativism could be taken as 'assuming that all truths are local and contingent, and that any conclusions represent no more than a temporary hegemony of a favoured belief' (Dear, 1995: 180) thus being far from the 'anything goes' stance exclusivists implicate. Similarly, with regard to the anti-theoretical elements in postmodern epistemology early postmodernists themselves did not proclaim to spurn theory at all. What many advocated was a 'transformation of theory' (Warf, 1993a: 165) that would pay respect to some of the central tenets of postmodernism such as the temporal and geographical boundedness of theory-making. Warf emphasizes that postmodernism does not seek 'to replace one discourse with another' (Warf, 1993b: 183), underlining the notion that there is no aspiration on the part of postmodernism to assume the epistemological position of modernism.

To be sure, the emergence of an exclusivist discourse is dependent on the attitude of both sides. If supposedly radical postmodernism is no longer perceived as radical, mainstream theorists could just as much be held responsible

as could be postmodern theorists. Either way, the postmodern impetus will not be harnessed for the benefit of the discipline. Thus, an allegedly revolutionary perspective that both fails to notice and fails to be noticed can never be called radical. It is precisely because 'Post-Modernism is fundamentally the eclectic mixture of any tradition with that of the immediate past: it is both the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence' (Jencks, 1986: 7) that the postmodern perspective does not need to fall into the exclusivist trap. Much of the inclusivist discourse on postmodernism in development studies proves that it is not impossible to square radicalism and postmodernism forging a radical postmodernism. But to this end postmodern deconstruction must be followed by reconstruction.

VI Whither social radicalism?

Postmodern epistemology does not have reconstruction on its agenda. It does not look for transferability or generalizability. This is not a flaw that has to be done away with, as many authors have it, but it is merely a result of internal consistency: dismantling metanarratives to expose difference hidden beneath discourses on the one hand, but installing new ones on the other would seriously compromise the postmodern impetus. Postmodernism therefore does not form an alternative paradigm to modernism, a paradigm that one could adopt or shed, as it is often implied in writings on postmodernism. It does not offer an alternative policy package for those weary of modernist policy advice. The crux is whether it is desirable or possible at all to replace the modernist paradigm with a postmodern 'paradigm'. Instead it is only through its engagement with modernism that postmodernism can make sense.

What, then, are the future prospects for the role of postmodernism in development studies and geography? How could postmodernism retain or regain radicalism and therefore continue the mission with which it started? This paper has shown that much can be said in favour of the view that the future

radical potential of postmodernism lies in the field of tension between the two poles of negotiation constituted by modernism and postmodernism. This friction between modernism and postmodernism in the vortex of mutual engagement spawns new theoretical ideas. It is by engaging in this negotiation that postmodernism can navigate the narrow corridor between ignorance by, and incorporation into, modernism and, at the same time, remain fruitful and beneficial to theoretical progress and reflection.

In this vein, the mutual engagement between modernism and postmodernism has led to some development research becoming hybrid in nature. Such research exhibits a complex nexus of modern and postmodern elements that both opens up a position that straddles modernism and postmodernism without conflating the two, and accepts the contradictions without dissolving them – being both modern *and* postmodern. Hybrid research manages not to succumb to an unbiased glorification of communities and ‘the local’ at the expense of a differentiated, radical view of development processes. That is, it constantly questions and deconstructs its own work, lest it turns into a powerful metanarrative of its own. This, perhaps, is the very idea of postmodernism: its power lies in the engagement with modernism, it persists as long as modernism persists and changes form when modernism changes form, and in this it will remain as it has always been: elusive and perennial.

All in all, an argument for more radicalism through less radicalism is what lies at the heart of the inquiries in this paper. The radical potential of postmodernism is vast but it needs to be funnelled and directed to finally bear out and bring about radical change. The emergence of a forceful exclusivist discourse, also fuelled by what is perceived as impertinent postmodernism, obstructs radicalism and, instead of mutual engagement, we experience deaf-muteness. In development studies the theoretical engagement with postmodernism seems to be at a very productive stage and translates into palpable outcomes in the doing

of development research. A prime endeavour should now be to not let postmodernism follow the same trajectory it seems to be following in geography – not to let it lose its radical potential by nurturing an exclusivist discourse.

Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Denver, 2005. I would like to extend my special thanks to the referees as well as to Shaila Fennell, Mark Graham, Brodie Ramin and Giles Standing for their inspiring comments.

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