Applied Post-Development Theory: Case Study of Enda Graf Sahel

Erica Prosser

Follow this and additional works at: http://preserve.lehigh.edu/cas-lehighreview-vol-18

Recommended Citation
http://preserve.lehigh.edu/cas-lehighreview-vol-18/16

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Lehigh Review at Lehigh Preserve. It has been accepted for inclusion in Volume 18 - 2010 by an authorized administrator of Lehigh Preserve. For more information, please contact preserve@lehigh.edu.
Applied Post-Development Theory: 
Case Study of Enda Graf Sahel

By Erica Prosser

The 1980s brought about much upheaval concerning “development theory” and the projects implemented in its name. Critics of the theory claimed that “development plans were failures,” and there was a call for a new philosophy and innovative projects. Thus, post-development came into being, rejecting “development” because of its attempts to eradicate indigenous culture, impose Western lifestyles, and change the people’s perceptions of themselves. By first establishing exactly what theories define as post-development, as well as examining criticisms of the new discourse, it may be found that this school offers potentially beneficial ideas and practices. Once a solid understanding of the post-development school has been established, it will be possible to view it from an African perspective. Though the theory is relatively new, and literature on the subject is sparse, I have found one potential case study, an NGO in Senegal that does not explicitly claim sparse, I have found one potential case study, an NGO in Senegal that does not explicitly claim

Post-Development Defined
Post-development theory is classified as a critique to the current “development” model used by so many social change activists, and while many believe it is nothing more than another critique of “development,” it is actually unique in its ideals. The aspect of post-development that makes it qualitatively different from other theories is its outright rejection of all current “development” plans, rather than a revamping of them. Now, before I continue, it is imperative to define “development” as it is used here. In the likeness of Sally Matthews’ “Post Development Theory and the Question of Alternatives: A View from Africa,” and Arturo Escobar’s Unravelling Development, who refer to “development” as the post-World War II development project, this paper will refer to “development” as post-war development. This term encompasses all theories and practices that have emerged on “development theory” since the 1950s. Though there are differences in the school, there appears to be one common theme: a belief that some parts of the world are “developed” and some are not, and that those who are not must seek out “development.”

Despite the excess of material available on “development” and “development theory,” there is limited research on the most recent division of anthropological study: post-development theory. This study seeks to establish post-development theory as a beneficial and practical response to societies exploring options for social change. Africa has long been the target of “development” projects, and this study of an alternative to “development” is valuable to organizations attempting to create social change in communities across the globe.

The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Delusion, disappointment, failures and crimes have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work . . . development has become outdated . . . Nevertheless, the ruin stands there and still dominated the scenery like a landmark. . . . It is time to dismantle this mental structure. The school of post-development emphasizes complete rejection of post-war development, not simply a revamping of the current model. Post-development theorists contended that the current post-war development model cannot be altered, and differences in its implementation will certainly not suffice for creating sustainable change. Post-war development must be dismissed in its entirety. Sally Matthews explains, “This rejection appears to emerge from a feeling that the negative consequences which have been observed to result from development are intrinsic to development, rather than being unintended side-effects of it.” Therefore, the failure of post-war development projects—that is, the lack of results achieved from the initiatives—is not the sole reason for post-developmentalists’ rejection of the model. They believe that the principles on which post-war development is based are inherently flawed, and thus, the only solution is to do away with the entire form.

Post-development theory is classified as a critique to the current “development” model used by so many social change activists, and while many believe it is nothing more than another critique of “development,” it is actually unique in its ideals. The aspect of post-development that makes it qualitatively different from other theories is its outright rejection of all current “development” plans, rather than a revamping of them. Now, before I continue, it is imperative to define “development” as it is used here. In the likeness of Sally Matthews’ “Post Development Theory and the Question of Alternatives: A View from Africa,” and Arturo Escobar’s Unravelling Development, who refer to “development” as the post-World War II development project, this paper will refer to “development” as post-war development. This term encompasses all theories and practices that have emerged on “development theory” since the 1950s. Though there are differences in the school, there appears to be one common theme: a belief that some parts of the world are “developed” and some are not, and that those who are not must seek out “development.”

Additionally, because “development” carries so many different connotations, it is necessary to indicate that I use the term “development” to mean social change or transformation of people rather than being unintended side-effects of it.” Therefore, the failure of post-war development projects—that is, the lack of results achieved from the initiatives—is not the sole reason for post-developmentalists’ rejection of the model. They believe that the principles on which post-war development is based are inherently flawed, and thus, the only solution is to do away with the entire form.
The aspect of post-development that makes it qualitatively different from other theories is its outright rejection of all current “development” plans, rather than a revamping of them.

Post-developmentists oppose this dependency because it places the priorities of the money under the control of the donor. Often, monetary loans are accompanied by conditions and stipulations that must be followed by the recipients, and the rejection of post-war development is thus challenged because of these restrictions.

Overall, post-development’s main objective is to reject post-war development in all its forms. As previously explained, it opposes the post-war development model because of its Western manipulation of problems and solutions. According to Arturo Escobar, UNC professor of anthropol- ogy, post-developmentists share “an interest in reversing the above affects. In fact, that is precisely the aim of post-development theorists. They seek to initiate change by looking to locals as guides to problems, but more importantly to solutions.

At the core of post-development thought is the call for “alternatives to development” that are significantly different than the “alternative development” other critics of post-war development assert. As mentioned above, a cornerstone of post-development theory is the commitment to involving locals in the process of identifying problems and solutions. According to Escobar, post-development theory in seeking autonomy from external dependency, asserts that post-war development is a “hands-off” approach that is interpreted as abandonment of the “underdeveloped” people. Many post-development theorists, like Arturo Escobar, Nederveen Pieterse, and Brussels Development and Globalization, states, “The risk of intellectual disengagement from increasingly brutal global inequalities...” This critique suggests that post-development discourages serious academic thinking about alleged human rights violations or “primitive” practices that “hold back” communities. Again, critics feel that post-development theory encourages encourage disengage- ment, both physically and mentally. Opponents of the discourse argue that post-development rejection of post-war development is arbitrary and unconvincing. They believe that if post-de- velopment theorists cannot offer concrete steps for revamping the current model, then merely dismissing post-war development appears fruitless.

Critiques of Post-development Theory

Post-development’s main argument has come under criticism for several reasons. Mainly, it is said to promote disengagement almost to the point of indifference and deconstruction of development projects without building a plausible alternative, post-development theory in seeking autonomy from external dependency, asserts that post-war development is a “hands-off” approach that is interpreted as abandonment of the “underdeveloped” people. Many post-development theorists, like Arturo Escobar, Nederveen Pieterse, and Brussels Development and Globalization, states, “The risk of intellectual disengagement from increasingly brutal global inequalities...” This critique suggests that post-development discourages serious academic thinking about alleged human rights violations or “primitive” practices that “hold back” communities. Again, critics feel that post-development theory encourages encourage disengage- ment, both physically and mentally. Opponents of the discourse argue that post-development rejection of post-war development is arbitrary and unconvincing. They believe that if post-de- velopment theorists cannot offer concrete steps for revamping the current model, then merely dismissing post-war development appears fruitless.

Another widely held notion, and critique of post-development focuses on its percep- tion of “people” as post-development advocates often mocked by post-development opposition. For example, Ray Kiely, a fierce opponent of the post-development paradigm has come under criticism for several reasons. Mainly, it is said to promote disengagement almost to the point of indifference and deconstruction of development projects without building a plausible alternative, post-development theory in seeking autonomy from external dependency, asserts that post-war development is a “hands-off” approach that is interpreted as abandonment of the “underdeveloped” people. Many post-development theorists, like Arturo Escobar, Nederveen Pieterse, and Brussels Development and Globalization, states, “The risk of intellectual disengagement from increasingly brutal global inequalities...” This critique suggests that post-development discourages serious academic thinking about alleged human rights violations or “primitive” practices that “hold back” communities. Again, critics feel that post-development theory encourages encourage disengage- ment, both physically and mentally. Opponents of the discourse argue that post-development rejection of post-war development is arbitrary and unconvincing. They believe that if post-de- velopment theorists cannot offer concrete steps for revamping the current model, then merely dismissing post-war development appears fruitless.

The post-development paradigm has come under criticism for several reasons. Mainly, it is said to promote disengagement almost to the point of indifference and deconstruction of development projects without building a plausible alternative, post-development theory in seeking autonomy from external dependency, asserts that post-war development is a “hands-off” approach that is interpreted as abandonment of the “underdeveloped” people. Many post-development theorists, like Arturo Escobar, Nederveen Pieterse, and Brussels Development and Globalization, states, “The risk of intellectual disengagement from increasingly brutal global inequalities...” This critique suggests that post-development discourages serious academic thinking about alleged human rights violations or “primitive” practices that “hold back” communities. Again, critics feel that post-development theory encourages encourage disengage- ment, both physically and mentally. Opponents of the discourse argue that post-development rejection of post-war development is arbitrary and unconvincing. They believe that if post-de- velopment theorists cannot offer concrete steps for revamping the current model, then merely dismissing post-war development appears fruitless.
Having stepped outside the diseased circles of Modernity, Science, and technology, post-development applies the theories of Westernisation, Consumption, the Nation-State, Globalisation and Development, the peoples of the social majority's values and needs from local soils, and shitting together in the commons.14

Again, the tone and sheer language of this statement illuminates blatant mockery of the new discourse. What the opponents are criticizing is the level of local involvement in post-development. Kiely explains, "When more participation is the critique of post-development's lack of unity, not in the sense that there are vari- ations in the discourse, but in that it is so cultur- ally specific to have a common thread. Matthews points to a common argument in the post-de- velopment debate: "This kind of position opens post-development to the charge that it en- braces a politically relativist realism, as this sort of assertion implies that there are no values that are more valid than others. The position is to assert that different groups have different but equally valid value systems."15 The position she refers to is one in which "an anti-racist critic or condemn any type of cultural practice in the community, in which he or she happens to reside in simplicity, frugality, meeting basic needs from local soils, and shitting together in the commons."16

In essence, post-development comes under attack because it allegedly fails to produce the alternatives to development for which it calls. Now, however, it will offer a specific example of post-development in practice that ultimately refutes the criticisms explained above. First, I will offer readers an explanation as to why the African perspective is one through which post-development should be viewed. Second, I will provide a detailed account of a Senegalese NGO, Enda Graf Sahel, and its seem- ingly post-developmentunderpinnings.

Post-Development from the African Perspective

The most difficult part of studying post-devel- opment is the lack of resources available on the topic. From an anthropological standpoint, the subject matter is frustrating in the least because much of the research and literature employs sweeping generalizations and few, if any, case studies. Thus, the majority of the research used in this section comes from a single scholar, Sally Matthews of Rhodes University in South Africa. Matthews points out that there is little discussion on post-development application in any part of Africa. In her essay, "Post-Development Theory and the Question of Alternatives: A View from Africa," she provides us with one of the only articles on how the discourse can be applied to the African experience.

Enda Graf Sahel

With that said, the question is whether or not there are examples or cases of applied post- development anywhere in Africa. The short answer is no, there are virtually no self-avowed post-development organizations or projects currently. However, while it does not explicitly declare its philosophy as post-developmen- tal, there exists one Senegalese NGO whose prin- ciples and practices very clearly exemplify those of post-development theory. By examining Enda Graf Sahel’s mission statement and strate- gic guidelines, as well as a case study of conflict management in which EGS participated, we
can see how the group models a practical, valid alternative to post-war development, thereby answering the call of post-development theorists. The very existence of Enda Graf Sahel (EGS) refutes the critique of post-war development of being a homogenizing structure working to eradicate diversity within African cultures. Post-war development theory fails to recognize the differences in perspectives.

As discussed above, post-war development theorists often criticize post-development theory because it "romanticizes the local." Countless scholars have suggested that the culture and value systems of people in Africa are essentially wrong, and that those values hamper the success of post-war development projects. Yet, this assumption is highly contested by post-development theorists. Understanding the Senegalese view of giving and receiving is essential to successfully implementing a development project that meets people's needs. If an "outsider" does not fully comprehend how exchanges are perceived by the Senegalese, the projects are likely to fail, as most applicable to real life situations, which is seen in the majority of post-war development projects. As we will see, EGS's post-development philosophies are congruent with this understanding of Senegal's value system.

By examining a 1994 program in which EGS participated, several things can be seen first, the actual transformation the organization makes from post-war development theory to post-development thought. Second, how, by focusing on community involvement, and more fundamentally the diversity within the community, EGS is successful in initiating projects that cater to the real needs of the people. Third, readers discover how EGS counters opponents' claims that centering on the local results in a lack of unity and direction within a project. In 1994, workshops were held in Dakar, Senegal and N’djamena, Chad to help with conflict management within those two communities. Two phases of the program, action-research and the development of action-research in the process of change, combined to "help those involved in conflicts to turn situations of tension into a situation of growth and education, and on the other hand, to explore the 'ins and outs' of such a process so as to achieve a similarly positive result. The collaborative nature of this program clearly demonstrates applied post-development thinking. The most advantageous part of this Senegalese project was its utilization of local knowledge in identifying disputes and discovering solutions, an aspect that post-war development theorists surely oppose. EGS's involvement in this arguably post-development program was a turning point in its philosophy and practice. Now, members of EGS see themselves as part of a process of research and experimentation with an aim radically to change our society, in the manner outlined above. The relationships

The post-development school has accused post-war development of being a homogenizing structure, working to eradicate diversity within African cultures. Post-war development theory fails to recognize the differences in perspectives.
and programmes, developed by Enda Graf Sahel with other organizations, are no longer relationships based on aid or support, but rather alliances with a view of creating change together. This program helped transform EGS from a failing post-war development project into a post-development initiative that refutes the critiques of the new discourse. Like Enda Graf Sahel, EGS is able to revitalize its organization in such a way that better meets the needs of the people it was serving.

Currently, EGS employs the conflict resolution skills it acquired during the workshops to calm tensions between popular organizations in Senegalese villages. It promotes a similar forum for discussion, encouraged by the locals’ ability to define and solve issues for themselves. While Senegalese villages are no longer ashamed of their language, and a lack of unity. Thus, their next task was to identify what EGS’s core values are, resulting in a list that includes, among others, equity, autonomy, reflexivity, and environmental protection. Through the efforts of EGS and their advocacy groups, Senegalese villagers have been promoted, their assessment of the value of their culture has changed, and they perceive their culture. “By seeing their language as a supporting role in local development projects, EGS was trapped: “Hosts interventions in the community, or indeed any intervention, could not be considered to be ‘value neutral.’”38 Thus, their next task was to identify what EGS’s core values are, resulting in a list that includes, among others, equity, autonomy, reflexivity, and environmental protection.

With the invasion of Western culture, locals are exposed to what they do not have, and are subsequently labeled as “underdeveloped.” Rather than accepting the continuous failure of post-war development projects, post-development theorists express a new view of community revival.

One example of this process is EGS’s efforts to fortify the Senegalese language, a spoken tongue of Senegal.34 In Dakar, Enda Graf Sahel wrote that this process “is not always easy. Matthews writes, “Because post-development is criticized for in the community, or indeed any intervention, could not be considered to be ‘value neutral.’”38 Thus, their next task was to identify what EGS’s core values are, resulting in a list that includes, among others, equity, autonomy, reflexivity, and environmental protection. Through the efforts of EGS and their advocacy groups, Senegalese villagers have been promoted, their assessment of the value of their culture has changed, and they perceive their culture. “By seeing their language as a supporting role in local development projects, EGS was trapped: “Hosts interventions in the community, or indeed any intervention, could not be considered to be ‘value neutral.’”38 Thus, their next task was to identify what EGS’s core values are, resulting in a list that includes, among others, equity, autonomy, reflexivity, and environmental protection.

With the invasion of Western culture, locals are exposed to what they do not have, and are subsequently labeled as “underdeveloped.” Rather than accepting the continuous failure of post-war development projects, post-development theorists express a new view of community revival.

One example of this process is EGS’s efforts to fortify the Senegalese language, a spoken tongue of Senegal.34 In Dakar, Enda Graf Sahel wrote that this process “is not always easy. Matthews writes, “Because post-development is criticized for not always recognized as a national language. Through the efforts of EGS and their advocacy groups, Senegalese villages are no longer ashamed of their language, and a lack of unity. Thus, their next task was to identify what EGS’s core values are, resulting in a list that includes, among others, equity, autonomy, reflexivity, and environmental protection. Through the efforts of EGS and their advocacy groups, Senegalese villagers have been promoted, their assessment of the value of their culture has changed, and they perceive their culture. “By seeing their language as a supporting role in local development projects, EGS was trapped: “Hosts interventions in the community, or indeed any intervention, could not be considered to be ‘value neutral.’”38 Thus, their next task was to identify what EGS’s core values are, resulting in a list that includes, among others, equity, autonomy, reflexivity, and environmental protection. Through the efforts of EGS and their advocacy groups, Senegalese villagers have been promoted, their assessment of the value of their culture has changed, and they perceive their culture. “By seeing their language as a supporting role in local development projects, EGS was trapped: “Hosts interventions in the community, or indeed any intervention, could not be considered to be ‘value neutral.’”38 Thus, their next task was to identify what EGS’s core values are, resulting in a list that includes, among others, equity, autonomy, reflexivity, and environmental protection. Through the efforts of EGS and their advocacy groups, Senegalese villagers have been promoted, their assessment of the value of their culture has changed, and they perceive their culture. “By seeing their language as a supporting role in local development projects, EGS was trapped: “Hosts interventions in the community, or indeed any intervention, could not be considered to be ‘value neutral.’”38 Thus, their next task was to identify what EGS’s core values are, resulting in a list that includes, among others, equity, autonomy, reflexivity, and environmental protection. Through the efforts of EGS and their advocacy groups, Senegalese villagers have been promoted, their assessment of the value of their culture has changed, and they perceive their culture. “By seeing their language as a supporting role in local development projects, EGS was trapped: “Hosts interventions in the community, or indeed any intervention, could not be considered to be ‘value neutral.’”38 Thus, their next task was to identify what EGS’s core values are, resulting in a list that includes, among others, equity, autonomy, reflexivity, and environmental protection. Through the efforts of EGS and their advocacy groups, Senegalese villagers have been promoted, their assessment of the value of their culture has changed, and they