

Liberation Ecology  
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## LIBERATION ECOLOGY

Development, sustainability,  
and environment in an age of  
market triumphalism

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Even society as a whole, a nation, or all existing societies put together, are not owners of the Earth. They are merely its occupants, its users; and like good caretakers, they must hand it down improved to subsequent generations.

(Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1)

In this world which is so respectful of economic necessities, no one really knows the real cost of anything which is produced. In fact the major part of the real cost is never calculated; and the rest is kept secret.

(Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*)

Driven by momentous political and economic changes and by apocalyptic visions of impending global ecological doom, the environmental question has returned to center stage, and with a vengeance (Turner *et al.* 1990; World Bank 1992). In the return of the repressed we frequently hear the language of "sustainability" and "sustainable development." The meanings of these terms are hotly contested (O'Connor 1994). But the new lexicon is so endemic it appears with as much frequency in the frothy promotional literature of the World Bank as in the rhetoric of the Sierra Club, the US military, or the myriads of Third World grassroots environmental and community movements. Whatever its semantic ambiguity, sustainability has the effect of linking three hitherto relatively disconnected discourses. It is now taken for granted that the *global environmental crisis*, and a renewed concern with *global demography* (the return of the Malthusian specter) are inseparable from the terrifying map of *global economic inequality* (Adams 1991; Lipietz 1988), from the devastating portrait of our times painted in the 1995 World Health Organization report in which poverty wields its destructive influence at every stage of human life. In sharp contrast to the 1960s, even conventional views confirm that eradicating poverty through enhancing and protecting livelihood strategies is as much an environmental sustainability issue and a fertility question (in which women's employment and

education figures centrally) as a "simple" asset or resource endowment question (World Bank 1992).

This new emphasis on nature–society relations in the context of concerns over the growing polarity of world income (UNDP 1992) has its genesis in a distinctive *fin de siècle* intellectual and political-economic atmosphere. First, the *collapse of many actually existing socialisms* and the rise of a neo-liberal hegemony in policy circles signals, for many, the exhaustion, if not the extinction, of socialist and, in many cases, import substitution or welfarist models of development. Second, there is a *resurgence of environmentalist concerns articulated explicitly in global terms* (e.g. global climate change, ozone depletion) as the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio made clear. Global ecology and the discourse of global environmental management and governance, however, is attached to a renewal of the old debate over the specter of Malthusian overpopulation (World Bank 1992), though the UN Cairo Population Conference in 1994, unlike earlier conferences, revealed a new sensitivity to the plight of women in population planning. And, third, *the rise of political ecology*, which offered a powerful Marxist-influenced analysis of resource use and environmental conservation during the 1970s and early 1980s (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987) is increasingly shaped, prodded, and challenged by wide-ranging debates within social and development theory. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of loosely related theoretical ideas embracing post-Marxist, action-research oriented, and poststructuralist ideas contributed to "a renewed interest in the diversity of development experience" (Booth 1995: xiii). This vibrant body of work challenges the ostensibly modernist and Eurocentric character of development itself, positing in its place various "alternatives to development" (Escobar 1995; Sachs 1993) and a kind of postmodern discourse on development (Slater 1992). Indeed, poststructural concerns with knowledge–power, institutions and regimes of truth, and cultural difference have proven compelling in the rethinking of both development theory and political ecology, as this book testifies.

Located on this expansive canvas of intellectual and political-economic ferment, *Liberation Ecologies* explores, through a series of rich case studies drawn from Latin America, Africa, East, Southeast, and South Asia, the current debates over development and the environment. In choosing this title we seek to emphasize a number of concerns. Obviously we wish to mark the potential liberatory or emancipatory potential of current political activity around environment and resources. However, we also wish to signal the fact that the proliferation of environmental concerns linked to questions of development has other profound theoretical and practical consequences. One is that the politics of the environment seem to embrace a wide terrain including not just new social movements, but transnational environmental alliances and networks, multilateral governance through, for example, the Global Environmental Facility of the World Bank, and a sensitivity to a panoply of local conflicts and resistances that may not warrant the term "movement." Another is that theories about environment and

development – political ecology in its various guises – have been pushed and extended both by the realities of the new social movements themselves, and by intellectual developments associated with discourse theory and poststructuralism. These exciting new developments – many of which appear in the chapters which follow – represent for us the possibility of a *more robust political ecology which integrates politics more centrally, draws upon aspects of discourse theory which demand that the politics of meaning and the construction of knowledge be taken seriously, and engages with the wide-ranging critique of development and modernity particularly associated with Third World intellectuals and activists such as Vandana Shiva, Arturo Escobar, and Victor Toledo. Liberation Ecologies highlights, in other words, new theoretical engagements between political ecology and poststructuralism on the one hand, and a practical political engagement with new movements, organizations, and institutions of civil society challenging conventional notions of development, politics, democracy, and sustainability on the other.*

Our introduction is structured around three broad themes which link environment–development theory and the particular conditions of the 1980s and 1990s outlined so far. The first is political ecology itself – that is to say the efforts begun in the 1980s to "combine the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy . . . [which] encompasses the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources" (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987: 17). This leads to a discussion of how political ecology may be extended through poststructural critiques of Western reason and discourse theory. Second, we examine the lineaments of this turn to poststructuralism and discourse in general, but with particular reference to development theory (what we call "mapping" development discourse). Finally, we turn to environmental politics, and specifically ideas on social movements and other political forms which are struggles for livelihood but nonetheless are ecological "insofar as they express objectives in terms of ecological requirements for life" (Martinez-Alier 1990: 7).

### POLITICAL ECOLOGY: A DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE FOR THE 1990s?

Twenty-five years after the first stirrings of Earth Day, Spaceship Earth, and a worldwide environmental awareness, it is clear that environmentalism – now couched in the language of sustainability – is back on the political agenda. Some nineteen green parties are active in a dozen West European states, environmental movements dot the landscape of the former socialist bloc, and the link between ecology and Third World poverty has been sealed in such unthreatening and centrist documents as the *1987 Brundtland Commission Report* and the Rio Declaration of 1992. It is tempting to see this proliferation of green politics as history repeating itself, but the current conjuncture is quite different from that of the 1960s and early 1970s. First, the restructuring of capitalism in the North Atlantic economies has radically transformed the regulatory environment, while

new institutional forms of globalization and market integration (WTO, NAFTA), coupled with new and more destructive technologies and substances in a climate of aggressive deregulation in privatized economies, suggests a quite different world from 1969. Second, the growth of peripheral Fordism and high rates of industrial growth in some of the new industrializing states (Brazil, Korea, Taiwan) has exacted a heavy environmental toll, while the terrifying environmental record in the former "socialist" bloc is now slowly becoming public knowledge (Feshbach and Friendly 1992). Indeed, there is a profound sense in which the very crisis of socialism itself was precipitated by serious environmental and resource problems generated by the economics of shortage. And, third, the recognition of new long-term catastrophic *global* tendencies (global warming, ozone depletion, biogenetic hazards) has spawned new efforts at multilateral and transnational institutional regulation and governance: witness UNCED in Rio, the Montreal protocols on climate change, and the efforts to green GATT (Esty 1994; Sand 1995).

The intellectual firmament of the last fifteen years is also markedly different from that of the first environmental wave of the 1960s, which was dominated by Darwinian or Malthusian thinking and simple organic analogies. Perhaps the most important line of recent social scientific thinking about environment and development is "political ecology." The term can be traced with some certainty to the 1970s when it emerged as a response to the theoretical need to integrate land-use practice with local-global political economy (Wolf 1972) and as a reaction to the growing politicization of the environment (Cockburn and Ridgeway 1979). Subsequently taken up by geographers, anthropologists, and historians (Bryant 1991), it is perhaps most closely associated with Blaikie (1985) and Blaikie and Brookfield (1987). In their view, political ecology combines the concerns of ecology with "a broadly defined political economy" (1987: 17): accordingly environmental problems in the Third World, for example, are less a problem of poor management, overpopulation, or ignorance, as of social action and political-economic constraints. Standing at the center of Blaikie and Brookfield's political ecology is the "land manager" whose relationship to nature must be considered in "a historical, political and economic context" (1987: 239).

Political ecology is part of a larger body of work which had its origins in the critique of ecological anthropology and "cultural ecology" in the late 1970s (Watts 1983). This earlier theory gained currency during the first wave of the post-war environmental movement in the late 1960s, and drew attention to the adaptive capacities of indigenous societies both in the efficacy of their "cognized models" of the local environment (for example, farmers in the Ivory Coast possessed a sophisticated understanding of local soil conditions and botanical relations), and in their *structural similarities* to all biological populations and living systems. Rappaport's (1967) classic account of the role of ritual pig killing among the Tsembaga Maring in local environmental regulation of fragile tropical ecosystems was a model of this ethnographically rich "systems thinking" about human adaptation to the environment. Culture – for example ritual practices or social structure – was seen to function as a homeostat or regulator with respect

to environmental stability. These studies took concepts derived from ecological theory or cybernetics and applied them directly to the sphere of social life; peasant societies were adaptive systems just like any other biological population, and culture was posited as an ecologically functional attribute of the evolutionary demands of the environment. Societies were closed homeostatic systems populated, as Jonathan Friedmann caustically observed, by "cybernetic savages." Typically working in rural and agrarian Third World societies, cultural ecologists nonetheless unearthed important data on local ethnoscientific knowledges and the relations between cultural practices and resource management – something which has re-emerged in the current concern with indigenous technical knowledge and the activities of the Center for Indigenous Knowledge for Agriculture and Rural Development in The Hague – but typically placed these in an overarching regulatory structure derived from the cybernetic and self-correcting properties of closed living systems. Many societies studied were actually part of large, complex, open political economies and it was precisely this openness – in short, market and state involvements of various sorts – which in many cases seemed to undermine, or be in contradiction with, the ideas of equilibrium and homeostasis on which geographers and anthropologists had drawn (Nietschmann 1973).

By the late 1970s, propelled by the appeal of Marxism and political economy and the proliferation of a radical peasant studies literature which privileged production over biological relations, ecologically concerned social scientists attempted to weld together the compelling questions of how communities were being integrated into, and transformed by, a global economy ("economic change") with local resource management and environmental regulation and stability (Grossman 1984; Watts 1983). During the 1980s, this attempt at synthesis met a second phase of environmental activism (the rise of the green movements worldwide) and a recognition of the deepening *global* human-induced modifications of the environment in part driven by the rapid industrialization of parts of the South and a renewed institutional concern with the consequences of high rates of demographic growth especially in Africa, South Asia, and parts of the Middle East (Meyer and Turner 1992). Forged in the crucible of Marxian or neo-Marxian development theory, this new "political ecology" was not inspired by the isolated rural communities studied by Rappaport but by peasant and agrarian societies in the throes of complex forms of capitalist transition. Market integration, commercialization, and the dislocation of customary forms of resource management – rather than adaptation and homeostasis – became the lodestones of a critical alternative to the older cultural or human ecology.

#### Political ecology and its limits

Environmental degradation is created... by the rational response of the poor households to changes in the physical, economic and social circumstances in which they define their survival strategies.

(de Janvry and Garcia 1988: 3)

and the sense of "equilibrium" ecology.

If political ecology reflects a confluence between ecologically rooted social science and the principles of political economy, its theoretical coherence nonetheless remains in question. A broad and wide-ranging approach, encompassing the work of such diverse scholars as Susanna Hecht, Harold Brookfield, Anna Bramwell, Susan Stonich, Michael Redclift, and Ram Guha, political ecology seems grounded less in a coherent theory as such than in similar areas of inquiry (cf. Bryant 1992 who specifically identifies contextual sources of ecological change, questions of access, and political ramifications of environmental alteration; see also Bramwell 1989). Some of the tensions and heterogeneities within the approach are reflected in Blaikie and Brookfield's (1987) key text *Land Degradation and Society*. The authors raise a number of important issues including the social origins of degradation, the plurality of perceptions and definitions of ecological problems, the need to focus on the land manager (and his/her opportunities and constraints), and the pressure of production on resources.

Land Degradation and Society contains three broad motifs which turn on the relation between poverty and degradation. The first is the concept of marginality and how political, economic, and ecological marginality can be self-reinforcing:

- ① "land degradation" as they say "is both a cause and a result of social marginalization" (1987: 23).
- ② Second, the pressure of production on resources is transmitted to the environment through social relations which compel the land manager to make excessive demands ("the pressure of deprivation" as they call it). And finally, in keeping with poststructuralism, they acknowledge that the facts of degradation are contested, and that there will always be multiple perceptions (and explanations) – one person's degradation is another's soil fertility. All of this amounts to a radical critique of the pressure-of-population-on-resources view of environment and points to the need for a rethinking of both conservation and development.

Blaikie and Brookfield's important intervention represents within geography, and social theory more generally, a sophisticated extension of previous efforts to integrate questions of access and control over resources – relations of production as realms of possibility and constraint – with human ecology. But there are also complementarities between the ideas in *Land Degradation and Society* and those of other social theorists working on questions of ecological crisis and rehabilitation. Like the work of Little and Horowitz (1987), regional political ecology focuses on the producer and ecological pressure points; it shares with Redclift (1987) an emphasis on the contradictions of development; and with Jane Collins (1987) a sensitivity to the social causes of degradation and the need for a rethinking of development itself. Like Bunker's (1985) Amazonian study, Blaikie and Brookfield employ a regional analysis sensitive to spatial variation and environmental heterogeneity; like Perrings (1987) they raise the suggestion that the market-price system as a means to regulate the environment is limited by the time perspectives of economic agents under capitalism and by the presence of uncertainty. And not least they share with Martinez-Alier and Schlupepmann

(1987) a belief that value in land (what Blaikie and Brookfield call "landesque capital") is inconsistent with both neo-classical economic theory and Marx's labor theory of value.

Collectively this body of work has punched a huge hole in the pressure-of-population-on-resources view, and the market distortion or mismanagement explanation of degradation. In their place it has affirmed the centrality of poverty as a major cause of ecological deterioration (de Janvry and Garcia 1988; Martinez-Alier 1990; Mellor 1988; see Blaikie and Brookfield 1987: 48). This represents an important advance in our thinking about nature-society relations but it nonetheless requires a much greater refinement, and an explicit theorization which is typically lacking because of political ecology's frequent appeal to plurality. What then are some of the limits and weaknesses of the political ecology that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s?

First, those who place an undue emphasis on poverty and poor peasants must recognize that impoverishment is no more a cause of environmental deterioration than its obverse, namely affluence/capital. Hecht and Cockburn (1989) make this point with respect to the rates of deforestation in the Amazon basin. The danger is to neglect the obvious power of capital as a material force in degradation and, as a consequence, come close to blaming the victim albeit in terms of the situational rationality of the land manager who is compelled to mine the soil or fell the forest. Second, the focus on poverty is perhaps not unrelated to the bias toward rural, agrarian, and Third World matters in *Land Degradation and Society*, and indeed in political ecology more generally (a bias which this book reinforces in part!). How, for example, might poverty or political ecology help explain worker injuries in the maquila plants in northern Mexico, toxic dumping in Nigeria, or urban water pollution in Turin? And, third, Blaikie and Brookfield privilege land – with good reason in view of its special significance in largely agrarian Third World states – as opposed to other "resources." The point we emphasize is that a poverty-centered analysis is, as the authors concede, only part of the story: there are other stories to tell of worker health and safety, air pollution, the decay of Third World cities, and of the restructuring of capitalism, and so on. The extent to which this partiality is of any analytical consequence rests, of course, on the theory which grants to poverty its causal powers.

Poverty, then, is at best only a proximate cause of environmental deterioration. In other words, one has to have a theory capable of explaining how the poverty of specific land managers is reproduced through determinate structures and by specific relations of production. Blaikie and Brookfield move some way toward this goal by isolating production but in an extremely diffuse and inconsistent way. Specifically, they invoke marginalization (which is an awkward label for several complex and contradictory processes) and an absence of control over resources. In short they make the land manager, and occasionally the production unit, the fulcrum, trapped within complex webs of relations, all held together by a political economy which, in a rather unhelpful way, is lumped together as "exogenous" (1987: 70). These exogenous, and largely untheorized, inputs into

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the political ecology decision-making model (i.e. how and why the land manager acts) purportedly explain declines in land quality, a process which, according to Blaikie and Brookfield, *only* elicits three responses: perception correction, "change the social data," and migration. In short, a very broad and untheorized exogenous cause seems deterministically to produce quite specific outcomes; which is hardly the sort of dialectical analysis that they themselves suggest should be on offer.

In spite of the fact that Blaikie and Brookfield talk of the selection of strategic factors which have causal power, we are not given a theory which helps us in the act of selection. Rather we are provided with "a chain of explanation" (one begins with the Nepalese farmers and ends with Nepal's relationship to India) in which there is no sense how or why some factors become causes. Coupled with their emphasis on plurality, the authors actually produce not "a theory which allows for . . . and identifies complexity" (1987: 239), but an extremely diluted, diffuse, and on occasion voluntarist series of explanations. Degradation can arise under falling, rising, or stable population pressures, under an upswing or downswing in the rural economy, under labor surplus and labor shortage; in sum, under virtually *any* set of conditions. The best that Blaikie and Brookfield provide is what they call a "conjunctural" explanation which seems to operate under all empirical circumstances.

Despite their claims for theory construction and the importance of social structural antecedents, Blaikie and Brookfield actually present an *ad hoc* and frequently voluntarist view of degradation. Political ecology is radically pluralist and largely without politics or an explicit sensitivity to class interest and social struggle. Yet any analysis of land-based resources must surely confront and incorporate politics inscribed in various social arenas: familial-patriarchal, production-labor process, and the state (Burawoy 1985). Politics must be central to political ecology in order to give the bare bones of "poverty" some sort of flesh if it is to be employed analytically. Political ecology comes closest to theory when it invokes surplus extraction and yet the authors on occasion seem more inclined to abandon theory altogether. Rather than outlining an explicit theory of production or political economy and an arsenal of middle-level concepts, Blaikie and Brookfield only provide a plurality of disconnected linkages and levels. Hence their discussion of degradation in socialist economies can only conclude that it exists, and cannot offer any insights into the question they pose, namely "is there a distinctive socialist environmental management?" (1987: 208), which presupposes a theorization of socialist political economy.

In short, political ecology's conception of political economy appears fuzzy ("almost every element in the world economy," 1987: 68) and diffuse. Their emphasis on plurality comes perilously close to voluntarism while their chains of explanation seem incapable of explaining how some factors become causes. Particularly striking is the fact that *political ecology* has very little *politics* in it (an issue which a number of chapters in this book take on – especially Chapters 4, 9 and 10 by Bebbington, Schroeder and Suryanata, and Rangan). There is no

serious attempt at treating the means by which control and access of resources or property rights are defined, negotiated, and contested within the political arenas of the household, the workplace, and the state.

These lacunae in Blaikie and Brookfield's book, coupled with its broad interdisciplinary focus, have pushed the field of political ecology in a number of important and interesting directions. In our view, these developments have been driven by a dialogue with a larger intellectual environment – ideas drawn from poststructuralism, gender theory, critical theories of science, environmental history, and Marxist political economy – and by the realities of a panoply of ecological movements and struggles throughout the Third World and in post-socialist transitional states. No attempt is made here to review this burgeoning field of political ecology – indeed many of these concerns are raised directly by chapters in this book – but rather we point to several fruitful avenues for debate and empirical exploration. It is striking, nonetheless, how political ecology has, from its inception, wrestled with the way management questions – whether in the form of regulatory apparatuses, local knowledge systems, new community or resource-user groups – must occupy an important space in civil society. As we suggest on our map of development discourse (see Table 1.1), political ecology, like much of development theory in the 1990s, also seems to be increasingly concerned with institutions and organizations in the context of shifting configurations of state and market roles.

#### New directions, new questions

A number of loosely configured areas of scholarship have extended the frontiers of political ecology and have elaborated and developed the important work of Blaikie, Brookfield and others. The first attempts to refine political economy within the ambit of political ecology: in other words to make the causal connections between the logics and dynamics of capitalist growth and specific environmental outcomes rigorous and explicit. Some of the most exciting new work centers on efforts at explicitly re-theorizing political economy and environment at several different levels. At the philosophical level there are debates over Marxism and ecology (Benton 1989; Grundemann 1991; see also Leff 1995) and whether the labor process is compatible with eco-regulation and the notion of biological limits. The work of James O'Connor (1988) and the journal *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism (CNS)* starts from the "second contradiction of capitalism." In this view Marx identifies production conditions (nature, labor power, and communal conditions of production) which capital cannot produce for itself as commodities. The state mediates, and hence politicizes, conflicts around these conditions (environmental movements, feminism, and social movements) in an effort at maintaining capitalist accumulation. Many contributions to *CNS* explore these ideas in various parts of the Third World. Also there are attempts at harnessing specific concepts drawn from political economy as a way of linking the two structures of nature and society. For example how the simple

reproduction squeeze compels self-exploitation among peasants who mine the soil; or how functional dualism can facilitate labor migration which undermines local conservation or constrains sustainable herding practices (Faber 1992; Garcia Barrios and Garcia Barrios 1990; Little and Horowitz 1987; Stonich 1989; Toulmin 1992; Watts 1987). Much remains to be done, however, in theorizing the specific dynamics of actually existing socialisms and the environment (Herskovitz 1993). Here, of course, the devastating ecological consequences of socialist political economy must be located not with respect to markets and profit but in relation to what Janos Kornai calls "the economics of shortage," that is to say the complementary and contradictory rationalities of centralized state planning (and its attachments to industrial gigantism and heavy goods) on the one hand, and the reciprocities and networks at the enterprise level on the other.

(2) x A second broad thrust questions the absence of a serious treatment of politics in political ecology. Efforts at integrating political action – whether everyday resistance, civic movements, or organized party politics – into questions of resource access and control have proven especially fruitful (Broad 1993; Kirby 1990). At the household management level, several studies focus on gender and domestic politics and struggles around the environment (Agarwal 1992; Guha 1990; MacKenzie 1991; see also Chapters 8 and 9 by Carney and Schroeder and Suryanata in this volume) specifically focused on property rights, labor, and the micro-politics of access and control within the domestic sphere. At other levels of analysis – the state, interstate, and multilateral institutions, and local, i.e. community level resource control – important new work has forged analytical links between power relations, institutions, and environmental regulation and ecological outcomes. Rich's book on the World Bank (1994) and more generally the ecological establishment, Peter Hass's studies of transnational scientific communities (1993) – epistemic communities in his lexicon – and international environmental agreements, Peter Sand's (1995) analysis of post-UNCED legal frameworks, all illustrate David Harvey's suggestion that "control over resources of others in the name of planetary health [and] sustainability . . . is never too far from the surface of many western proposals for global environmental management" (1993: 25). Peluso's brilliant study (1993a) links the historiography of criminality with everyday resistance to show how state power and forest management institutions are contested by Indonesian peasants, and raises the larger issues of the colonial legacy and of coercive patterns of conservation. In subsequent work on Kenya, Peluso shows how the militarization of environmental and resource conservation can be legitimated by international conservation groups (Peluso 1993b). What is at stake here is the more general question of participation, community rights, and local needs in environmental protection and conservation strategies (Utting 1994). Finally, the emancipatory potential which unites nature with social justice is a key theme in the emerging body of work on the ecology of the poor (Broad 1993; Gadgil and Guha 1992; Hecht and Cockburn 1989; Martinez-Alier 1990) and in the large body of work on Indian environmental movements (see *IICQ* 1992). Contained within this work

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is a sensitivity to the panoply of political forms – movements, domestic struggles over property and rights, contestations within state bureaucracies – and the ways in which claims are made, negotiated, and contested.

A third focus is the complex analytical and practical association of political ecology and the institutions of civil society. The growth of environmental movements largely unregulated by, and distinct from, the state poses sharply the question of the relations between civil society and the environment. There are two obvious facets of these relations, both of which have received some attention. The first is the origins, development, and trajectories of the environmental associations and organizations (see Escobar 1995; Ghai 1992; *Socialist Review* 1992). What are the spaces within which these movements develop and how, if at all, do they articulate with other organizations and resist the predations of the state (see Bebbington and Moore, Chapters 4 and 6 in this volume)? The second draws on the substantial literature on local knowledges and ecological populisms (Richards 1985; Warren 1991). The concern is not simply a salvage operation – recovering disappearing knowledges and management practices – but rather a better understanding of both the regulatory systems in which they inhere (see the literature on common property, Ostrom 1990) and the conditions under which knowledges and practices become part of alternative development strategies. In this latter sense we return to the politics of political ecology but more directly to the institutional and regulatory spaces in which the knowledges and practices are encoded, negotiated, and contested (see Bebbington and Jarosz, Chapters 4 and 7 in this volume) and ultimately to the relation between democracy and environmentally sound livelihoods.

A fourth theme employs discursive approaches to tackle head on Blaikie and Brookfield's point about the plurality of perceptions and definitions of environmental and resource problems. Several new lines of thinking are important. One draws upon the critical studies of science as a way of exploring the politics of what one might call "regulatory knowledge"; why particular knowledges are privileged, how knowledge is institutionalized, and how the facts are contested. Beck's (1994) work on risk and reflexive modernization, and Shrader-Frechette's (1990) work on risk and rationality are important illustrations of this sort of research. Another line of thinking traces the history of particular institutions – say forestry – and how particular knowledges and practices are produced and reproduced over time (Sivaramakrishnan 1995; Rangan, Chapter 10 in this volume). The genesis and transmission of conservation ideas, and the institutions of national parks and their management, have been explored productively in this way (Beinart and Coates 1995; Grove 1993; Neumann 1992). Another line of work examines the globalization of environmental discourse and the new languages and institutional relations of global environmental governance and management. Taylor and Buttel (1992), for example, trace the moral and technocratic ways in which the new global discourse on the environment is privileged, and how in the formulation of environmental science some courses of action are facilitated over others.

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The question of doing environmental history represents a fifth aspect of an invigorated political economy (in this regard see the new journal *Environmental History* edited by Richard Grove). In providing much-needed historical depth to political ecology, environmental historians raise important theoretical and methodological questions for the study of long-term environmental change. The obvious theoretical contrasts between Worster (1977), Merchant (1993), and Cronon (1992) point to an extraordinary heterogeneity in the field. Contained within each is the idea of writing alternative histories from the perspective of long-term ecosystemic changes which cannot be captured with the clumsy unilinear models of agricultural and environmental change. The relations between agrarian intensification and the environment are rarely so simple. Tiffen and Mortimore's (1994) study of Machakos District in Kenya shows how population increased five-fold between 1930 and 1990 but the environmental status actually improved over the same period. Soil structure improved and even woodfuel was sustained. Similarly Fairhead and Leach (1994), working in Sierra Leone, locate forest quality and biodiversity in the influence of past land-use practices. Like new work on Amazonia and South Africa, they show how habitation and cultivation can improve soil and support denser woodlands. As they put it, "vegetation patterns are the unique outcomes of particular histories not predictable divergences from characteristic climaxes" (1994: 483). In a sense the new environmental historians meet on the same ground as a quite different intellectual tradition, derived from the so-called agrarian question (cf. Kautsky 1906), which attempts to chart the ways in which the biological character of agriculture shapes the trajectories of capitalist development (Kloppenber 1989). Opportunities for exploring the long-term capitalization of nature through "appropriation" and "substitution" (Goodman *et al.* 1990; O'Connor 1994), and their environmental ramifications, can, and should be, readily seized by political ecologists.

Finally, there is the much-needed interrogation of the term "ecology" in political ecology and the extent to which political ecology is harnessed to a rather outdated view of ecology rooted in stability, resilience, and systems theory (Zimmerer 1994). Botkin (1990) and Worster (1977), among others, describe the relatively new ecological concepts which pose problems for the theory and practice of political ecology. The shift from 1960s systems models to the ecology of chaos, that is to say chaotic fluctuations, disequilibria, and instability, suggests that many previous studies of range management or soil degradation resting on simple notions of stability, harmony, and resilience may have to be rethought (Zimmerer 1994). The new ecology is especially sensitive to rethinking space-time relations to understand the complex dynamics of local environmental relations in the same way that the so-called dialectical biologists (Levins and Lewontin 1985) rethink the evolutionary dynamics of biological systems. Notwithstanding Worster's (1977) warning that disequilibria can easily function as a cover for legitimating environmental destruction, some of the work on agro-ecology (Altieri and Hecht 1990; Gleissman 1990; see also Zimmerer, Chapter 5

in this volume) suggests that the rethinking of ecological science can be effectively deployed in understanding the complexities of local management (for example in intercropping and pest management).

All of these new directions are not necessarily of a theoretical piece, and it remains to be seen where the conceptual confluences and tensions will arise within the political ecology of the 1990s. What is striking, however, is the extent to which *these new directions attempt to engage political ecology with certain ideas and concepts derived from poststructuralism and discourse theory.* There is in other words an extraordinary vitality within the field reflecting the engagements within and between political economy, the power-knowledge field, and critical approaches to ecological science itself. As a shorthand we refer to these confluences and engagements as "liberation ecology." The implication in this notation is to recognize the emancipatory potential of what we will call the "environmental imaginary" and to begin to chart the ways in which natural as much as social agency can be harnessed to a sophisticated treatment of science, society, and environmental justice. Of course, a major site of such engagement is in the analysis of social and environmental movements, a field which draws together the explosive growth of organizations and civic movements around sustainability with an implicit critique (and an alternative vision) of "development." It is to the philosophical and social theoretical underpinnings of development and the environmental imaginary that we now turn.

## DISCOURSE, RATIONALITY, AND DEVELOPMENT

*Cogito ergo sum.*

(Descartes)

Poststructural theory's fascination with discourse originates in its rejection of modern conceptions of truth. In modern philosophy truth resides in the exact correspondence between an externalized reality and internal mental representations of that reality. Enlightenment philosophy considered all minds to be structurally similar, truths to be universal, and knowledge potentially the same for everyone. By comparison, following the philosophers Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey, the postmodern theorist Rorty (1979: 171) argues that the notion of knowledge as representation should be abandoned in favor of knowledge without foundations: "knowledge as a matter of conversation and of social practice, rather than as an attempt to mirror nature." For Foucault (1972, 1973, 1980; Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982; Rabinow 1986), similarly, each society has a *regime of truth*, with control of the "political economy of truth" constituting part of the power of the great political and economic apparatuses: these diffuse "truth," particularly in the modern form of "scientific discourse," through societies, in a process infused with social struggles. In the poststructural view, then, truths are statements within socially produced discourses rather than objective "facts" about reality.

## Discourse theory

\* A "discourse" is an area of language use expressing a particular standpoint and related to a certain set of institutions. Concerned with a limited range of objects, a discourse emphasizes some concepts at the expense of others. Significations and meanings are integral parts of discourses just as, for example, the meaning of words depends on where a statement containing them is made (Macdonell 1986: 1-4). Hence for Barnes and Duncan (1992: 8) discourses are "frameworks" that embrace particular combinations of narratives, concepts, ideologies and signifying practices, each relevant to a particular realm of social action. Discourses vary among what are often competing, even conflicting, cultural, racial, gender, class, regional, and other differing interests, although they may uneasily coexist within relatively stable ("hegemonic") discursive formations.

\* Discourse theory came to prominence in the context of the critique of Western rationality. Horkheimer and Adorno (1991) found European rationality liberating at the cost of political alienation. Foucault (1980: 54) found Western rationality's claim to universal validity to be "a mirage associated with economic domination and political hegemony." But as Young (1990: 9) points out, the French poststructural philosophical tradition is concerned particularly with the relation between the universal truth claims of the Enlightenment and the universal power claims of European colonialism; the new critical stress on this relation has stimulated a "relentless anatomization of the collusive forms of European knowledge." Hence Derrida (1971: 213) says: "the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own *logos*, that is, the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason." In this view, then, Enlightenment reason is a regional logic supporting, reflecting, and justifying a history of global supremacy rather than a universal path to absolute truth. Reason, in a word, is ideological.

\* This critique of truth and re-emphasis on discourses of power when projected into space produces a new approach to inter-regional relations, among other things focused on the discursive relations between hegemonic and dominated regions. Said (1979: 2) argues that "the Orient" helped define Europe as its contrasting image (i.e. as "its other"); "Orientalism" is a "mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrine, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles" through which European culture was able to "produce" the Orient (politically, imaginatively, etc.) in the post-Enlightenment period. Because the Orientalist discourse limits thought, the Orient was not, and is not, a free subject of thought or action. Vico observed that humans make their own history based on what they know; extending this to geography, Said finds localities, regions, geographical sectors like Orient and Occident, to be humanly "made." Subsequent work extends this notion of "discourses on the other" to a whole history of the different European conceptions ("science fictions") of "alien cultures" (Hulme 1986; McGrane 1989; Todorov 1984). For Bhabha (1983a, 1983b: 19), conversely, representations of the Orient in

Western discourse evidence profound ambivalence towards "that otherness which is at once an object of dislike and derision." Colonial discourse, for him, is founded more on anxiety than arrogance, and colonial power has a conflictual economy – hence colonial stereotyping of subject peoples is complex, ambivalent, contradictory representational form, as anxious as it is assertive. So, for example, in an analysis of mimicry, Bhabha (1984) argues that when colonized people become "European" the resemblance is both familiar and menacing to the colonists, subverting their identities. The hybrid that articulates colonial and native knowledges may reverse the process of domination as repressed knowledges enter subliminally, enabling subversion, intervention, and resistance (Bhabha 1984). Similarly for Baudet (1965: vii): "the European's images of non-European man are not primarily, if at all, descriptions of real people, but rather projections of his own nostalgia and feelings of inadequacy."

One complex, controversial, and very much unresolved issue is whether discourse theory can recover the voices of colonized peoples. Something like this is the aim of the "subaltern studies group" (Guha and Spivak 1988). Guha's (1983: 2-3) original position was that colonial historiography denied the peasant recognition as a subject of history. Acknowledging peasants as makers of rebellion means attributing to them a consciousness (cf. Gramsci 1971: 53). Guha tries to identify the (recurring) elementary aspects in such a rebel consciousness, his main theme being that the peasant's subaltern identity includes an imposed negative consciousness from which, however, revolt often derives from inversion (as with the fight for prestige). Spivak (1987: 206-7) however sees the subaltern studies group's attempt to retrieve a subaltern or peasant consciousness as a strategic adherence to the essentialist and humanist notions of the Enlightenment. As long as such Western, modernist notions of subjectivity and consciousness are left unexamined, the subaltern will be narrativized in what appear to be theoretically alternative but politically similar ways (MacCabe 1987: xv). Spivak's alternative involves the structural notion of subject-positions, in which the "subject," for example of a statement, is not the immediate author but "a particular, vacant place that may in fact be filled by different individuals" (Foucault 1972: 95; see also Foucault 1980: 196-7). Here Spivak seeks to reinscribe the many, often contradictory, subject-positions assigned by multiple colonial relations of control and insurgency, so that a subaltern woman, for example, is subjected to three main domination systems, class, ethnicity, and gender. From this she reaches the extreme, and for us indefensible, position that subaltern women have no coherent subject-position from which to speak: "the subaltern cannot speak" (Spivak 1988: 308).

## Regional discursive formations

These themes only indicate the potentials of discourse theory for understanding relations between geographical groups of people. We find these positions attractive in that here, at least, poststructural theory links with the causes of oppressed



peoples, the geographical dimensions of power relations, and the relentless critique of everything, even notions usually considered to be emancipatory. We find particularly suggestive the hierarchical relations between centralized power articulated through hegemonic, rational, "truthful" discourses and the "mythological" discourses of peripheralized and dominated peoples. By criticizing the modern belief in rational humans speaking objective science, poststructural theory opens a space in which a wide range of beliefs, logics, and discourses can be newly valorized.

We theorize this in terms of "regional discursive formations" (cf. Lowe 1991; see also Peet 1996). Certain modes of thought, logics, themes, styles of expression, and typical metaphors run through the discursive history of a region, appearing in a variety of forms, disappearing occasionally, only to reappear with even greater intensity in new guises. A regional discursive formation also disallows certain themes, is marked by absences, silences, repressions, marginalized statements, allowing some things to be mentioned only in highly prescribed, "discrete," and disguised ways. Within a regional discursive formation even competing "opposite" notions often employ the same metaphors, perhaps even similar logics. Hence oppositional positions may be partly captured by hegemonic discourses which shift to incorporate particularly insightful and vivid images. We argue that regional discursive formations originate in, and display the effects of, certain physical, political-economic, and institutional settings. Hegemonic discursive formations grounded in material, political, or ideological power supremacies extend over spaces with greatly different physical characteristics and discursive traditions. As the previous discussion indicates, we find particularly relevant to the geographical imagination theoretical notions dealing with the power-saturated interactions and interchanges between people immersed in regional discursive formations, articulations which leave no discourse intact, which continually produce hybrids. We stress the theme of the discourse on nature as a powerful, almost primordial, element in discursive formation; here we see links with what we later call "environmental imaginaries."

### The discourse of development

The world knows much better now what [development] policies work and what policies do not. . . . [Now] we almost [never] hear calls for alternative strategies based on harebrained schemes.

(World Bank Official, cited in Broad 1993: 154)

Such reconceptualizations of power-knowledge, discourse, and space see development as perhaps *the* main theme in the Western discursive formation; it is simply the case that, in the West, the passage of time is understood developmentally, that is, "Things are getting better all the time." By contrast, poststructuralism has increasingly come to see development efforts as "uniquely

efficient colonizers on behalf of central strategies of power" – the apparent ability to "make things better" is *the* main way of achieving power (Dubois 1991: 19; Schuurman 1992; Slater 1992; Watts 1993). The pioneering work, by Escobar (1984–5, 1988, 1992a, 1995), thus finds modern development discourse to be the latest insidious chapter of the larger history of the expansion of Western reason; that is, he believes reasoned knowledge uses the developmental language of emancipation to create systems of power in a modernized world. Such hegemonic discourses appropriate societal practices, meanings, and cultural contents into the modern realm of explicit calculation, subjecting them to Western forms of power-knowledge. They ensure the conformity of the myriad peoples of the world to First World (especially American) types of economic and cultural behavior.

For Escobar, development has penetrated, integrated, managed, and controlled countries and populations in increasingly detailed ways. It has created a type of underdevelopment which is politically and economically manageable. Its power acts not by repression but normalization, the regulation of knowledges, the moralization of issues. The new space of the "Third World" carved out of the vast surface of global societies, is a new field of power dominated by development sciences accepted as positive and true. Yet, he says, political technologies which sought to erase underdevelopment from the face of the earth end up, instead, multiplying it to infinity.

Thus the Western, modernist discursive formation, formulated during momentous changes in global power relations, in control over nature, in science and technology, has as its dynamic theme the core concept of "development." This seizes control of the discursive terrain, subjugating alternative discourses which Third World people have articulated to express their desires for different societal objectives. People are controlled, or "discursively regulated" (Peet 1996), by replacing their aspirations with Western mimicry. Through critique, post-structural theory wants to liberate aspirations. In the following section we map in detail recent tendencies in the content and meaning of this contentious concept of "development."

### Mapping development discourse: a cartography of power

The postindependence development efforts failed because the strategy was misconceived. Governments made a dash for "modernization", copying but not adapting Western models. . . . This top down approach demotivated ordinary people, whose energies most needed to be mobilized in the development effort. . . . The strategy [after Independence] failed . . . because it was based on poorly adapted foreign models. The vision was couched in the idiom of modernization. . . . In recent years, however, many elements of this vision have been challenged. Alternative paths have been proposed. They give primacy to agricultural development, and emphasize not only prices, markets and private sector activities but also *capacity building, grassroots*

*participation, decentralization and sound environmental practices. . . . The time has come to put them fully into practice.*

(World Bank 1989: 3, 36, emphasis added)

Failed modernization, alternative visions, grassroots participation, people power, environmental sustainability: this is not a vocabulary typically associated with the most influential advocate of global capitalist development. Could the World Bank really have embraced the popular energies of "ordinary people" in the name of sustainable development alternatives? At the heart of its long-term strategy, says the Bank, is the desire to release energies that permit "ordinary people . . . to take charge of their lives" (World Bank 1989: 4, emphasis added). What is on offer is a recognition, indeed celebration, of democratization movements which have attended the frontal assault (led in large measure by global regulatory institutions like the IBRD [International Bank for Reconstruction and Redevelopment] and the IMF) on various state-centered development strategies (i.e. everything from government subsidies of food, to state provision of tertiary education, to import substitution industrialization strategies).

The "new" World Bank approach can be contested at many levels: its ability to rewrite history to suit the Bank's own ideological purposes, its unwillingness to assume accountability for its own failures (whether smallholder colonization schemes in Brazil or massive dam projects in India), its still flimsy commitment to the environment, its partial and limited interpretation of sustainability, and so on. But what is particularly striking is not the purported newness of what has been variously called the "Washington consensus" or the "new realism," but its historical antiquity; in other words the ease with which the Bank's new approach can be situated on a much larger map of development ideas, the links to what might be called a cartography of development discourses. Unlike the World Bank, which believes that the 1950s represents a historic watershed with the arrival of development thinking in Africa and elsewhere, development theorizing has a much deeper history and one characterized by a recycling of key development ideas which appear, disappear, and reappear in new guises under changed political-economic and ideological circumstances (what we referred to earlier as regional discursive formations). While these ideas may have real power and endurance as Hall (1989: 390) rightly notes in his discussion of the spread of Keynesian thinking, "they do not acquire political force independent of the constellation of institutions and interests already present there."

### A genealogy of "development"

There is a genealogy of the Saint-Simonian doctrine [of development as a response to the faults of Progress] which runs from and through the nineteenth century to the present. One genealogical line from Comte to John Stuart Mill and then . . . to the Fabian socialists who domesticated [this] doctrine for Britain.

(Cowen and Shenton 1995: iii)

In his book *Keywords* Raymond Williams (1976: 104–6) notes that the complex genealogy of "development" in Western thinking can "limit and confuse virtually any generalizing description of the current world order." Rather it is in the analysis of the "real practices subsumed by development that more specific recognitions are necessary and possible." The history of these "real practices" is, however, long and complex. While "development" came into the English language in the eighteenth century with its root sense of unfolding, it was granted a new lease of life by the evolutionary ideas of the nineteenth century (Rust 1991; Williams 1976). As a consequence, development has rarely broken from organicist notions of growth or from a close affinity with teleological views of history, science, and progress in the West (Parajuli 1991). By the end of the nineteenth century, for example, it was possible to talk of societies in a state of "frozen development." Even radical alternative intellectual traditions, Marxisms among them, carried the baggage of historical stages, scientism, and modernization, forms of universalism which carried the appeal of secular utopias constructed with rationality and enlightenment. Development was modernity on a planetary scale in which the West was the "transcendental pivot of analytical reflection" (Slater 1992: 312).

There is another aspect to the genealogy, however, traced by Cowen and Shenton (1995) to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of Progress, and specifically to development as a sort of theological discourse set against the disorder and disjunctures of capitalist growth. Classical political economy – including Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, and the like – is suffused with the tensions between the desire for unfettered accumulation on the one hand and unregulated desire as the origin of misery and vice (Herbert 1991). Development in Victorian England emerged in part, then, as a cultural and theological response to Progress. Christopher Lasch (1991), for example, has described a late nineteenth century obsessed by cultural instability and cataclysm. Saint-Simon devoted himself in his last years to a new creed of Christianity to accompany his industrial and scientific vision of capitalist progress. Trusteeship, mission, and faith were, according to Cowen and Shenton, the nineteenth-century touchstones of development.

Of course there is a more modern sense in which Third World development as state and multilateral policy harnessed to the tasks of championing economic growth, improving welfare, and producing governable subjects is of more recent provenance (Sachs 1992). These origins of development theory and practice as an academic and governmental enterprise – and of development economics as its hegemonic expression – are inseparable from the process by which the colonial world was reconfigured into a "developing world" in the aftermath of the Second World War. Africa, for example, became a serious object of planned development after the Great Depression of the 1930s. The British Colonial Development and Welfare Act (1940) and the French Investment Fund for Economic and Social Development (1946) both represented responses to the crises and challenges which imperial powers confronted in Africa, providing a

means by which they could negotiate the perils of independence movements on the one hand and a perpetuation of the colonial mission on the other. The field of Development Economics which arose in the 1940s and 1950s – for example, the growth theories of Lewis, Hirschmann, and Rodenstein – sprouted in the soil of imperial planning initiatives, albeit propelled after 1945 by the establishment of a panoply of global development institutions (Bretton Woods, the United Nations) and President Truman's "program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing" (20 January 1949, cited in Esteva 1992: 6).

### A cartography of development

If development theory (and development economics in particular as its dominant expression) is a post-1945 construction rooted in growing U.S. hegemony on the one hand and the geopolitics of post-colonialism on the other, it nevertheless can be deposited on a much larger historical ground of ideas about comparative economic growth and sociopolitical transformation. One simple way to map development discourse historically in terms of its normative (i.e. goal-oriented) content, is to see development as a constant oscillation between the centrality of state, market, and civil society as means to secure key goals such as economic growth, social welfare, environmental sustainability, and national sovereignty (Table 1.1). This intellectual cartography is in no sense exhaustive – it refers largely to Eurocentric development theory associated with conventional development institutions and practices – and only refers to the *normative* (as opposed to the positive) aspects of development theory. As a heuristic device, however, it highlights a number of important points.

The first is to historicize one form of development itself, locating in the complex geopolitical environment of the inter- and post-war period, the construction, or more properly the invention, of development as planned social and economic improvement (Escobar 1992a; Watts 1993). A second is the recognition that development discourse is calibrated around the relative weight attributed in its normative vision to the role of the state, the market, and civil institutions. Typically, at any historical moment the prevailing or dominant development ideas – a particular center of intellectual gravity – are closely identified with one of these normative poles. For example, the 1980s counter-revolution, as Toye (1987) calls it, which shifted the market to center stage, a shift which stands in sharp contrast to the 1950s when there was widespread acceptance of some sort of state planning – a strange hybrid of a Gerschenkronian and Keynesian state – as a prerequisite for "catching up" and as a response to the maladies of relative backwardness. A third implication of Table 1.1 is that each *vertical axis* – state, market, civil society – is engaged in some sort of internal and external puzzle-solving. Internal because market-based theories, for example, are part of a tradition of market-based thinking which engages with itself as a prerequisite for developing new and different interpretations of the world. External in the double sense that particular ideas and theories within one of these

vertical axes are always driven and shaped by their engagement with the other theoretical traditions external to it (certain forms of state-led theorizing are driven by their engagement with market-led explanations), but also because these same ideas are simultaneously part of a dialogue with the "external" world, that is to say by the problems, issues, and realities to which the theories must be made to speak. For example, the remarkable rise of the newly industrializing countries (NICs) – South Korea and Taiwan – in the post-1970 period acted as a major point of reference for debates over the relative significance of regulated or unregulated markets in their "catching up" and whether the East Asian NICs are free-market or "Leninist" success stories (Amsden 1989; Wade 1990).

No simple or direct relation exists between particular theoretical traditions – Marxism or modernization theory for example – and each axis. Marxism does not dismiss entirely the role of the market, for example, although the market nexus is defined in a particular way (Elson 1988); similarly, neo-liberalism rarely jettisons the state *in toto*, although it too is defined in a particular fashion. In this sense, theories tend to combine the normative content of development as particular configurations of state, market, and civil society, each constituted in ways peculiar to the core propositions of each theory. Different theoretical traditions tend naturally to weight these normative elements quite differently. In this sense, development theories may be distinguished in terms of the extent to which states, markets, and civil society fail. For example, whatever the purported virtues of markets, they may be monopolistic, imperfect, inflexible, or encourage externalities. Often seen as compensatory mechanisms for market failure, states may be rigid and inflexible mechanisms for allocating resources, they may be poorly co-ordinated, may create rents for particular classes, or may simply colonize civil society (Stern 1989). Civil society, often seen as a critical mediating space between state and market, a repository of rights, participation, and associational life, may equally be the crucible within which religious, ethnic, or other identifications impose strictures. It is important to emphasize, however, the *lateral* (i.e. diachronic) dimension to Table 1.1 in the sense that the intellectual and discursive traditions surrounding the market, state, and civil society engage each other, an engagement driven in some measure by the pressing development realities they seek to explain (for example Colclough and Manor's recent book [1991] is entitled *States or Markets?*).

These lateral and vertical dimensions vastly simplify the complexities of practical and theoretical differences in the field of development discourse. Individuals may shift locations on the map during the course of their careers – for example Albert Hirschmann moved from being a growth theorist in the 1950s to an institutionalist in the 1990s – and all theoretical traditions, almost by definition, contain particular definitions of states, markets, and civil society, which in some way reinforces the earlier point about the lack of correspondence between the vertical axis and theories of development *per se*. Last, it needs to be emphasized that development ideas are always *regionalized* into what we earlier called regional discursive formations: Latin American dependency theory is part of a particular

Table 1.1 A map of development discourse

	State <sup>1</sup>	Civil society <sup>2</sup>	Market <sup>3</sup>
<b>Periodization</b>	(Market failures, regulation for growth with equity, institutional and political capacity)	(Associational life, households, communities, lobbies, NGOs, non-state economic and cultural production)	(State failures, separability of equity and efficiency, harmony)
<b>Phase 1</b> 1760–1890 (first Industrial Revolutions)	<i>Relative backwardness and catching up</i> Protectionism, forced savings (Meiji reforms, Witte's Russia, List and Bismarck in Germany)	<i>Mars, proto-socialists and European populists</i> Artisanal production, small-scale co-operatives, collective control (Sismondì, Owen, Proudhon, Fourier, Herzen)	<i>Classical political economy</i> Laissez-faire, division of labor, comparative advantage (Smith, Ricardo, Malthus)
<b>Phase 2</b> 1890–1945 (classical imperialism)	<b>Soviet socialism</b> Nationalization, central planning, collectivization and primitive social accumulation (Preobrazhensky, Stalin)	<b>Gramsci, Arendt, neo-Marxist theory</b> Autonomy of civil society, solidarity, pluralistic rights <b>Neo-populism</b> Russian populists, Narodniks, East European Green Uprising, Gandhism (Chayanov, Gandhi, Chernyshevski)	<b>Neo-classical economics</b> Harmony and just returns, general equilibrium models (Marshall, Austrian School, Schumpeter, Pigou)

The "Development" revolution

	State <sup>1</sup>	Civil society <sup>2</sup>	Market <sup>3</sup>
<b>Phase 3</b> 1945–1980 (Growth to crisis)	<b>Third World socialism and radical dependency</b> Maoism, Ho Chi Minh, Che, Debray, Indian Marxism/ Nehru, Kernal (delinking, basic needs, central planning)	<b>Development economics and growth with equity</b> ISI, protection, big push, linkages (Lewis, Myrdal, Mahalanobis, ECLA), redistributive strategies, basic needs	<b>Neo-classical economic development</b> Pluralist state theory, agriculture and innovation, aid and trade (Bauer, Schultz, Ruttan, Myint, Jorgensen, Rodgers)
<b>Phase 4</b> 1980–1995 (Crisis, stabilization, adjustment)	<b>New political economy</b> <b>Developmental state</b> Neo-Weberian state capacity, relative autonomy, embeddedness (Wade, Chalmers, Johnson, Evans, Amsden)	<b>New institutional economics</b> Transaction cost approaches, imperfect and asymmetrical information (Stiglitz, Bardham, Nugent, de Janvry, Williamson)	<b>Modernization theory</b> Human capital, capital formation, stages of growth, diffusion, savings, need achievement (Rostow, Chenery, Rodgers)
		<b>The public sphere</b> Local knowledge/peasant science, new social movements, NGO/PVOs, feminisms, post-Marxism (Escobar, Shiva, Hartne, Offe, Laclau, Kothari, Habermas)	<b>Neo-liberal counter-revolution</b> Price distortions, rent-seeking, market strategies, trade theory (Timmer, Kreuger, Berg Report, Lal, Little, Balassa, Bauer)

Source: This is a substantially revised and amended version of a figure originally prepared by Alain de Janvry, University of California, Berkeley, in connection with a course on development theory co-taught with Michael Watts.

<sup>1</sup> The state is understood as a set of institutions which act as a system of political domination/regulation, with specific effects on class and class struggle (see Jessop 1990: 28)

<sup>2</sup> Civil society is understood in the Gramscian sense as a non-state sphere of organizations – "the ensemble of organisms commonly called private" – where hegemony and consent are organized, and possessing the potential for rational self-regulation and freedom (Gramsci 1971).

<sup>3</sup> The market is understood as a nexus between buyers and sellers (but an institutional nexus that has to be made: cf. Elson 1988) – that is to say, an auction in which buyers and sellers bid against one another or as a broker-organized market.

regional discursive formation whose genesis and character was very much wrapped up with intellectual figures and activists associated with the Economic Commission for Latin America and subsequently with a number of Chilean and Brazilian universities. Likewise, some traditions of Marxist theorizing and forms of state planning have a distinctive Indian or South Asian character.

### Development theory in the 1980s and 1990s

The Cold War is over and Communism and the socialist bloc have collapsed. The United States and Capitalism have won, and in few areas of the globe is that victory so clear cut . . . as Latin America. Democracy, free-market economics and pro-American outpourings of sentiment and policy dot the landscape of a region where until recently left-right confrontation and the potential for social revolution and progressive reform were widespread.

(Castaneda 1993: 3)

Poverty is the leading cause of premature death and ill health across the planet and the gaps between rich and poor are widening not closing the World Health Organization warned this week. . . . In a Foreword, Hirosho Nakajima, WHO's director-general, describes the report as "a devastating portrait of our times. . . . Poverty . . . wields its destructive influence at every stage of human life and for most of its victims the only escape is an early grave. Poverty provides that too."

(*Guardian* 7 May 1995: 1)

In relation to this simple map, the 1980s represented a period of retrenchment and restructuring in which recession and the debt crisis focused attention on short-term management ("disequilibria"). The literature was dominated by questions of stabilization and adjustment, driven increasingly by a neo-liberal orthodoxy which sought to reaffirm the necessity of reintegration into a global market and emphasized a "back to the future" strategy (i.e. a return to the colonial model of comparative advantage and export-oriented commodity production). The East Asian NICs were studied as success stories in the context of widespread failure (stagnation, corruption, de-industrialization) of debt- or state-led development models. State-centered analysis focused both on the so-called relative autonomy (or "embeddedness") of the developmental state in Taiwan and South Korea and the problems of state accountability, credibility, and rent-seeking in Latin America and Africa, not least in relation to the 1980s reform packages for stabilization. Ironically, state- and market-centered theories converged at the level of analytics in development economics, largely through transaction cost and collective action theory and the so-called "new institutional economics" (Bardhan 1989). By the 1990s in a rather different geopolitical and economic environment – the end of the Cold War, a declining debt burden, new social actors – development seemed to gravitate around the "balance" between

state, market, and civil organizations, each with different incentive schemes and compliance-co-operation mechanisms (de Janvry *et al.* 1991).

For both theoretical and empirical reasons, then, the 1980s saw a growing concern with *institutions*, whether expressed in terms of agrarian social relations (Bardhan 1989), state-society relations (Migdal 1989), or new social movements (Melucci 1988). Moreover, criticisms levelled at the failings of both neo-liberal and authoritarian-bureaucratic development provided considerable momentum for a focus on institutions within civil society, especially agreements based on bargaining, co-operation, and persuasion. As de Janvry *et al.* (1991: 4) note:

When the state fails to deliver public goods, insurance, management of externalities, minimum basic needs and democratic rights, civil organizations may fill the vacuum. The same holds for the market where market failures lead to the emergence of [civil] institutions, many of which take the form of organizations.

Of particular interest are development strategies that build relations of complementarity between civil organizations and the market and the state.

This resurgence of civil society in development thinking has been driven by a complex set of political forces and intellectual confluences. We have already referred to the impact of "people's power" in the overthrow of various Stalinisms in Eastern Europe but one should take note also of the proliferation of new social actors and civic movements, in part as a response to the austerity of the 1980s, in Latin America, South Africa, the Philippines, India, and more recently in parts of sub-Saharan Africa (we discuss this in more detail later). But there has also been a rethinking of the relations between culture and development by returning to the modernization theory of Shils, Geertz, and Weber (Hoben and Hefner 1991), in the role of grassroots organizations in the context of diminishing states and expanding markets (Uphoff 1991), in the social embeddedness of states and markets (Evans 1991; Friedland and Robertson 1991), in the endogeneity of development institutions and social norms (de Janvry *et al.* 1991), and in the promotion of local knowledge systems and resource management (Richards 1985; Warren 1991). All of these quite different tendencies nonetheless reaffirm the confluence of analytics noted by Bardhan (1989) in his observation that the analysis of institutions has emerged as a central problematic, whether expressed in terms of analytical Marxism, the contract theory of the neo-institutionalists, or the anthropological study of common property regulation.

### Environment, development, and civil society: "populism" and sustainability

To throw some light on discussions about "the people" and "the popular", one need only to bear in mind that the "people" or "the popular" . . . is first of all one of those things at stake in the struggle between intellectuals.

(Bourdieu 1990: 150)

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP 1992) the polarization of global wealth doubled between 1960 and 1989. In the *fin de siècle* world economy, 82.7 per cent of global income is accounted for by the wealthiest 20 per cent, while the poorest 20 per cent account for 1.4 per cent of world income. In 1960, the top fifth of the world's population made thirty times more than the bottom fifth; by 1989 the disparity had grown to sixty times. The growing bi-modal character of relations between the North and South (indeed within Third World states, as Brazil, the Philippines, and India testify) is unquestionably rooted in the period of adjustment and stabilization since the oil crisis of the 1970s. For good reason, then, have many intellectuals and activists from the South come to see development discourse as a cruel hoax, a "blunder of planetary proportions" (Sachs 1992: 3). "You must be either very dumb or very rich if you fail to notice," notes Mexican activist Esteva (1992: 7) "that 'development' stinks." It is precisely the groundswell of *anti-development thinking*, oppositional discourses that have as their starting point the rejection of development, of rationality, and the Western modernist project (see Escobar, Chapter 2 in this volume), at the moment of a purported Washington consensus and free-market triumphalism, that represents one of the striking paradoxes of the 1990s. Ironically, however, both of these discourses – whether the World Bank line or its radical alternative – look to *civil society, participation, and ordinary people* for their development vision for the next millennium.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the enhanced emphasis within current development discourse on consolidating and promoting civil society has often drawn from the various strains of populism, in other words ideas about the power of what the World Bank called "ordinary people." Populism here implies not only a broadly specified development strategy – that is to say, the promotion of small-scale, owner-operated, anti-urban programs which stand against the ravages of industrial capitalism (Kitching 1980) – but also a particular sort of politics, authority structure, and ideology in which an effort is made to manufacture a collective popular will and an "ordinary" subject (Laclau 1977). In general populism: "is . . . based on the following major premiss: *virtue resides in the simple people, who are in the overwhelming majority, and in their collective traditions*" (Wiles 1969: 166, original emphasis). The recycling of populisms in development discourse, therefore, contains both an historical *continuity* – the recurrent motif of "the people" and "the ordinary" in development policy and practice – and an historical *difference* insofar as populist claims are always rooted in specific and local configurations of political and ideological discourses and practices.

Populism in no sense exhausts discussions of the role of civil society and civic traditions in development (see Gramsci 1971; Keane 1988; McGuigan 1992; Watts 1995) but it represents an important line of thinking and theorizing from the early nineteenth century to the present. Indeed a distinctive feature of populism – which perhaps explains its current appeal – is its flexible ability to draw on liberalism, nationalism, and socialism in fashioning its pragmatic, rather than political, agenda:

[Populism] . . . is profoundly a-political. . . It goes beyond democracy to consensus. . . It calls on the state to inaugurate restoration, but it distrusts the state and its bureaucracy and would minimize them before the rights and virtues of local communities and the populist individual.  
(Macrae 1969: 162)

But when "people" are invoked in developmental discourses about civil society – whether the World Bank singing the praises of the ordinary African worker or the geographer lauding peasant science – who the people are, and how they are constructed, are precisely political questions (Bennett 1986).

Populist strategies, and the language of populism more generally, rest on what Laclau (1977: 193) calls the "double articulation of discourse": that is, on the one hand the tensions between "the people" and those who rule (the power bloc), and on the other the various ways in which "the people" and their interests are articulated or aligned with specific classes. How, in other words, does particular populist language articulate with a particular power bloc and how is a particular populist subject "interpolated" – for example, the ordinary peasant possessed of local knowledge and resource management capability, or the informal sector worker equipped with the entrepreneurial skills for appropriate technology or flexible specialization? There is little doubt that the confluence of social movements in the former socialist bloc (the 1989 "revolutions") with a neo-liberal conservatism which advertises individual agency in the marketplace (for example the authoritarian populism of Mrs Thatcher) has helped sustain a developmental populism for the 1990s reflected in the uncritical promotion of NGOs, civil institutions, and the power of ordinary people.

Current populist development thinking, therefore, can and should be located on a larger historical canvas, but its particular character and specificity must be rooted in the *realpolitik* of the end of the Cold War, a widespread disenchantment with state-administered politics, and in the self-interested, freedom-loving individual of the neo-liberal counter-revolution (Bierstecker 1990; Fukuyama 1990). But as we shall see, populism is also an important ingredient in the development–environment debate, whether expressed in terms of grassroots green movements, indigenous technical knowledge for sustainable development, or the calls for administrative decentralization in local resource management. Civil society and populist thinking, in other words, cut across many of the issues which are treated in this volume (see Chapters 4, 5, 9, and 10 by Bebbington, Zimmerer, Schroeder and Suryanata, and Rangan in particular).

#### POLITICS, MOVEMENTS, CIVIL SOCIETY: A LIBERATION ECOLOGY?

Development can only occur when the people it affects participate in the design of the proposed policies, and the model which is implemented thereby corresponds to the local people's aspirations. . . The indigenous

people of the Amazon have always lived there; the Amazon is our home. We know its secrets, both what it can offer us, and what its limits are . . .  
(Statement by the Co-ordinating Body for the Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin, 1989)

Political economy and political ecology have long been interested in social movements of many kinds. Much of the work theorizing social movements begins with Marxism, historical materialism, and a dialectical theory of social and environmental change. In the materialist view the productive transformation of nature is the primary activity making possible the whole structure of human existence. The productive forces (labor and means of production such as tools, machines, infrastructure) are organized by social relations (kinship, lineage, class) fundamentally characterized by inequalities of power – for example a minority class owning nature and the means by which continued life is made possible. The idea more generally is that modes of production create appropriate forms of consciousness, ideologies, and politics and have a certain level and type of effect on natural environment. From a dialectical view, societal dynamics emerge from contradictory oppositions in the material reproduction of existence, conflicts between the forces of production and a limited natural environment for example, which result in crises. These moments of contradictory crisis are, for classical Marxists, the contexts in which class existing “in-itself” engages in intensified political struggle and becomes class “for-itself,” that is a group with collective identity, a collective agent which forces necessary social and environmental transformations. In Marx’s own works, class is the main form of social engagement, and control of the means of production its primary terrain of struggle (Marx 1970).

### Critique of classical Marxism

This economic theory of society is open to severely restrictive “readings” or interpretations: notions of the “iron laws of history” in which technology creates change; reducing people to being passive “bearers” of social relations; and focusing on class to the exclusion of other social relations, are prominent examples. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1971) argued for two modifications to classical Marxism. First, social strife endemic to capitalist and other modes of production may be countered by state force (army, police) but also by an ideological and cultural hegemony operating through traditions, myths, conventional morality, and “common sense,” all of which are significant terrains of struggle. Second, transformative human actions do not result automatically from material contradictions; they are mediated by subjective meanings and conscious intentions. Material changes, such as resource deprivation or environmental crisis, may create higher propensities for transformative action and limit the range of its possible outcomes, but ideological and political practices are relatively autonomous and are literally the decisive moments in the transformation of material conditions

into political practices. Gramsci believed that capitalism could be transformed only through a range of counter-hegemonic movements using new strategies in several realms of social, political, and cultural life.

Similarly, various “neo-” and “post-” Marxist critics often accept Marxian principles of class stratification and social antagonism, but also challenge parts of the classical Marxist account (Cohen 1982). Two main aspects of Marxism, an evolutionary unfolding of the objective contradictions between the forces and relations of production (Marx 1970), and “the history of class struggles” (Marx and Engels 1974: 84), are found not easily to cohere in a single theory (Habermas 1971). Similarly Marxist theory is said to find all spheres of social life penetrated by a single, productivist logic which privileges economy and identifies class relations as key to the structure of domination and the forms of resistance; for Cohen (1982: xiii) this occludes other aspects of society and precludes an understanding of the novelty of recent social movements.

Neo-Marxist theorists modify the classical formulation. Theoreticians like Marcuse (1964) search for a substitute revolutionary subject to play the leading role previously assigned to the proletariat. “New working class” theorists (Aronowitz 1973; Gorz 1967; Mallet 1969) see welfare state capitalism providing a new strategy for labor. Structural Marxist class analysis (Poulantzas 1973; Wright 1979) rejects many of the features stressed by humanist Marxism to concentrate on classes defined as effects of structures. Theorists of the “new intellectual class” (Gouldner 1979; Szelenyi and Konrad 1979) transfer attention from workers to critical intellectuals. Despite such modifications, for critics like Cohen (1982: 3), the presupposition of Marxism remains that production relations are key to the logic of society and radical social movements. Post-Marxists, by comparison, argue that production is only one arena for collective resistance, that groups other than the working class are now significant sources of social movements, that greater attention has to be given to active processes of human agency.

Cohen (1985) also criticizes the (non-Marxist) “resource-mobilization paradigm” based in conflict models of collective action (Gamson 1975; Oberschall 1973; Tilly *et al.* 1975). Here the assumption is that conflicts of interest are built into institutionalized power relations. Collective actions involve the rational pursuit of interests by conflicting groups (Olson 1965). The mobilization of groups depends on their resources, especially the social networks in which they are embedded and their organizational structures. This approach assumes that individuals join groups when the benefits from so doing exceed the costs. Yet it remains unclear from this point of view why individuals acting rationally in pursuit of their interests get involved in groups (the “free rider problem” [Miller 1992]) and what gives groups their solidarity in the first place. Many theorists therefore maintain that such neo-utilitarian, rational-actor models are inapplicable, for collective action involves something other than strategic or instrumental kinds of rationality. Thus Habermas (1984) differentiates *system*, in which people operate under strategic rationalities following technical rules, and

*lifeworld*, with its communicative rationality oriented towards consensus, understanding, and collective action. For Habermas social movements of resistance emerge when commodifying systems colonize lifeworlds; resistance struggles are as much against dominant rationalities as they are against institutional control.

The result of such criticisms is a position which analyzes the conditions and processes by which structural change is transformed into collective action (Klandermans and Tarrow 1988). Here geography is both part of the structure (as with control of space, environments, resources, etc.) and part of the process by which structures are transformed into collective actions (the influence of terrains of struggle on the forms and intensities of struggles [Ackelsberg and Breitbart 1987–8]). Group consciousness and collective identities are made through the sharing of confined spaces in places with definite environmental conditions, and have tendencies towards common environmental imaginaries, an idea we develop in our conclusion (Chapter 12). Even the clarification of terms like “terrains,” “fields of action,” “arenas,” etc. (Rucht 1988) is only just beginning. Clearly, however, this is rich in potential, especially in the area of social struggles over natural environments – what we refer to as liberation ecologies.

#### Urban social movements

Drawing on the Marxist tradition, but again differing significantly from it, a series of works explores the connections between contradictions, crises, and urban social conflicts. This work was precipitated by the rise of protest movements (civil rights, student, feminist, environmental, etc.) often centered on identity politics which came to be referred to as the “new social movements” – as compared with “old” movements, such as working-class organizations. In Castells’s (1977) early work, urban social movements respond to the structural contradictions of the capitalist system; but these contradictions are of a plural-class and secondary nature, involving various deprivations, rather than the working class struggling to control the productive apparatus. Thus protest movements organize around common interests on a variety of terrains of struggle, often in opposition to the state and other political and sociocultural institutions, rather than the economically ruling class directly. Indeed, Castells (1983: 299) came to believe (wrongly in our opinion) that “the concept of social movement as an agent of social transformation is strictly unthinkable in the Marxist theory.” He argues instead that social change happens when a new urban meaning is produced through conflict, domination, and resistance to domination. For Castells (1983: 311) “the new emerging social movements call for the pre-eminence of human experience over state power and capitalist profit.”

Another sequence of works in the post-Marxist vein stems from collaboration between Laclau and Mouffe. Mouffe (1984) argues that the commodification of social life, bureaucratization, and “cultural massification” create new forms of subordination to which new social movements respond. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) find the common denominator of all the new social movements (urban,

ecological, feminist, anti-racist, regional, or sexual minorities) to be their differentiation from workers’ struggles considered as class struggles. Indeed Laclau (1985: 29) argues that:

Categories such as “working class”, “petit bourgeois”, etc. [have become] less and less meaningful as ways of understanding the overall identity of social agents. The concept of “class struggle” for example, is neither correct nor incorrect – it is, simply, totally insufficient as a way of accounting for contemporary social conflicts.

For Laclau (1985: 27) the rise of the new social movements precipitated a crisis in the way social agents and conflicts are theorized. It became increasingly difficult to identify social groups with a coherent system of “subject positions.” The social transformations of the twentieth century weakened the ties between the subject’s various identities so that, for example, the worker’s position in the relations of production and his/her position as consumer, resident, or political participant, are increasingly autonomous: this autonomy specifies the new social movements. For Laclau, also, subject-positions always display openness and ambiguity and there is no fully acquired social identity. Further, the social contradictions to which social agents respond cannot be reduced to moments of an underlying societal logic – “the social is in the last instance groundless” (Laclau 1985: 34). This leads to a differing conception of radical politics. In the nineteenth century, Laclau says, crises involved a total model of society and social struggles developed a unified political imaginary. In the twentieth century, a multiplication of points of rupture in society leads to a proliferation of antagonisms, each tending to create its own space and politicize a specific area of social relations. What Laclau (1985: 39) calls the “moment of totalization” in the political imaginary is now restricted to specific demands in particular circumstances. Rather than finding this a political retreat, Laclau finds the democratic potential of the new social movements lying precisely in their implicit demands for a radically open and indeterminate view of society.

#### The self-production of society

Given such (partly valid) criticisms some recent theorizing has drawn, instead, on a tradition in French social theory initiated by Castoriadis, drawing on the French and German phenomenological traditions and continued, in modified form, by Touraine. Like Marx, Castoriadis begins with the physical environment, the biological properties of human beings, and the necessity of material and sexual reproduction, for which fragments of logic and applied knowledge must be created. But he claims this is as true for apes as it is for humans. Instead for Castoriadis (1991: 41):

The construction of its own world by each and every society is, in essence, the creation of a world of meanings, its social imaginary significations,



which organize the (pre-social, "biologically given") natural world, institute a social world proper to each society (with its articulations, rules, purposes, etc.), establish the ways in which socialized and humanized individuals are to be fabricated, and insaturate the motives, values, and hierarchies of social (human) life. Society *leans upon* the first natural stratum, but only to erect a fantastically complex (and amazingly coherent) edifice of significations which vest any and every thing with *meaning*.

Knowing a society therefore entails reconstituting the world of its social imaginary significations. Furthermore, for Castoriadis (1991: 34): "History does not happen to society: history is the self-deployment of society." His notion is that the elements of social-historical life are created each time (in terms of relevance, meaning, connections, etc.) in and through the particular institution of society to which they "belong." Thus each social-historical instance has an essential singularity: phenomenologically specific in the social forms and individuals it creates, ontologically specific in that it can put itself into question, explicitly alter itself through self-reflective activity.

Similarly Touraine (1988) replaces the construct of society as a system driven by an inner logic with society as a "field of action." His stress lies more on the social praxis involved in the genesis of norms and conflicts over their interpretations. Whereas in Marxism classes are defined structurally by positions in the production process, for Touraine they are defined more directly in terms of social action. Touraine distinguishes himself from the main message of structural/poststructural social theory. From Marcuse to Althusser to Foucault and Bourdieu, the claim is that social life is nothing more than "the system of signs of an unrelenting domination" (Touraine 1988: 71) – in such systems radical social movements would be quickly shunted to the margins. For Touraine, by comparison, the necessary decomposition of society, the passage from one cultural and societal field to another, makes possible the entry of social movements with transformative capabilities.

At the core of his analysis lie conflicts over "cultural orientations," between an innovative ruling class which manages culture and people subordinated to its domination (Touraine 1988: 155). For Touraine (1985: 750–4) social conflicts involve the competitive pursuit of collective interests but also the reconstitution of social, cultural, or political identities; above all, conflict occurs over control of the main cultural patterns through which relationships with the environment are normatively organized. Most significantly, for Touraine, class struggles and social movements express conscious contestation over the "self-production of society," by which he means the work society performs on itself in terms of reinventing its norms, institutions, and practices. Struggles over historicity lie at the center of the functioning of society and the processes by which society is created.

### New social movements in the Third World

Recent social movements theory has therefore moved away from what are frequently found to be the restrictions of classical (Marxist) theories. But also the geographic focus of research has tended to shift towards new social movements in the Third World, particularly Latin America. A multiplication of groups independent of traditional trade unions and political parties – squatter movements and neighborhood councils, base-level communities within the Catholic Church, indigenist associations, women's associations, human rights committees, youth meetings, educational and artistic activities, coalitions for the defense of regional traditions and interests, self-help groupings among unemployed and poor people – created a new social reality which, in Evers's (1985: 44) terms, "lies beyond the realm of traditional modes of perception and instruments of interpretation." Radical theorists found in these movements potential for a new political hegemony constructed through the direct action of the masses. This radical optimism has more recently been tempered as some movements declined and their limited potential was realized. Nevertheless it remains the case that Third World people's movements rather than First World workers' movements are seen as potentially transformative of the existing social structures. ?

Although not strictly in the social movements tradition, some of the more interesting ideas in this vein derive from the work of Scott on everyday resistance (1985, 1990). Scott, too, criticizes structuralist variants of Marxism for assuming that class relations can be inferred from a few diagnostic features like the dominant mode of production. While economic factors structure the situations faced by human actors, people fashion their own responses within these, based on their experiences and histories. Also, class does not exhaust the total explanatory space of social actions, especially in peasant villages, where kinship, neighborhood, faction, and ritual links are competing foci of human identity and solidarity: "the messy reality of multiple identities [is] the experience out of which social relations are conducted" (Scott 1985: 43).

Drawing on phenomenology and ethnomethodology, Scott (1985: 80) argues that subordinate classes "have rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organized, political activity" which is the preserve of the middle classes and intelligentsia. Instead he focuses on:

*everyday* forms of peasant resistance – the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents and interest from them. Most of the forms this struggle takes stop well short of outright collective defiance. Here I have in mind the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth.

(Scott 1985: 29)

In struggles over land, everyday resistance might entail piecemeal peasant squatting on plantation or state forest land; open defiance, by contrast, would

be a mass invasion that challenges property rights. Everyday forms of resistance are often the most significant and effective over the long run.

Drawing more directly on poststructural themes, Escobar (1992b) sees social movements equally as cultural struggles over meaning as over material conditions and needs. Escobar draws a number of themes which might make this cultural dimension more visible. First is a more accurate theorization of the practice of everyday life through which culture is created and reproduced – the idea is to locate daily life at the intersection of the articulation of meaning through practice on the one hand and macro-processes of domination on the other. Second he finds it necessary to rethink the relations between everyday life, culture, and politics: in terms, for example, of Touraine's (1981, 1988) notion of historicity; or Melucci's (1988) proposition that networks of relationships submerged in everyday life lie behind the creation of cultural models and symbolic challenges by movements; or Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) argument that politics is a discursive articulatory process. Third, there is developing a micro-sociology and ethnography of popular resistance: de Certeau's (1984) notion that the "marginal majority" effect multiple, infinitesimal changes in the dominant forms under which they live; Fiske's (1989: 10) claim for "semiotic resistance" which originates in the "desire of the subordinate to exert control over the meaning of their lives"; and Williams' (1980) insistence on the continuation of residual practices that have a collective character and which can provide a basis for resistance and action. Generally the idea for Escobar (1992b) is to relate structural theories of global transformation to the "subjective mapping of experience."

The notion of everyday resistance may be combined with a poststructural interest in discourses of protest. A wide array of popular statements which often appear only at the local level can be read, for example, as evidences of environmental resistance. Academic work, displayed in several of the chapters of this book, can usefully compare "documentary" evidence of resistance with a critique of hegemonic discourses on development and environment. Here the mission is to pose alternatives in stronger terms. Rather than "speaking for" subaltern peoples, the idea is to help uncover discourses of resistance, put them into wider circulation, create networks of ideas. Rather than saying what peasant consciousness should be, were it to be "correct," the idea is to allow discourses to speak for themselves.

#### Environmental movements, environmental security

This literature suggests several themes for a liberation ecology. As we have seen, critiques of classical Marxism widen the spectrum of social movements opposing a hegemony extending far beyond control of productive resources to include culture, ideology, way of life; there is a particular interest, stemming from poststructural work on discourse, in examining the thoughts, imaginaries, statements, and institutions of both dominant and subaltern groups. The mediations

between structural contradictions, deprivations, and various forms of socio-political actions are now seen as highly significant, rather than contradiction automatically producing organized opposition. These mediations seem to consist of at least five moments or types: (1) perceptions and interpretations which place the adverse situations faced by people into their meaning systems; (2) the sense of collective identity, commonality with others, often place-based or environmentally structured; (3) conditions which spur deprived, injured, or aggrieved people to different levels or types of actions ranging from sullen individual resistance to organized social movements; (4) linkages between social movements which create broad-based political forces; (5) the possibility of joining "old" social movements, such as unions and leftist parties, to new movements, such as organizations advocating environmental justice.

Many of these ideas have been deployed in the analysis of burgeoning Third World "environmental movements" (Ghai and Vivian 1992). While some work, often by political scientists working in the "new" domain of environmental security, posits simple and unmediated relationships between environmental change and social instability/civil strife (see Homer-Dixon *et al.* 1993), much of the environmental movements' literature tends to the local in its purview and often focuses on efforts to take resources out of the marketplace, to construct a sort of moral economy of the environment (see Martinez-Alier 1990). Broad (1993), for example, documents what she calls a new citizens' movement in the Philippines (5–6 million strong) consisting of "mass-based organizations" which arise from the intersection of political-economic plunder and local demands for participation and justice. In much of this literature the label "environmental" is hardly appropriate, since the proliferation of grassroots and NGO movements often focus more broadly on livelihoods and justice. Indeed, it is striking how indigenous rights movements, conservation politics, food security, the emphasis on local knowledges and calls for access to, and control over, local resources (democratization, broadly put) crosscut the environment–poverty axis. This multi-dimensionality is, according to some (Escobar 1992a), indicative of a new mode of doing politics, so-called autopoietic (that is to say, self-producing and self-organizing) movements which exercise power outside the state arena and which seek to create "decentered autonomous spaces."

These are ambitious claims which require careful scrutiny, though we are in general in agreement with Antje Linckenbach (1994: 81–2) when she says that:

Ecological movements are not creating a new economics for a new civilization, they are not presenting a solution for the crisis of the modern world, and they do not have the capacity . . . for ending development. But they can show the difficulties, shortcomings and limited scopes of the dominant as well as the alternative models for development at the level of action.

However, if reasonable people can disagree over the potential and scope of these movements, it is striking how little is said in the "environment as social

movement” literature about the conditions under which local movements transcend their locality, and hence contribute to the building of a robust civil society, and about the continuing problems of productivity and growth in the face of mass poverty. Whatever their shortcomings analytically, however, the existence of such grassroots livelihood movements – rubber tappers in eastern Amazonia, tree huggers in North India, or Indian communities fighting transnational oil companies in Ecuador – represents for the new social movements community the building blocks for an “alternative to development” (Sachs 1992).

### CONCLUSION: POLITICAL ECOLOGY REDUX

Like other ideologies environmentalism is socially constructed but it is an especially indeterminate, malleable ideological form.

(Buttel 1992: 15)

[A]mbiguity runs through all of the most important discourses on economy and the environment today. . . . Precisely this obscurity leads so many people so much of the time to talk and write about “sustainability”: the word can be used to mean almost anything . . . which is part of its appeal.

(O’Connor 1994: 152)

Political ecology is changing as the underlying social theory moves in post-structural directions and as new developments and tendencies occur in the politics of environment. In terms of the former, social theory is itself an arena of struggle, changing in the sources it draws upon, the themes it stresses, the shape of its contemplative imagination, and the directions and significance of its political outcomes. In terms of the latter, social struggles over land and resources, the environmental conditions of human existence, erupt in a profusion of styles and intensities, sometimes becoming full-fledged social movements, sometimes remaining as more prosaic and circumscribed individual resistance. As these two tendencies interact, political ecology as a specialized branch of critical social theory undergoes its own partly autonomous shift in thematic structure and theoretical style, very much as earlier versions also are critiqued and revised. Earlier in this chapter we surveyed the origins of political ecology and its concern to link the political economy of development – typically expressed through the ability of the land manager to manage his/her resources in the context of particular relations of production and circulation – with the traditional environmental concerns of ecological anthropologists and geographers. We then placed political ecology in a broader context which encompasses debates over the nature of modernity itself. The renewal of long-standing skepticism about modernity and its rationality, this time as poststructural and postmodern philosophies, leads social theory in fascinating directions, many of which are worth pursuing for the challenges they pose and the insights they stimulate. The simple notion that

truth is socially and culturally constructed, rather than discovered already existing as a quality inherent in things, reverberates through social theory, revealing itself in remarkably diverse places. In particular the critique of reason as the discovery of eternal verities, re-emphasizes the imaginative and discursive aspects of reasoning as a creative, constituting act which transforms realizations about what already exists into projects of how to make new things exist. Thus environmental crises do not project truth into consciousness, on the basis of which people act in appropriate ways. Rather, multiple realizations about all levels of environmental problems are one main source stimulating a series of creative reactions which may (or may not) emerge as fully formed social movements. Furthermore, these movements are collectivities organized around common concerns and oppressions. But as well as being practical struggles over livelihood and survival, they contest the “truths,” imaginations, and discourses through which people think, speak about, and experience systems of livelihood.

Hence in terms of social theory and political ecology we find both *a broader conception of the forms of contention* (from class struggle to social movements to everyday resistance) and *a deeper conception of what is contended* (from ownership of productive resources to control over the human imagination). We suggest that the social imaginaries and discourses which environmental and other social movements contend, do not arise on the head of a pin or in a de-natured ivory tower. Rather, the environment itself is an active constituent of imagination, and the discourses themselves assume regional forms that are, as it were, thematically organized by natural contexts. In other words, there is not an imaginary made in some separate “social” realm, but an environmental imaginary, or rather whole complexes of imaginaries, with which people think, discuss, and contend threats to their livelihoods – a claim we discuss and elaborate in more detail in our concluding chapter. Notions like “environmental imaginary,” which draw on the Marxist conception of consciousness, poststructural ideas about imagination and discourse, and, dare we add, environmental determinism from early-modern geography, open political ecology to considerations so different that we propose a new term to describe them – liberation ecology. The intention is not simply to *add* politics to political ecology, but to raise the emancipatory potential of environmental ideas and to engage directly with the larger landscape of debates over modernity, its institutions, and its knowledges.

Liberation ecology is not set in concrete as an already formed structure of ideas. It is a discourse about nature, Marxist in origin, poststructural in recent influence, politically transformative in intent, but subject still to the fiercest of debates. These concern vital, fundamental issues, such as attitude towards modernity, rationality, and emancipation. Compare Chapters 2 and 4 by Escobar and Yapa, so critical of such basic tenets of modernism as developmentalism or environmentalism that they advocate their abandonment, with Chapter 10 by Rangan, critical of the Chipko movement, that darling of the anti-modernists, or Chapter 4 by Bebbington, which shows that Ecuadorean movements defend their indigenous cultures by self-consciously embracing modern techniques. Our

own position – certainly not endorsed by everyone in this volume – tends towards a critical modernism in which rationality is contended rather than abandoned. But the main point is that liberation ecology is a discursive arena rather than a doctrine, a site where the broad issues of politics and thought that shape and mark our time are freely and audaciously discussed in terms of their environmental applications.

The poststructural and postmodern critiques of Western science as rationality in its pure and universal form thus open the way for a fuller understanding of the multiplicity of ways of comprehending the extraordinarily complex nexus of development–environment relations. A poststructural ecology may begin with the devastating environmental consequences of modernity but it deepens this practical critique by arguing for its path-dependency, substantially different local discourses about environment, each marked by its own contradictions, each with lessons to teach and problems to avoid. In this sense a retrieval of peasant and indigenous discourses on nature, land use, and ecological regulation and management need not romanticize pre-capitalist or non-Western relations between society and nature as Shiva (1991) does. Furthermore, one of the great merits of the turn to discourse, broadly understood, within political ecology, is the demands it makes for nuanced, richly textured empirical work (a sort of political-ecological thick description) which matches the nuanced beliefs and practices of the world. Some of the contributions to this book precisely capture this fine-grained and culturally sensitive analysis.

In our view, accounts of environment and development should begin still with the overall contradictory character of relations between societies and natural environments and recognize that dialectics remains a compelling theory of contradiction, crisis, and change (see Harvey 1993). But we would argue that poststructural theory, which owes much of its appeal to the deconstruction of the Western myths of science, truth, and rationality, itself has fabricated a mythology about the dialectic or, rather, has taken the “dialectic” of Stalin’s iron laws of history as its prevailing model. The dialectic, then, is portrayed as an idealist device in which thesis incorporates antithesis during teleological passage to an already given synthesis, allowing no room for contingency, difference, or, for that matter, the new. In our view, dialectical analysis instead imagines a system of relations which does not consume the autonomy of the particular; it is one in which a number of dynamic tendencies in shifting hierarchical arrangements are constantly disturbed and dislocated by new sequences of different events, a dynamic which has pattern, order, and determination without being teleological. It is a theory of totalities which, because it values their unique aspects, is not *totalizing*.

This body of work at its best locates specific sorts of movements emerging from the tensions and contradictions of under-production crises, understands the imaginary basis of their oppositions and visions of a better life and the discursive characters of their politics, and sees the possibilities for broadening

environmental issues into a movement for livelihood, entitlements, and social justice. This is a tall order, and in a sense the theoretical work has only just begun. We believe that this book represents, from a multiplicity of vantage points, a common effort to refine and deepen the political, and in so doing pushes toward what we have termed a liberation ecology. Furthermore, we also believe that the contributions to this volume – to return to the quotations by Buttel and O’Connor cited at the beginning of the conclusion – provide building blocks on which environmentalism and sustainability can be critically assessed and hopefully reconstructed.

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