

African Journal of Development Studies (AJDS)

Published consistently since 2012

ISSN 2634-3630 E-ISSN 2634-3649

Indexed by IBSS, EBSCO, ERIH PLUS, COPENICUS, ProQuest,
SABINET and J-Gate.

Volume 15, Number 3, September 2025

pp 275-291

The Symbiotic Relationship between Development Theory and Policy: An Exploration of the Influence of Development Studies

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3649/2025/v15n3a13>

Prof Ntsikelelo Breakfast

Department of History and Political Studies

Faculty of Humanities

Nelson Mandela University

E-mail: Ntsikelelo.breakfast@mandela.ac.za

Abstract

This article examines the strong nexus between development theory and practice/policy within the context of Development Studies. The aim of this article is to critically explore the intellectual influence of Development Studies as an academic field of study on matters of development, in particular development theory and policy. I enter the debate with a strategic question, namely: Does the intellectual landscape of Development Studies critically reflect the material conditions of the Global South and apply contextual development theory and policy? At a methodological level, this is a qualitative literature review assessment study, largely because it is desktop qualitative research. My main line of argument is that Development Studies still remains a Western-inspired and neoliberal-inclined field of study. Over and above that, I argue that there is a great deal of scope to make the field of Development Studies have a human face and appreciate the context of the Global South coupled with its sociological and cultural makeup. This article contributes to the ongoing critical discourses about decolonisation, Africanisation and contextualisation of Development Studies.

Keywords: *Development theory, Policy, Development Studies, Global South, Global North*

INTRODUCTION

A number of global developments occurred in the second half of the 20th century, especially in the scientific community, including the emergence of Development Studies as a field of study. In my view, Development Studies has been accepted as an academic field owing to its ontological and epistemological assumptions. Thus, there are many university departments of Development Studies around the world. In other universities, however, development is located within the context of Sociology. It has been one of the fastest-growing fields of study in the 20th and 21st centuries. However, this is still questioned by other scholars in the domain of social sciences as an academic discipline. This is largely because some academics tend to argue that this field lacks coherent academic grounding. Nonetheless, the intellectual contribution of Development Studies to many discourses on social sciences, including other related disciplines of economic and business sciences, is quite palpable. According to Escobar (1995), the dominant discourse of development, both in the field of Development Studies/Sociology of development and in practice, has been framed by the Global North. He further states that the dominant development narrative has been overly prescriptive for the Global South, preventing them from developing their own terms.

For the purposes of this article, I will refer to Development Studies as a field of study without taking away its significant contribution to scholarship. In this article, I examine the intellectual influence of Development Studies pertaining to the synergy between development theory and policy. I enter the debate with a strategic question, namely: Does the intellectual landscape of Development Studies critically reflect the material conditions of the Global South and apply contextual development theory and policy? Among other things, the aim of this article is to critically describe and explore the influence of Development Studies on central discourses on development theory and policy. At a methodological level, this is a qualitative literature review assessment study, largely because it is desktop qualitative research. My main line of argument is that Development Studies still remains a Western-inspired and neoliberal-inclined academic field of study. Over and above that, I argue that there is a great deal of scope to make Development Studies have a human face and appreciate the context of the Global South coupled with its sociological and cultural makeup. Many of the challenges in the Global South are racially-based. For instance, poverty, inequality and unemployment have a colour, in the sense that they are associated with the Black majority.

The end of the Second World War had a huge intellectual influence on the ushering in of Development Studies, due to the socio-economic challenges of many countries. Doctrine (associated with President Harry Truman) and the Marshall Plan were introduced to curtail the expansion of socialism around the world, in particular in Europe. The research agenda of Development Studies has focused on the introduction of anti-poverty strategies to promote economic development. Of late, Development Studies has been perceived by other researchers as a field of study that examines the Global South as a unity of analysis. I argue that the context of the post-Cold War era necessitated the growth of Development Studies, precisely because many political and business leaders around the world were grappling with the question of development. The first theoretical framework to emerge as an academic discourse during the Cold War was the modernisation model of development. Michel Foucault's (1969, 1978) theoretical framework of power and discourse reminds us that political complexities are understood by the public in relation to framing and are underpinned by the grand narrative.

Modernisation as a model of development did not rise to prominence as a unitary theory but as a development theory. Later in this article I will tease this and locate it within the context of development policy. The ontological and epistemological foundation of modernisation theory has been linked to Westernisation and marketisation. The ideological bias of development discourses has led to some conceptual crises in the field of Development Studies. Among other things, the scope of the field of Development Studies has always been a subject of debate regarding what exactly is covered by the field (Martinussen, 2004). In fact, one of my key arguments is that Development Studies does not have boundaries. Anyone with whatever qualification can undertake research in the name of development. Some academics have tended to strongly associate Development Studies with Economic Development. Paradoxically, other scholars trace the intellectual history of Development Studies from Sociology of Development as subset of Sociology. Political science and public administration have also had philosophical influences on the field of Development Studies in particular in areas that examine institutional performances of the state. Moreover, the concepts of deepening democracy and robust public participation within the field of Development Studies originate from both political science and public administration.

Neo-liberalism as a mainstream model of development and development theory has come under heavy criticism for falling short of getting rid of underdevelopment and addressing social ills such as inequality and poverty. Political economist Ben Fine (2001) argues that the

Bretton Woods institutions not only promoted market fundamentalism but also influenced the field of Development Studies to embrace neo-liberalism. He goes on to say that in the 1990s, there was a call by former chief economist of the World Bank (Joseph Stiglitz) for a paradigm shift of development by espousing a post-Washington Consensus. The idea of a post-Washington Consensus is all well and good; however, it has not been supported by all the great powers, including the United States as a superpower. This is because the concept of a post-Washington Consensus is associated with the Beijing Consensus, which is a Chinese model of development often attributed to the development state.

The field has ignited crucial debates on the decolonisation of scholarship. However, the mainstream narrative has dismissed these debates because they are seen as lacking universal applicability. The notion of universality in this context refers to Westernisation and modernisation. Edward Said (1978) foregrounded the intellectual framework of oriental (self) and occidental (other). According to him, discourses on the Global North are othering the Global South by looking down on its culture (lived experiences). This is the centrality of the thesis of Said's (1978) *Orientalism*: that the Western ontology perceives the Global South as underdeveloped while elevating itself as being superior and developed. Again, race still remains an important marker in the discourse of development in the field of Development Studies. The propagation of the discourse of us (the self) and them (the other) is still an expression of covert racism in the intellectual field of Development Studies. The next section elucidates my positionality in this article, coupled with the reasons for choosing it.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POST-DEVELOPMENT THEORY

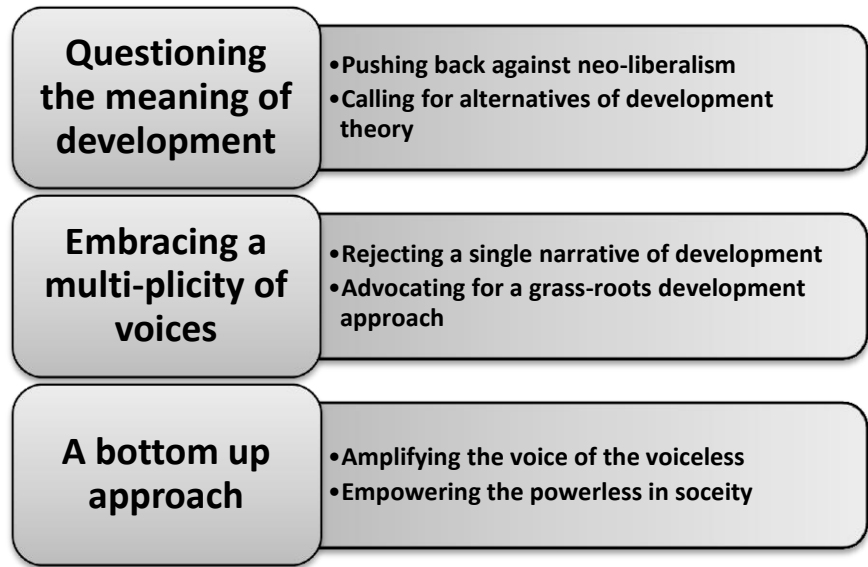
The purpose of this section is, among other things, to assert my standpoint theory. Post-development theory is useful in this article, owing to its critical stance on matters of development, in particular in Development Studies. There have been a number of discourses that have broken out in the second half of the 20th century surrounding the concept of development. More specifically, the debates and narratives emerged after the Second World War on how to promote development to the world, in particular in the Global South. At the heart of the discourse on development has been the emphasis from the Global North that the Global South has to adhere to the neoliberal model of development alongside modernisation theory. Former chief economist of the World

Bank, Joseph Stiglitz (2002), noted the failure of neoliberalism to promote development for the majority in post-colonial states.

Multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank have tended to impose a neoliberal approach to development on the Global South. Against this background, post-development theory as an intellectual tradition of development rose to prominence out of the debates from post-colonial states that the Global North is fundamentally different from the Global South, which creates a scope for a call for an approach to development that considers the history of the oppressed and underdevelopment.

Post-development theorist Arturo Escobar (1995), in his seminal work titled *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, calls for ‘pluriversal studies’ to foster development in the Global South. This means that there is a need for the multiplicity of voices on matters of development. Challenging the idea of divergent perspectives on development, it is suggested that a historical appreciation shows development is not universal. In addition, the workings of development differ from place to place and from situation to situation. The figure that follows showcases the key components of post-development theory.

1.1 Grassroots development approach



Post-development theorists argue that people at the grass-roots level are sidelined by policymakers because of a lack of consultation when 'development policy' is made. Again, these theorists hold the view that ordinary people on the ground need to take a stand and challenge the 'powers that be' on issues of development if these do not reflect their views. Arguments advanced by post-development theorists are supported by post-modernism and proponents of participatory development, namely that there are different possible paths to development. According to proponents of the post-development approach, development means different things to different people, and this is determined by the context in which people find themselves. For proponents of post-development theory, the participation of people at the grassroots level in development policy is crucial. Supporters of the post-development approach have a fundamental quarrel with the recent preoccupation with neo-liberalism as the mainstream development theory. Their argument is that neo-liberalism as a model of development does not improve the lives of the poorest of the poor on the ground. Scholars who are critical of the dominant paradigm of development in the social sciences are also called post-modernists (Willis, 2005:27–29; Haines, 2006:51; Breakfast and Phago, 2019). The following section explores the modernisation theory.

THE MODERNISATION MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT

There is a synergetic relationship between liberal democracy and modernisation theory. Modernisation theory, one of the early approaches to development, is normally associated with Arthur Lewis and Walter Rostow and came into prominence during the early 1960s. However, it must be noted that modernisation was not a unitary theory. It was a process and not just an economic event. Both of these development economists firmly believed that economic growth should be central to a society's development. They were of the view that the labour market in the traditional sector of the economy should be modernised in order to attract investment, and that economic growth would subsequently be expected to follow. Proponents of modernisation argue very strongly that Third World countries should follow the same development path as that followed by First World countries (Rostow, 1960:1–12).

Supporters of modernisation embrace the Darwinian theory of evolution in society. This implies that society is dynamic and not stagnant, meaning it should evolve over time. This reinforces the argument that culture should be subject to change. In the discourse on modernisation, there is emphasis on new technology and science in the modern world (to

promote development). Scholars of the modernisation school tend to blame political leaders in developing countries for misleading their people by implementing centrally planned economies such as socialism, as opposed to market-oriented economies (Rostow, 1960:1–12; Hyden, 1983:60–63; Martinussen, 2004:61).

According to these scholars, reliance on the state does not accelerate development but rather hinders the process from occurring, because they hold the view that socialism does not attract foreign direct investment. Advocates of political modernisation blame the internal dynamics in developing countries for a lack of development. Central to this diagnosis is corruption in developing countries, especially in Africa. Corruption is singled out, among other things, as one of the main causes of underdevelopment (Warren, 1980:45).

According to this school of thought, we should embrace Western standards of government such as bureaucracy, multi-party democracy, liberal democracy and a vibrant civil society. According to the political theory of modernisation, liberal democracy is the only path to development, because it protects the right to own private property or a business. Moreover, liberal democracy is perceived to promote free enterprise, which is supportive of capital and its maximisation of profit (Huntington, 1991:6). In his seminal work, titled *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama (1992:2–3) asserts that liberal democracy is the only political system that can unify different people globally and that liberal democracy, alongside free market system principles, has succeeded in promoting economic development in First World countries, including some aspects of impoverished developing countries. Both neoliberalism and modernisation have been criticised by a number of scholars for emphasising the dominance of the market while not changing the lives of poor people for the better.

Modernisation theory implies that developing countries are expected to follow the economic approaches embraced by Western countries. This concept features prominently within the neoliberal literature. Nonetheless, European countries, through multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, were misleading developing countries by telling them to open up their markets, while they themselves protected their own local markets. In trade relations, European governments are subsidising their own local farmers. These bilateral and multilateral trade agreements between the South and North are essentially unequal. This raises questions about the objectivity of modernisation theory regarding development in Third World countries. In the next section, I discuss an antithesis of the dependency theory.

DEPENDENCY THEORY/APPROACH

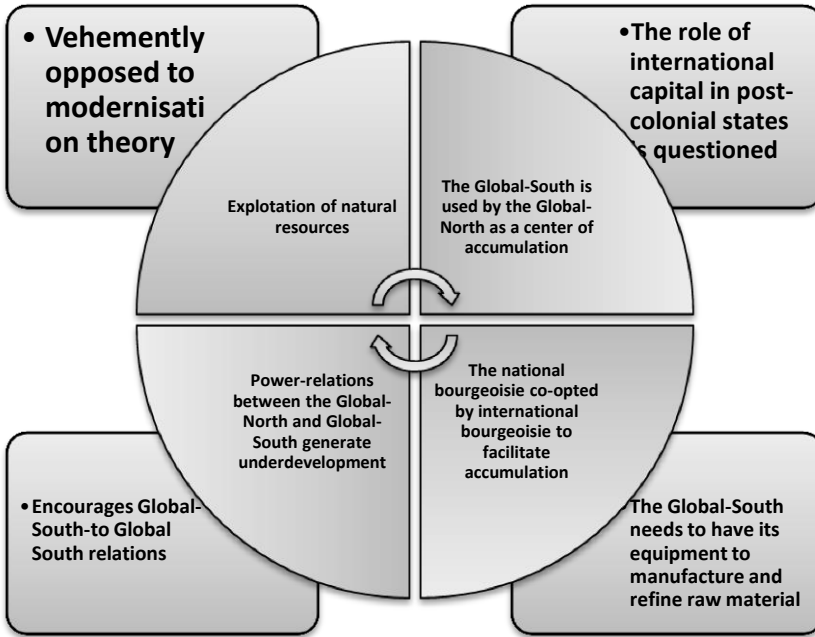
Dependency theory gained prominence as a political and economic reaction against modernisation following the Second World War. The critique on the power dynamics between the Global North and South regarding underdevelopment stemmed from a range of scholars, namely Paul Baran, Samin Amin and Andre Gunder Frank, among others. Dependency theory is a neo-Marxist-inspired theoretical framework. In his seminal work, *Crisis in the World Economy*, Andre Gunder Frank (1980) blames First World countries for the lack of development in less-developed countries. He goes on to say that developed countries are misleading developing countries by advising them to adopt capitalist economic policies that do not provide employment opportunities. He concludes by saying that 'in their view, unemployment has graduated from being merely normal to being natural as well; for business and certain politicians, unemployment has become not only natural but downright desirable. This being so, economists have had to catch up with the times (Frank, 1980:73).

Proponents of the dependency school blame international forces such as multi-national corporations for exploiting the resources of developing countries. They hold colonialism and post-colonial relations among First World countries responsible for the lack of development. These multilateral relationships are based on exploitation of the natural resources of developing countries. The root cause of underdevelopment in Third World countries is 'imperialist expansion' (Baran, 1957:1–5; Frank, 1969:318).

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (2006) argues that the international bourgeoisie appoints people in developing countries to manage their resources. He calls this particular class the 'comprador bourgeoisie', and, according to him, this class has a direct relationship with the 'international bourgeoisie'. He argues that the comprador bourgeoisie gets its instruction on how to manage the economies of developing countries from the international bourgeoisie (Wa Thiong'o, 2006:20). The economic exploitation between First World countries and Third World countries is made possible by distorting developing countries' economies to serve the interests of the developed countries of the North. Again, neo-imperialism undermines industrial production in developing countries, which are flooded with imports of cheap manufactured goods from First World countries, by insisting on the cheap export of raw materials. Proponents of the dependency theory criticise the architects of the modernisation school for misleading developing countries in that poverty alleviation can be achieved by following capitalist ideology (Baran, 1957:1–5; Frank, 1969:x; Amin,

1990:1–x). The following figure outlines the essential aspects of dependency theory:

1.2 Dependency theory



Regarding dependency theory, Bill Warren (1980:3–7) criticises the dependency school when he argues that this theory puts too great an ‘emphasis on external factors’ such as imperialism and that internal political factors in this regard are also to be blamed for underdevelopment in developing countries. Domestic factors in developing countries also include corruption, the abuse of state institutions and patronage (Jackson and Jackson, 1997:412). The main flaw of the dependency school of thought is that it over-emphasises the role of external forces. However, this does not mean that foreign capitalists are not also exploiting the resources of developing countries.

It should be borne in mind that public officials in Third World countries are to be singled out for causing underdevelopment by stealing public funds meant for development. These are some of the gaps of the dependency theory; the same goes for orthodox Marxism (which also has limitations on development). For instance, Anthony Giddens (1979:132) argues that Marxism is too reductionist in its approach in the sense that it focuses too heavily on ‘class analysis’ and that there is too much emphasis

on the conflict between the working class and capital. This implies that classical Marxism is too simplistic and ignores other complexities and contradictions in society. The next section examines the synergy between development theory and policy. However, there is a great deal of emphasis on development policy as a subset of development theory.

AN APPLICATION OF DEVELOPMENT THEORY: DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The main purpose of this section is to explain the theory behind development policy and its foundational principles. Among other things, this is also the focus of this study: to examine development theory and practice. An examination of development policy is also carried out to indicate the gaps in the discourse regarding the application of development theory later on in this section. Development policy can be seen to be a vague concept, largely because of different understandings and interpretations. It is a concept employed often in the field of development studies as opposed to the political science and public administration phraseology of public policy. On the one hand, the term refers to the operationalisation of development theory. On the other hand, development policy denotes the process of making a policy. However, in the context of this article, what is the meaning of the concept 'development policy'?

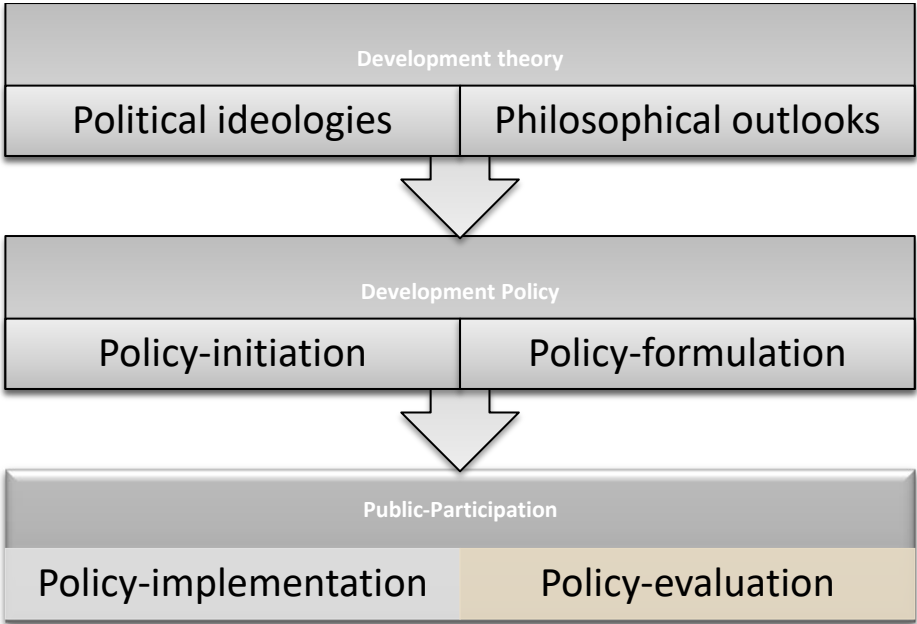
This question can be answered according to the following theorisation of development policy:

- Development policy should spell out clear objectives of the government of the day.
- Policymakers should identify a specific problem.
- Decision-makers must always explore a number of alternatives.
- This should take into account political, social and economic factors (Landsberg, 2005:6).

More specifically, development policy is a declaration of intentions and outlines the aims and guidelines of public policymakers. Hence, development policy is considered a road map because it outlines the goals and objectives policymakers wish to achieve in improving people's lives. In essence, therefore, a policy is understood to be an assertion of intent. The concept 'policy' is employed even within ostensibly governmental agencies to define several different activities, including (1) stating the aims of

government, (2) outlining key priorities, and (3) describing a framework (Swanepoel, 2000:87–88). The next figure explains the direct link between development theory and development policy.

1.3 The nexus between development theory and development policy



Government policies are meant to respond to socio-economic, political and cultural problems. All governments around the world operate within a social context. This means that development policy should focus on social problems social problems. It must not be meant to benefit a few individuals in society. Hyden (1983:12–17) argues that development policy is also underpinned by certain ideologies such as capitalism or socialism. Thus, development policy in its implementation is by and large influenced by the political elites as opposed to civil servants (Hyden, 1983). Development policy needs to be aimed at promoting development across the board. After all, the whole notion of development policy is about a government’s emphasis on development through a range of policies from the national to the local level.

The conceptualisation of 'development policy' is summarised as follows:

- Policy refers to the affirmation of goals that ought to be followed by an organisation to deal with a specific problem.
- Policy is a guideline that must be followed by individuals in an institution in order to promote the welfare of the people.
- Development policy states specific aims in a given situation and the technique to achieve them.
- Policy is an assertion of objectives and intentions related to a specific problem (Fox and Meyer, 1996:96).

Policy is clearly explained as a link between intentions, implementation and outcomes. Development policy indicates what the government of the day plans to achieve and the increasing efforts of implementation. A policy involves the acknowledgement of a specific problem. What is important in the development policy process is how a problem is conceptualised and how policymakers plan to address a specific problem (Anderson, 2019). This implies that those who are policymakers start by diagnosing a problem. Subsequently, all the stakeholders in society should be taken on board for detailed deliberations.

This is a procedure that should be followed in a democratic country; development policies must not be made without the active participation of its citizens. Politicians should uphold a democratic tradition. Political participation is the foundation of democracy. This contention is echoed by policy analyst Hanekom (1987) when he argues that public policies should reflect the 'public interest'. Public views can be expressed in different forms of public participation, such as writing letters to newspaper editors, voting in both general and local elections, imbizo meetings and public hearings. Public participation is an important element for enhancing political accountability and good governance. The idea of public participation also encompasses consultation before a public policy is made by policymakers. Therefore, public participation is at the core of democracy (Reich, 1990:124; Gildenhuis, 2004:104; Draai and Taylor, 2009:11; Masango, 2009:123; Edigheji, 2010:8–9).

Government policies are meant to promote the welfare of the people. Policy execution is a difficult process, and legal prescriptions, administrative context and the preferences of civil society must be brought on board. Policy execution, to a great extent, is shaped by the administrative guidelines of departments in achieving political objectives. The implementation of policy relates to specified objectives and the translation of the policies that emerge from the complex process of putting

decision-making into practice (Hanekom, 1987:55; Heywood, 2002: 406; Webb, 2002:33). In order for any government to achieve its intended objectives, it must have the capacity to implement its policies. This means that the human resource departments within the state machinery need to recruit the best candidates and not compromise on quality. Implementation is crucial in the policy process, as it puts all the intentions into practice. Myrdal (1968:186–189) argues that there are institutional factors characterised by corruption, incompetency, laziness and a lack of discipline within state machinery, which hamper development in society. According to Myrdal, due to a lack of work ethic in the public sector, these institutional tendencies affect the implementation of development policies that are meant to promote development (Myrdal, 1968).

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have explored the intellectual influence of the mainstream discourses on Development Studies. The focus was on the influence of Westernisation on debates of development. A case in point is the expectation of Western nations for post-colonial states to embrace modernisation theory. Furthermore, this article aimed to critically examine the strong link between development theory and policy. One of the strong points of Development Studies has been the notion of interdisciplinarity and multi-disciplinary approaches. Development Studies is able to pull different strengths of academic disciplines to address underdevelopment. Clearly, most societal problems demand multidisciplinary approaches. However, Development Studies has come under critical scrutiny for having ontological and epistemological assumptions of the production of knowledge which are inclined to the Western worldview or culture. Most of the time, Western ontology is presented uncritically by the scholarship of mainstream development studies.

Universalism is a smokescreen for the propagation and application of Western culture in post-colonial states. Moreover, Development Studies has been lambasted for failing to have a contextual understanding of matters of development. Scholars like Michel Foucault (1989), Edward Said (1978), Arturo Escobar (1995) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010) have questioned the concept of universality. Interestingly, the notion of development as informed by modernisation theory has been perceived to be a universal phenomenon. Clearly, universalism overlooks the historical, material and cultural factors of post-colonial states by decontextualising socio-economic conditions.

In this article, my central question was: Does the intellectual landscape of Development Studies critically reflect the material conditions of the Global South and apply contextual development theory and policy? In conclusion, Development Studies has been transformed to reflect different intellectual voices outside of Europe, in particular from the Global South. Development policies in post-colonial states are still inspired by a great deal of modernisation theory and neo-liberalism. The recent work by Murrey and Daley (2023) argues that intellectual efforts need to be intensified to transform how development is discussed in the field of Development Studies. They suggest a collective effort by the Global South to be driven by students, academics and civil society. Development studies needs to be a critical field that questions the matrix of power of oppression that elevates one culture over other cultures and erodes the context of the powerless.

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