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The thing about the 'post-' prefix

Postdevelopment or Post-development?

Does it matter whether you write post-development or postdevelopment? Well, you might think it's just a semantic exercise, but it actually changes the meaning of the word. "Post-" as a prefix implicates temporal closure. On the one hand, this makes sense. After all, PD calls for the end of 'development' and proposes alternatives to 'development'. On the other hand, the temporal dimension seems to imply that first we fully need to abandon "development" as otherwise moving beyond, and therefore also thinking about alternatives, is not possible.

The problem is: that would mean that we cannot start the alternatives before 'development' is fully finished. Practically, however, these alternatives are already happening in parallel, on different levels and in different places

In using the spelling postdevelopment we can make sure all three are included – the critique, the vision, and the recognition of lived alternatives!

Readings for inspiration: "Pluriverse. A Post-Development Handbook" and "Degrowth. A Vocabulary for a New Era"

Starting to read about critical perspectives towards "development" you will soon encounter post- and decolonial literature and arguments, popping up regularly as catchwords. Both are not homogenous streams of thought, but rather certain standpoints from which "development", capitalism, Eurocentrism, Anthropocentrism and the ongoing legacies of colonialism are critiqued and contested.

Then, you may notice that likewise postdevelopment (PD) comes with a "post-" prefix. How to make sense of all the "post" and "de"? How do they all connect?

You're confused? Fret not and look no further, here's a zine for you!

*Check www.convivialthinking.org for some good arguments why "development" should be written in inverted commas only.

Postcolonialism or Post-colonialism?

Again, we might think of 'post-' as an implication of historical conditionality, if not historical termination. On the one hand, assuming a temporal succession as in "after-colonialism" is too simplistic and becomes even dangerous when confirming the exact issue that the concept initially intends to criticize: the definition of the rest of the world through their relation with former colonial powers. On the other hand, historical traces (see what Gramsci says on that) play an important role, especially in recognising struggles for justice and sources of inequality.

As a solution, we can use the spelling Post-Colonialism in the sense of simple temporal posteriority, but when stressing social, political, cultural dimensions, we should adhere to Postcolonialism.

Well, it's easy. In linking to Christine Sylvester (1999), who has written: "development studies does not tend to listen to subalterns and postcolonial studies does not tend to concern itself whether the subaltern is eating" I think PD can serve as a bridging concept between the study of 'development' and the more abstract and theoretical approaches of post- and decolonial theory.

PD offers starting points to place policies and interactions within frames of 'development' (cooperation) in relation with critiques focused on power, knowledge and representation.

More precisely: PD places the political dimensions of 'development' in connection and context with the 'development project' by placing centrality onto knowledge and power divides in development interactions.

Okay, got it. And how does PD connect to all of that?

PD as a tool?!

A fundamental questioning of the whole 'development' idea as such is uncomfortable and inconvenient. Yet, since the finiteness of our planet becomes more and more difficult to negate, it is time to not only look for, but to practice alternatives to development. These alternatives do not need to be thought up by those that have claimed 'development expertise' for so long, but are practised widely in the non-Western peripheries. So far, these other cosmovisions have been easily dismissed as backward or underdeveloped, simply because they fail to measure up to the yardstick of Eurocentric modernity.

With postdevelopment as a 'tool', we are not asking HOW can we make development better, but: WHY through what historical processes, and with what consequences did Asia, Africa and Latin America come to be 'invented' as the 'Third World' through discourses and practices of 'development' (Escobar 1992)? It proposes contestations to the current world order, simultaneously from the top and from the bottom.

This is where post- and decolonial approaches come in.

Is there a difference between post- & decolonialism?
 Prof Gurminder K. Bhambra has laid it out in more detail, you should definitely look it up. Here's the super-brief version.

Postcolonialism has, while looking at some socio-economic aspects, mostly been focused on the cultural realm. The most important postcolonial concepts and scholars are, arguably, Orientalism and Othering (Said 1978), Subalternity and Representation (Spivak 1988), Hybridity (Bhabha 1994) and the Provincialization of Europe (Chakrabarty 2000). All of them are diasporic scholars from the Middle East and South Asia. Their work is concerned with their countries' relation to European imperial powers in the 19th and 20th century.

Decolonialism (you should read Icaza, Mignolo, Lugones, Quijano), emerging from South America refers to Europe in a much broader timeframe starting from the 15th century (Columbus and those guys) and scrutinizes the interrelation of capitalism, coloniality, modernity.

Their commonalities? 1) Challenging historical Eurocentric narratives, 2) Placing the current world order in the context of colonialism, extractivism, enslavement, 3) Demands for uprooting processes of knowledge production through epistemic decolonization

Gurminder K. Bhambra (2014) Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues, Postcolonial Studies, 17(2), 115-121.