
The Project of Development as a Discourse

“The complex notion of economic development has been reduced to a number, the income per capita. The dialectical spectrum of Human wants [...] has long since been covered under the colourless numerical concept of ‘utility’”.

The Entropy of Economic Process (Georgescu-Roegen 1971, p. 52).

In spite of their widespread use, the meaning of words such as “development” (Rist 2007) and “innovation” (Krause 2013) remains vague and elusive, often only being disclosed in practice. These words take on multiple significances depending on who uses them and for what purpose. The notion of innovation for development, as we will discuss in Chapter 2, rests on highly contested ground. The ways science, technology and innovation are framed in the discourse of development belie a diversity of values, motivations, interests, political positions and world views. Those elements can be combined to create an interpretative and normative framework in which the actions of a practitioner of development are then constructed and legitimized.

In order to understand the role of innovation in the discourse of development, it is crucial to understanding how both those two notions are *constructed and combined*, as theoretical formulations and concrete practices. We can analyze the ways in which development and innovation are intertwined using a theoretical framework focused on the notion of *discourse*. This theoretical and analytical lens is based on the idea that

language is fundamental to constructing the frames through which every individual or human group deciphers and creates meaning from the complexity of the surrounding reality. In the first part of this chapter, we introduce in general terms the concepts of discourse, framings and narrative. In the second part, we adopt a particular position within development studies known as “post-development”, which frames the notion of development as a specific, historically situated discourse. Taking this approach, we can first deconstruct both the discourse of development and then the emerging discourse of innovation for development and analyze these with a non-essentialist lens that is sensitive to both the historical and contingent aspects that have contributed to their emergence and evolution.

We consider this perspective to be important, because the way the discourse of development has evolved, in particular the domestication of market led approaches and innovation within it since the 1990s, has significantly influenced the way development interventions have been enacted on the ground. In a nutshell, the main argument formulated in this chapter is that the recent hybridization of the discourse of development with elements emerging from innovation studies described in Chapter 2 can be analyzed using a process of discursive deconstruction often used by post-development scholars. The chapter does not aim to provide a comprehensive description of development, as this has been covered elsewhere, but to provide the reader with sufficient understanding for the subsequent chapters, in which innovation will be located at the very center of the contemporary development discourse.

1.1. Discourses, framings and narratives

1.1.1. *The order of the discourse*

“There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis.
Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world”.¹

The word “discourse” in common parlance refers to the mundane use of language in social interaction, often describing an articulate discussion or treatment of a subject in the form of speech or writing. At the same time, the term discourse also refers to the ways in which people integrate linguistic

¹ The Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire 1996, p. 68).

and non-linguistic features “to enact or recognize certain identity [...] give the material world certain meaning, distribute social goods in a certain way, privilege certain symbols, systems and ways of knowing over others” (Gee 2011, p. 13). The study of this specific meaning of the term discourse is known as “discourse analysis”. The importance of this kind of analysis has gained momentum over the last five decades, since an increasing number of “researchers [have] developed the idea that discourse is, first and foremost, a form of action, a way of making things happen in the world, and not a mere way of representing it” (Nicolini 2012, p. 189). Language is not only limited to the transfer of information, but also conveys identities and action as a form of social practice that can have constitutive impacts. As such, discourses always belong to social groups, cultures and institutions (van Leeuwen 2008). Therefore, when we enact a specific kind of discursive practice, we can also sustain (or create/transform) specific social group(s), culture(s) and institution(s) (Gee 2011).

The analysis of discursive practice can be used to gain insights about the evolution and organization of social phenomena. The practical outcomes of discursive practices are evident in the allocation and distribution of social goods, defined as all the goods (e.g. products, services or relationships) that people value. As Gee (2011) argues, social goods are the field of politics and “[politics] at a much deeper level is about how to distribute social goods in a society: who gets what in terms of money, status, power, and acceptance on a variety of different terms”. And if discourse is always and necessarily political, its analysis also has to be political, since a full description of any use of language has to deal with politics. This approach to discourse analysis is known as critical discourse analysis (CDA).

A very influential way of approaching CDA comes from the work of Michael Foucault. Foucault’s interest is not in the mundane use of language, but in the rules that enable the emergence of a particular set of discursive practices and the “domains of knowledge that are constituted in this way” (Nicolini 2012, p. 196). Foucault calls those groups of rules “discursive formations” (Foucault 1970; Foucault 1984). These determine *what* can be spoken of, *who* is allowed to speak or write and within *which field of possibilities*. The rules that establish a particular discursive formation are the result of a process of historical negotiation among the producers and users of a discourse. Those subjects who are “allowed” to speak have a privileged

status that is given by a specific “institutional site” “from which [they] make their discourse, and from which this discourse derives its legitimate source and point of application” (ibid., p. 51). Therefore, for example, a doctor is allowed to make medical statements. The legitimation of those statements is given by the institution of medicine which legitimates the practice of care for patients by knowledgeable and qualified medical practitioners in physical spaces called hospitals and surgeries.

Discursive formations evolve in time and space and are not isolated. On the contrary, any particular formation is related to a number of other discursive formations to form what Foucault calls the “order of discourse”, which can be seen as the totality of discursive practices within a set of institutions or society at a given point in time (Foucault 1984). According to Foucault, the order the discursive formations present at any moment in society – the ways they interact, the preponderance of a specific formation over another – is controlled and organized by certain rules. In his words:

“In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality”. (ibid., p. 52)

The process of controlling, selecting and excluding discourses is intimately related to the distribution of power among the institutional sites within which the discourse is produced and consumed. The process of exclusion underlies a subtle mechanism of power that consists of the delimitation of other subjects’ range of actions. By setting the boundaries of what is legitimate to say or do, the order of the discourse establishes which discursive formations are “possible and reasonable” and which are not. The divisions created by the exclusion of certain types of discourses in favor of others are historically constructed: they have sometimes complex but specific origins that are subject to change and evolution.

An important consequence of Foucauldian thought is that discourse has a *constitutive* nature. It is not simply a mechanism signifying and representing the world but is involved in the definition and structuring of the world itself (Nicolini 2012, p. 196). This process of structuring social life through discursive practices does not occur merely by repetition of the same activity

over and over again, as much as by delimiting diversity (Foucault 1970, p. 37). Indeed, a plea we will make at the end of this book is precisely for diversity and pluralism in this respect. By exercising power through the exclusion of certain discursive practices, certain identities (i.e. ways of being, institutions, values, social groups, etc.) and certain practices (i.e. ways of doing) can in turn be excluded.

According to Fairclough (1992), the production of discourse always takes place within specific institutional settings. He argues that the “order of the discourse” is not determined by a free play of ideas but is determined by tensions and conflicts between different institutional settings. The process of normalization of the discourse can hide its past struggles, but these can at any moment become a source of potential tension (ibid., p. 86). An end to these struggles is achieved by control over a specific order of discursive practices that, according to Fairclough (1992), assumes the form of *discursive hegemony*. We will argue later in the book that the discourse of innovation for development may risk moving towards such discursive hegemony. One reaction to this analysis is a call for political action to empower the powerless, to give voice to the voiceless, to expose power abuse and to revive the alternative discursive practices excluded by the hegemonic discourse (Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000). We will later make the case for such a reaction in the context of the discourse of innovation for development.

1.1.2. *Framings and narratives*

The discursive practices described above have the capacity to create, promote and diffuse cognitive frameworks and mental models that influence action in the real world (van Dijk 1995). Important in this regard are the related concepts of “framing” and “narratives”. The concept of framing was introduced by Gregory Bateson to describe the context that enables any kind of communication (Bateson 2000). He argues that verbal and non-verbal communication always occurs with reference to a meta-message, a frame, this being the information related to the context in which the communication occurs and which provides the necessary key for its interpretation. According to Bateson, any communication is possible only within a certain frame of interpretation. Once the frame is set, the communication can be meaningful. The capability to interpret and decipher the context is acquired

through experience, drawing on a process of codification of those features that make a certain frame “recognizable”. Framing, through a process of “sense making” of the surrounding reality, allows a simplification of an otherwise complex and chaotic situation (Goffman 1986, pp. 40–45). The notion of framings draws on the observation that the understanding of the whole complexity of reality is always mediated by a process of interpretation (Tannen 1993).

The mechanisms of interpretation of a complex reality are not randomly established but follow a specific logic, which is never unique. The boundaries of the system, its dynamics, outcomes and interactions are “always open to multiple, particular, contextual, positioned and subjective assumptions, methods, forms of interpretation, values and goals” (Leach and Stirling 2010). Framing construction is characterized by at least two elements (Leach *et al.* 2010, pp. 45–47): first, the choice of elements, e.g. scale, boundaries, dynamics, the kind of outputs and the kind of relationships to be considered; second, it is shaped by subjective value judgments, group or individual perspectives, interests, values and goals. In short, framings are a “way to frame reality”, define boundaries within complexity and introduce interpretative mechanisms. According to Entman (1993), frames help define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies (i.e. propose action). The creation and evolution of framings has important implications in many aspects of social life. Frames can for example highlight some aspects of reality while obscuring others. They can become the basis for narratives concerning problems or social issues. Narratives are simple stories that start defining a problem, elaborate on their consequences and ends, and outline solutions (Roe 1994). The creation and development of a narrative or story implicates a number of discursive practices, all of which involve value judgments about what or who is excluded and included and what issues, questions and solutions are prioritized, in a Foucauldian sense.

Having briefly discussed the linked concepts of discourse, framings and narratives as an interpretive and analytical framework we now go on to use these for the remainder of the book to explore development as a discourse, laying the foundations for a deeper understanding of the cross-pollination of this discourse with the discourse of innovation.

1.2. Development as a discourse: underdevelopment and “the others”

Development is a concept that is highly contested. In an effort to analyze the wide range of perspectives that exists concerning the concept, Sumner and Tribe (2008, p. 11) suggested three major categories: i) development as a long-term process of structural and societal transformation; ii) development as a short- to medium-term outcome of certain desirable targets; iii) development as a dominant discourse of Western modernity. A rigorous analysis of the history and evolution of those perspectives is beyond the scope of this book. We will focus on the third perspective that considers development as a discourse. This perspective takes a “post-modern” (Sumner and Tribe 2008), “post-structural” (Castro 2004) or “post-development” (Rahnema and Bawtree 1997) conceptualization(s) of development.

“Development, as the term came to be used after 1945, was based on a familiar explanatory mechanism, a theory of stages. Those who used this concept were assuming that the separate units – national societies – all developed in the same fundamental way but at distinct paces” (Wallerstein 2004, p. 10). In this post-war period, the industrialized countries of the time (largely the US and nations of Western Europe) aimed to extend the benefits of modernization to the rest of the world (Rist 2011). Gustavo Esteva (2010), Arturo Escobar (2012) and Wolfgang Sachs (1990) symbolically situate the birth of the “development industry” in the inaugural address pronounced on January 20, 1949 by the then president of the United States Harry S. Truman (Truman 1964). In his speech, after a scathing attack on Communism, Truman declared the US intention to “develop” that constituency of the world’s population living in conditions of poverty, misery and economic stagnation. The key to this intervention was the transfer of modern *technical and scientific knowledge* to the *underdeveloped regions* of the world.

Drawing on post-structural analysis, post-development proponents argue that the project of development implicit in Truman’s words can be better understood as the discursive exercise of power, a construct “invented” by the West to diffuse its narrative of modernity and Western values outside the Occident. The post-development perspective argues that development was “a pervasive cultural discourse with profound consequences for the production of social reality in the so-called Third World” (Escobar 2000). In Arturo Escobar’s view, Truman’s political speech presented a discursive

construction that established the boundaries and permissible space of what it means to be developed and underdeveloped, shaping in a fundamental way how development was to be framed and understood after World War II. Rist (2007, p. 487) argues that in the second half of the 20th Century, the term development became a “modern shibboleth, an unavoidable password [...] to convey the idea that tomorrow things will be better, or that more is necessarily better”.

The construction of the *underdeveloped*, however, has far deeper roots. According to Ivan Illich (1981), the concept of development emerges from a deeply engrained Western world view of “us” against the “outsiders” or the “others”. For Illich, the concept that is currently termed development emerges from earlier foundations going back to late antiquity. For the Greco-Roman civilization, the outsiders were the *βάρβαροι*, the barbarians who were only able to slur together incomprehensible “bar-bar-bar”. The mission of civilization was to teach them how to speak properly, how to dress and appreciate art and literature. The Romans often legitimated conquests and invasions by considering barbarians as savages who needed to be civilized. Then, the outsiders became the *pagans* and the *infidels*. Finally, in the colonial quest, the outsider assumed the form of the *savage*, the *native* and ultimately the *underdeveloped*. The Europeans, for example, justified the occupation of land in the Americas in part on the basis of the inability of the natives to make it productive for agriculture. The idea of “the others” thus has a long and troubling history. By declaring a majority of humanity to be underdeveloped, Truman’s doctrine and the project of development that followed served to extend this. Interestingly, the relationship with the “others” always invoked a specific, historically situated formulation of rationality. During the colonial times for example, this rationality was one of civilizing the uncivilized. In contrast, in the modern era, developing the underdeveloped would be underpinned by first a technical and scientific rationality, and then one that would combine these with innovation.

One example of how this emerging discourse of development would subsequently be translated into the reality on the ground is the “institutional ethnographic” work of Ferguson (1990). Ferguson deconstructs the discourse of the World Bank’s 1975 report on the country of Lesotho, describing how the country’s issues and weaknesses were constructed to legitimize the intervention of development agencies advocating large infrastructural

projects. Ferguson argues that the state, with the help of the World Bank, created a discourse that led to the extension of the power of Lesotho's government at the expense of pre-existing traditional structures. In his words:

“development institutions generate their own form of discourse, and this discourse simultaneously constructs Lesotho [in this case] as a particular kind of object of knowledge, and creates a structure of knowledge around that object. Interventions are then organized on the basis of this structure of knowledge, which, while ‘failing’ on their own terms, nonetheless have regular effects, which include the expansion and entrenchment of bureaucratic state power”. (ibid, p. 14)

According to Ferguson, Lesotho was framed by the World Bank as a “traditional subsistence peasant society [...] virtually untouched by modern economic development” (ibid., p. 14), despite the fact that the country had been integrated with the South African economy and indirectly connected to the world economy since the beginning of the 20th Century. This narrative would have a real impact on people's lives there. The framing of Lesotho as underdeveloped, marginal, poor and backward, as depicted by the World Bank using quantitative analysis, increased the power of local bureaucracy and served to strengthen the agenda of the central government and international development agencies.

Of note in this regard is that the deployment of the discourse of development is often preceded by a process of knowledge construction about “the others”. Postcolonial scholars such as Edward Saïd and Robert Young have explored this relationship with knowledge further, arguing that the construction of the discourse about the others has origins rooted in institutions of the West such as the educational system. Saïd (1994) in his famous text *Orientalism*, for example, argues that the West's cultural representation of the others pervades Western literature as well as contemporary media representations of the Middle East. In his words, Orientalism is “the systematic discipline by which European culture [has been] able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively”

(ibid., p. 3). Young has shown that this sense of racial or intellectual superiority is often framed within rational, positivistic and scientific discourses (Young 2005).

As we will describe in our second case study in Part 2, this construction of non-Western reality can be accompanied by an insidious subtext of the “others” as being lazy, inefficient and backward, requiring a course of corrective action that provides legitimation for development interventions. As Sahlins (1993) writes:

“To ‘modernize’, the people must first learn to hate what they already have, what they have always considered their well-being. Beyond that, they have to despise what they are, to hold their own existence in contempt – and want, then, to be someone else. [...] Humiliation is an important stage of economic development, a necessary condition of economic ‘take-off’. The role of disgrace is critical, for in order to desire the benefits of ‘progress’, its material wonders and comforts, all indigenous sense of worth, both the people’s self-worth and the value of their objects have to be depreciated”. (Sahlins 1992, p. 13, 25)

This can be compared with a statement from our second case study:

“We analyse together their activities and how they work [...] We have to make them feel that they have wasted time. If you did it efficiently, instead of this one week work you could have done in two days work”.²

Arturo Escobar had analyzed development as a discourse from the time of the famous Truman speech until the 1980s, focusing on development interventions in Latin America, with special attention to his home country, Colombia. His work casts “serious doubt not only on the feasibility but on the very desirability of development” (Escobar 2000). By describing the missions of the World Bank and the IMF in the country from the beginning of the 1950s until the end of the 1970s, Escobar illustrates how the discourse of development evolved from its initial formulation to a more complex weaving of discursive constructs such as “the poor farmer”, “the rural poor”,

2 Mother Earth’s production manager.

“the female poor”, etc. (Escobar 2012), themes we will pick up (and update and reframe) in our case studies in Part 2. These categories, according to Escobar, were constructed to legitimize a specific political action that served the interests of the dominant elites and institutions that ruled the country:

“The world bank strategy argues that development is about growth, about capital, about technology, about becoming modern. This discourse repeated ad nauseam produces a world of production and markets, of good and bad, of developed and underdeveloped, of aid, of investment by multinational corporations, of science and technology, of progress and happiness, of individuality and economics”. (ibid., p. 162)

By oversimplifying and reducing the reality of the subsistence life of the imaginary stereotype of the *Colombian peasant*, Escobar argues, the development discourse constructs the category of the “rural poor farmer” that fits the aspiration of the governmental agenda to create a national, agriculturally competitive market. The peasants then are removed and excluded from their traditional modes of production and forced to compete as individual entities in the free market, themes which will re-emerge in our case studies, but now leveraging the language of inclusive innovation, inclusive business and self-help.

Unlike our case studies, where there is an active desire by intermediaries such as social enterprises to connect the rural poor to markets and global value chains, Colombian farmers found themselves unable to compete on the market. Many lost their land in favor of big landowners or corporations and were compelled to migrate to the city. In contrast, we will describe how social enterprises such as Mother Earth try to maintain rural livelihoods by connecting villagers to the market. Our analysis will suggest that in doing so, ways of being, time and space are being re-configured around the concept of market readiness. While Escobar saw the introduction of the discourse of development and modernity as one that served the interests of the dominant elites, we will argue this is now one that serves the interest of the market and those who wield power within it.

Either way, the process of deconstruction advocated by Escobar aims to historicize and politicize the development discourse, which he sees as the expression of a particular paradigm:

“Development was – and continues to be for the most part – a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of ‘progress’. Development was conceived not as cultural process (culture was a residual variable, to disappear with the advance of modernization) but instead as a system of more or less universally applicable technical interventions intended to deliver some ‘badly needed’ goods to a ‘target’ population”. (ibid., p. 44)

We will go on to argue that this top-down approach has in recent decades become supplemented by an approach that favors interventions driven by private actors, or private–public partnerships (e.g. the Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) narrative described in Chapter 2), often located within an innovative, entrepreneurial and market-focused paradigm which continues to frame development as a “delivery issue”. This, we will argue, however leaves his observations on culture (and indeed politics) as being residual variables largely unchanged.

Escobar’s views are supported by several other critics of the mainstream, including two useful anthologies from post-development scholars: *The Development Dictionary* (Sachs 2010) and *The Post-development Reader* (Rahnema and Bawtree 1997). In *Toward a History of Needs*, Illich (1978) extends the analysis to the genealogy of human needs, disclosing their historical and contextual contingencies. He questions the universality of the concept used in development programs of “basic needs”, arguing that in any human society, the concept of needs is constructed on the basis of social values and not just on economic parameters. A similar argument was proposed by Rahnema (1991; 2005) who analyzed the historical evolution of the notion of poverty. He argued that the concept of “global poverty” used in the development discourse is a modern construct based on the dismissal of subsistence ways of living. In his words:

“Global poverty is an entirely new and modern construct. The basic materials which have gone into the construct are essentially the economization of life and the forceful integration of vernacular societies into the world economy”. (Rahnema 2005, p. 178)

At the same time scholars such as Claude Alvares (1992) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2002) questioned the universality of scientific rationalism as one that dismisses indigenous way of knowing (i.e. indigenous epistemologies) in favor of the supremacy of Western epistemology. According to those authors, scientific rationality can be, and has been used to discriminate and exclude other forms of knowing with the aim of replacing local institutions with Western-style ones. Shiva and Mies (1993) also advocate the right to explore alternative ways of development based on indigenous knowledge that they consider more appropriate to address environmental problems, poverty and gender issues at local levels, themes we will pick up in our fourth case study. Mehta (2010) similarly analyzed the effect of the development discourse on resource allocation, showing that the politics of distribution of basic resources such as water and land are enormously affected by the narrative of industrial progress that privileges the interests of big business to the detriment of the powerless sectors of society. And indeed, since the 1990s, post-development thinking has been instigated or intersected with new forms of critical actions (see, for example, the political ecology of Martinez-Alier (2002), reflexive development initiatives (Jakimow 2008) and the emerging movements of degrowth (Kallis 2011) and Buen Vivir (Acosta 2010; Walsh 2010)).

1.2.1. After post-development: the contemporary situation

It seems fair to conclude that the project of development has been the subject of an extensive level of critique. However, the world dissected by the earlier post-development scholars has itself also changed, becoming, at least until very recently, more neoliberal and market-oriented, more interconnected (e.g. digitally) and, until very recently, more globalized. This in turn has influenced the development discourse, critically opening the door for new actors and new buzzwords such as innovation to follow where state donors, science and technology had gone before. We have also witnessed the rise of new regional powers (e.g. China) and the emergence of unprecedented transnational corporate elites and philanthro-capitalists (Fejerskov 2017). As Arrighi (2007) acknowledges, countries such as China have formulated their own hybrid discourse of development, one that only partially overlaps with the analysis proffered by Escobar and his colleagues.

In revisiting the post-development literature after almost two decades, W. Sachs (2010) writes:

“Looking at *The Development Dictionary* today, it is striking that we had not really appreciated the extent to which the development idea has been charged with hopes for redress and self-affirmation. It certainly was an invention of the West, as we showed at length, but not just an imposition on the rest. On the contrary, as the desire for recognition and equity is framed in terms of the civilization model of the powerful nations, the [Global] South has emerged as the staunchest defender of development”. (ibid., viii)

Despite this, there remains, as Paulo Freire foresaw in the 1960s, a sense that the “oppressed” eventually adopts the values of the “oppressor”:

“Their perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression. At this level, their perception of themselves as opposites of the oppressor does not yet signify engagement in a struggle to overcome the contradiction; the one pole aspires not to liberation, but to identification with the opposite pole”. (Freire 1996, p. 27)

A “colonization of the imaginary” (to use an expression forged by Serge Latouche (2004)) within the elites of the so-called developing world has emerged over the six or so decades of development since Truman’s speech. Nevertheless, this belies a more nuanced, complex situation on the ground, with a mix of conflicting perspectives, as our case studies will show. In this respect, perhaps the post-development community has played an important role, one that can be extended to the critique of the innovation for development discourse. The post-development approach, for example, highlights the need for a cultural politics that takes seriously into account the existence of both the mainstream as a dominant model and the manifold hybrid local models that still exist in the Global South. Furthermore, the approach is a call for epistemological and ontological diversity to explore alternative ways of progress and, above all, alternatives to Western modes of knowing. Post-development analysis is a useful tool to deconstruct the politics that underlie the emerging discourse of innovation for development, rather than treating innovation as apolitical, agnostic and unreflexively a force for good. It instead calls for a way of understanding

human relations and interactions in the Global South that takes into account politics, culture, history, local contexts and local knowledge.

In summary, the discourse of development has variously evolved, been modified, transformed, negotiated, critiqued and even dismissed over time. Since the 1970s, as we will go on to explain in more detail, as the external global, political and economic context has changed (notably the rise of the neoliberal agenda and an emphasis on free market forces), there has been a progressive shift in how development interventions have been delivered and implemented, paving the way for innovation to enter fully into the lexicon of development. Nevertheless, our analysis is that the premise for the discourse of development has not drastically changed over time, at least in its mainstream formulations, in three fundamental aspects. The first is the economization, commodification and bureaucratization of social life. Development remains a numbers and ratings game. Figures, statistics and reports still have a major role to play in the construction of the “beneficiaries of development action” (Radomsky 2011). The legitimate interpreters and users of these tools are an increasing generation of experts specialized in many fields.

The second aspect is a more cognitive phenomenon that is rooted in the *a priori* conviction that there is always something wrong about the condition of the beneficiaries – the “others”. That does not mean that starvation and destitution are desirable conditions, that child mortality and curable disease should not be fought or made the target of innovative solutions. We refer to any latent conviction behind development interventions which views those conditions as in some way being the result of flawed or biased cultural values, irrational behaviors and traditions or intellectual inferiority (for the ethical issues raised by development interventions see a summary by McEwan (2011) and on the new form of intellectual supremacy in research and development interventions on “the natives” see Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2002)).

The third aspect is a consequence of the former, in that this conviction can neglect the political and cultural dimensions of the development project. We will go on to describe one consequence of this depoliticization, an increasing recourse to the “techno-fix” and to managerial discourse and

practice evident for example in the BOP literature and in the language of inclusive business models. This leverages a powerful Western predisposition evident in Truman's words and described by Reddy (2013) as:

“[...] a desire to ‘fix’ things with simple minded mono-causal reasoning, allied with the conviction that technology [...] makes it possible to do so. Its technocratic premises, its naïve view of politics and society, and its unselfconscious do-goodism make for a self-affirming picture of the world”. (ibid., p. 72)

Before we move on to, innovation and development, it is worth noting that removing power and politics from the study of development is a political move in itself. It can neatly reduce matters to issues of developing and delivering innovative services or products in appropriate, “inclusive” ways to those that inhabit the Bottom of the Pyramid, with the assumption for example that social goods will be co-produced with profits. It becomes a managerial issue for which one needs experts, managers, organizations, routines, producers, consumers, markets and, importantly, innovation. However, the issues of power and politics do not go away: they are simply hidden, made tacit or re-framed as technical problems.

1.2.2. *Technology, innovation and development: a contested political field*

Development, science and technology have always been intertwined. Innovation is a more recent entry into the lexicon of development. These have, in various ways, influenced the discourse of development since its inception. At first, in line with Truman's doctrine, it assumed the form of “technical assistance”, “technical cooperation” and “technology transfer” to those countries that were deemed as requiring assistance (note, however, alternatives to this in the form of such initiatives as the appropriate technology movement in India). The emphasis on technological assistance and transfer evolved into one emphasizing technological *innovation*, with for example a focus on innovation systems, learning processes and knowledge management that we will presently go on to describe as one manifestation. According to Leach and Scoones (2006), the discourse concerning technical change, innovation and development has followed “three races”. The first race, which is also the dominant one (according to these authors), is the

“race to the top of the global economy”. Here, science and technology are seen as the fundamental ingredient to achieve national economic growth in a highly competitive world. The narrative of development that characterizes this race is one of modernization and progress, assuming that developing countries can move through a sequence of stages towards industrial modernity. In this view, it is generally assumed that poverty will be reduced by a trickle-down effect of the benefits of economic growth and prosperity. A second race is the “race to the universal fix”, which assumes that major breakthroughs in science and technology will have a decisive impact on poverty. This has been a popular narrative emanating from the philanthro-capitalist community, e.g. in Silicon Valley. New revolutionary advances in agriculture, new mobile phone technologies and new vaccines – among many other technological artifacts – are examples of this approach. In this view, there is a moral commitment to providing transferable and scalable technical solutions. As W. Sachs (1990, p. 14) argues, the popularity of this idea derives from “the tragic fallacy that modern technologies possess the innocence of tools”. Throughout the Global North and South, the consensus is that “more technology” is always better because technology is seen as a powerful but neutral force for good. Then, there is a third “slower race” that Leach

et al. (2008) define as follows:

“[the slower race] emphasises pathways to poverty reduction which, while recognising the importance of science and technology, are specific to local contexts; recognise that technological fixes are not enough and that social, cultural and institutional dimensions are key; create hybrids between local and external knowledge for appropriate solutions, and go the extra mile to make already-existing technologies more readily available to those who are poor and marginalised. In this view, science and technology are a part of a participatory process of development where citizens themselves take centre stage. Rather than passive beneficiaries of trickle-down development or technology transfer, citizens are knowledgeable, active and centrally involved in both upstream technology choice and design, and downstream deliberations around technology delivery and regulation – perhaps challenging external perspectives. This, so the policy argument goes, makes for technologies more appropriate to the challenges of poverty reduction and social justice”. (*ibid.*, p. 730)

This has many parallels with concepts of responsible innovation that we have discussed elsewhere (Owen *et al.*, 2013). It originates from the acknowledgment that the dynamics of technological change, far from being a singular path to progress, imply complex, power-influenced processes, often contradicting each other, that can move in a huge variety of different directions. These dynamics might imply the marginalization and exclusion of some social sectors and, at the same time, benefit other people by providing economic growth and greater well-being. Technological innovation is far from a collection of neutral tools, rather it takes the form of value-laden “knowledge spaghetti”. Once “technical development” is embraced, “no society can stay the same” (Sachs 1990, p. 15): there can be no technical modernization without remodeling the whole of society’s arrangements. In this view, questions about power, political economy, the impact of planned development interventions and who gains and who loses from these interventions are crucial to understanding the directions of technical change. Wilson (2007) notes a convergence between the critical approach proposed by the critics of mainstream development (i.e. post-development scholars) and the social constructivist approach adopted in the tradition of STS studies. According to Leach *et al.* (2005), however, although both approaches show an interest in the links between power, knowledge and the interests of actors and institutions, the academic work that connects Development Studies with STS studies remains limited.

1.3. Conclusion

We began this chapter by introducing the concepts of discourse, framings and narratives, emphasizing the point that language is not merely an instrument to convey information or meaning but is also a powerful means to make things happen in the world, to shape reality and modify the relations that constitute society. Then, in the second part of the chapter, we engaged critically with development as a discourse, reviewing some of the literature on post-development that describes development as a set of discursive practices designed to impose Western Modernity on “the others”. We also acknowledged that the discourse of development is far from a stable and fixed entity but is dynamically evolving, through the writing, speaking and acting of many different actors, ourselves included. We noted, however, that despite significant changes over the years to how development is delivered (and by whom), the central premise and goals of development appear to have changed only little. These are deeply entwined with a Western imaginary

and rationality of progress fueled by knowledge, science, technology and, more recently, innovation. In the third and final part of this chapter, we introduced the notion of technology and innovation as political and contested concepts within the broader discourse of development. As Krause (2013) noted, while there is increasing use of the word “innovation” in the development literature and in the discourse of the practitioners in the field, the concept of innovation for development can assume a huge variety of meanings and normative orientations. Chapter 2 explores this variety in more detail, providing a theoretical foundation for our case studies in Part 2.

