

Geographies of Development: without the poor

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Abstract

Some contemporary narratives of development give privileged status to middle classes in the global South. In the face of intractable poverty, policy makers take heart from the success stories of ordinary people who have, over generations, realised and consolidated the gains of development and who embody society at its most functional. Their presumed virtues are their self-sufficiency, their ability to articulate with the global economy, their buying power, and their good sense as responsible citizens. This, the first of three reports on geographies of development, reflects on recent research that interrogates the privileged status of middle classes in some narratives of development. As this burgeoning literature suggests, celebratory narratives elide the complex circumstances that make and unmake middle classes. Furthermore, middle class gains do not automatically translate into development for others. Indeed, efforts to centre the middle class threaten to displace, and justify the displacement of, economically marginalised groups seen as surplus to development.

Keywords: development subjectivities, middle classes, surplus populations, urban sanitization

The concept of hegemony was introduced by Gramsci in order to describe the future role of the working class in the building of a new society, but it is also useful for analysing the action of the bourgeoisie, especially in relation to space. (Lefebvre, 1991: 10)

As Marx said, 'historically [the bourgeoisie] played a most revolutionary part' in Europe. In emerging markets, that revolution now looks closer. (*The Economist*, 2011: 22)

If popular discourse could until recently be critiqued for its 'dichotomised schema of a "successful North" and the "unsuccessful South"' (Pearce, 2000: 17) then current media obsessions suggest different polarities. Deficits, unemployment, and shattered growth prospects in many parts of the North have made transparent what is being called the 'Great Regression', or the erosion of the middle class gains that once epitomised First World development (Reich, 2011). Meanwhile economic hopes, fragile as they may now be, have been transferred east and south, where a range of established and 'frontier markets' make the emerging world 'a whirling hub of dynamism and creativity' (Wooldridge, 2011: 127).

Major sporting events such as the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, and 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi have been dubbed 'coming out [parties]' (Tomlinson et al., 2009: 6) in which ascendant countries showcase their development. Yet it is telling that these global spectacles of modernity and progress involve the displacement of large numbers of ordinary people. In Beijing 300,000 citizens had been relocated by 2004 in order to build Olympic facilities (Broudehoux, 2007). In Cape Town, shack dwellers that would have greeted visitors along the airport highway were exiled to the outskirts of the city and replaced by an avenue of pastel coloured apartments (Miraftab, 2009; Newton, 2009). Slum demolitions in Delhi (Bhan, 2009; Dupont, 2008) were part of an effort to ensure that the shocking sight of the poor would not distract visitors from the image of 'shining India' (Burke, 2010). These vain attempts at sweeping away inconvenient realities demonstrate that those who seek to achieve a sense of development sometimes do so by ejecting, bypassing, or wishing away the very people we usually take to be the primary objects of development.

In this series, I review recent literature on three contradictory, although mutually constitutive, understandings of development. I refer to these as development *without* the poor, development *for* the poor and development *by* the poor. At times I use 'the poor' simply as shorthand for people who

experience relative and absolute material deprivation. Yet it is a 'thin social categorisation' which corresponds only partially with the lexicon of both classifiers and classified (Harrison, 2011). In this respect, it serves as a starting point for thinking critically about the ways in which society constitutes populations of people who enjoy differential shares in the gains of citizenship and wealth. This, the first report, considers those notions and practices of development that position some poor people as being superfluous, and that give the leading role in development to groups such as the middle class. These conceptions of development have become harmonised with the tendency of economic growth to telescope wealth onto specific sub- or trans-national groups and their concomitant spaces, which, by circular logic, are then valorised for being the primary agents and sites of development. The second report examines literature on broad responses to economic marginality, including experiments in cash transfers, which powerfully show that state-led attempts to target resources at the poor remain very much on the agenda. The third report considers recent literature on the agency of ordinary people themselves in shaping the terms and outcomes of development including their political claims, and how the effects of the broad participation of the poor in making space, economy and society defies those who would position them as surplus.

Social membership and development

Two decades ago, Robert Reich described the changing relationship between nations and socio-economic membership in this way: 'Americans are no longer in the same economic boat (nor, for that matter, are the citizens of other nations in the same boat)' (1991: 7-8). The economic nationalism of much of the twentieth century assumed that the fates of rich and poor rose and fell together. In the North, rapid Fordist industrialisation in the context of relatively protected economies translated into high levels of employment, good wages, and social protection. Workers were key contributors to wealth creation and wage earners were 'a normal subject' (Denning, 2010: 85) and the foundation of the Keynesian welfare state (Ferguson, 2009). However, in the final decades of the century, privileged groups were increasingly able to unshackle their fortunes from national collectives and, in effect, secede. The working class, meanwhile, had a less prominent role in the production of wealth, and post war social compacts became hegemonically redundant.

Although social democracy was an unrealised aim much more than it was a reality in most countries of the global South, various authors have plotted a similar normative drift in many contexts around the world. The development of national industrialisation platforms would, according to narratives of

modernization, create the conditions for waged employment and development as a result of rising national wealth (Rowden, 2010). These endeavours would draw in ‘both elites and popular sectors’ (Lawson, 2002: 243) under the universalising label of citizen and extend across the entire national territory (Lawson, 2007; Smith, 2011). Improvements to living environments were not acts of ‘charity’ (Chatterjee, 2004: 137) but the means of ensuring cooperative citizens, productive labour, and the hegemony of elites.

Yet claims to universalism belied the dependence of state-making processes on the exclusionary mechanisms of race, caste, gender, property ownership, education, urbanization, and indeed nationality itself (Brenner and Elden, 2009; Ghertner, 2008; Holston, 2008). In other words, the nation was never in reality a universal basis for social membership. In addition, universalism was not realisable in the face of the widening inequality and uneven geographical outcomes of economic growth (Arrighi, 2007; Hart, 2009; Harvey, 2010; Rigg et al., 2009; Smith, 2008; Wainwright, 2008). There have been many advances towards full democracy and political citizenship in recent decades. However the attainment of ‘social citizenship, or the benefits and income security presumed to be labor’s fair reward’ has proved much more elusive (Barchiesi, 2011: 2). The literature explains this in terms of three factors that have changed the way capital values those on the labour market.

First, the global labour supply far exceeds capital’s direct labour requirements. Marx, as recent texts have reminded us, saw a necessary link between the accumulation of capital and the accumulation of labour in excess of the needs of capital (Chari, 2004; Chari, 2006; Denning, 2010; McIntyre, 2011; Yates, 2011). The mobility of manufacturing and services has unlocked many previously unavailable labour reservoirs. In addition, the workforce participating in the global capitalist economy has doubled as a result of political and economic reforms in India, China, and the former USSR (Freeman, 2010). Collectively these labour pools exceed the need for labour, and as a result, only a portion of the available labour supply is able to find waged work. Those not engaged in wage relationships are seen as being ‘functionally unnecessary’ to the new economy (Chatterjee, 2004: 143) and of ‘very limited relevance to capital at any scale’ (Li, 2009: 67). The welfare of these permanently unemployed populations is of little importance to producers.

Second, given this surplus of labour power, those who are engaged in waged relationships are unlikely to enjoy favourable terms of employment. Direct competition between workers globally and the

presence of the reserve army of labour both serve to depress wages and increase the ranks of the working poor (Bernstein, 2010; Cammack, 2009; Harvey, 2010). For capital, the biological and social reproduction of labour is simply not urgent when there is a large surplus labour force (McIntyre and Nast, 2011: 1471). It is even less important to distant investors who do not share citizenship with those who produce for them. To be sure, worker gains do occur, but these are not generalised to all or even most workers. Increasing wages in China are delimited by the hukou system, which structures the workforce into urban insiders, who receive some social protection, and highly precarious migrant workers (Chan, 2009).

Third, labour is less important to capital because there are more tempting ways for capital to make a profit than slugging it out in the real economy. As a result of financial deregulation, investors can generate impressive returns by providing credit, speculating, trading currencies and securities, and engaging in other forms of finance capital (Arrighi, 2007; Hart, 2010; Harvey, 2010; Smith, 2011; Smith, 2009). Furthermore, as the literature on primitive accumulation shows, the real economy is much less appealing for some investors than simply appropriating and selling things of value such as land, natural resources, access to markets, and public services (A recent contribution to this now extensive literature is a special edition of the *Review of African Political Economy*: Bush et al., 2011). This may involve dispossessing people of land or other bases of livelihood, which pushes yet more people onto the saturated labour market.

Where waged workers were treated as normal subjects in social democracies, in the South it is informal workers who have become normalised and lauded for their industriousness and entrepreneurialism by free market advocates (Barchiesi, 2011; Denning, 2010). Meanwhile the left has criticised the neoliberal abandonment of economically vulnerable members of society. While wealth accumulation frequently depends on the poor, development occurs without the poor if there is no imperative to distribute wealth in a way that would counter poverty and support broader upward mobility. Social membership is now expressly much more selective than broad national containers (Smith, 2011), and therefore development dividends are concentrated spatially and socially. As Desai puts it, the 'ring of development' is 'tightening ... around specific nodes of investment' (2010: 433). As a result, the benefits of development investments bypass entire populations living nearby (Searle, 2010). Li argues that 'under increasingly globalized conditions, it is less obvious that nation states provide containers for crossclass settlements' (Li, 2009: 81). Ong similarly writes that states are 'moving from being administrators of a

watertight national entity to regulators of diverse spaces and populations that link with global markets' (2006: 78). Entitlements congregate around those more valuable to the global economy, whether they are actually citizens or not. Meanwhile low skilled members of society are regarded as 'less-worthy' and therefore 'excludable populations' (Ong, 2006: 16).

In contrast to the development state, which mobilised at least the principle of engaging ethically with many kinds of marginalised groupings within society, some authors point to the emergence of post-development states (Gidwani and Reddy, 2011: 1460; Ong, 2006: 77) which ethically disengage from populations whose social reproduction is not an important economic consideration. (This use of the term 'post-development state' here is unrelated to post-development theory.) If taken as a historical periodisation, this teleology idealises development states. Even relatively inclusive political and economic arrangements rely on, as Lefebvre put it, the 'expulsion of whole groups towards the spatial, mental, and social peripheries' (Lefebvre cited in Shmueli, 2008: 221). Furthermore, as the second and third reports in this series will discuss, there has not been an absolute abandonment of the poor by the state, nor have these kinds of trends been uncontested by the poor. Nevertheless, changes to capital and labour accumulation do provide important insights into the ways in which those who are supposedly the primary focus of development are, in some circumstances, written out of the story, spaces, and benefits of development.

Middle class as a development subject

Along with the normalisation of the poor, the working class, unemployed surplus, informal worker, and other subjectivities, more privileged groups in society also have roles in the narratives of development. Elites, the bourgeoisie, the new rich, the creative class, and the middle class who are in various ways presented as model subjects of progressive society and the 'natural force for rapid development' (Chibber, 2005: 146). Middle classes occupy a particularly favourable position as watchdogs of good governance and democracy, and a balance against hoarding elites (Easterly, 2001; Embong, 2002; Tomba, 2009). They are 'worshipped by global developers as the benchmark of human civilization' (De Angelis, 2010: 968), or simply as good citizens who are reasonable, rational, responsible, 'educated and self propulsive' (Ong, 2006: 16). In India, the middle class is a '*normative* political project' which valorises market reforms undertaken there (Fernandes, 2006: xviii, *Empahsis* in original). Rhetoric in China increasingly positions the middle class as the vanguard of a civilizing project that produces an improved quality of people who are 'exemplars of modernity' (Tomba, 2009: 497). Not to be outdone, a

recent African Development Bank report insists that the growing middle class on the continent is comparable in size to that of India and China, and represents 'Africa's future', no less (2011: 1). The report argues that it would be more effective to tackle poverty by expanding the middle class than to simply address the problems of the poor.

As with other subjectivities, 'the middle class' is an unsatisfactory term for a wide range of people whose disparate relations to means of production give them little class coherence (Cohen, 2004). While some apply the middle class label to those who spend as little as \$2 a day (African Development Bank, 2011), other uses of the term are something of a misnomer for what should be called more accurately be called the new rich (Fernandes, 2000; Goodman and Zang, 2008). Nevertheless, or possibly because of this ambiguity, it functions as a powerful idea of an open class of ordinary people who enjoy good incomes from their hard work, and to which everyone can aspire. Whereas other subjectivities are often treated as problems for society – rapacious elites, precarious workers, the idle and uncivilised surplus – the middle class has almost entirely positive and unproblematic connotations. Nations that hope to thrive through globalization-led growth regard the middle class as their key channel for doing so (de Koning, 2009; Pow, 2007). In India, Fernandes suggests, the new middle class has become 'a central agent for the revisioning of the Indian nation in the context of globalization' since it is positioned to negotiate India's economic and cultural relationship with the rest of the world (2000: 89). Richard Florida has enjoined aspirant cities to attract and retain members of the creative class who will drive economic development (Peck, 2005). According to this logic, where more successful individuals are able to thrive, others will have better opportunities through the multiplier effects of economic growth (Forti, 2007).

Much of the virtue associated with the non-poor is their 'ability to produce value through their practices of consumption' (Tomba and Tang, 2008: 172). Indeed, it is consumption rather than relations to the means of production that constitutes the middle class in many of its popular applications (Tomba, 2004). For consumers themselves, consumption is the vehicle not only for meeting material needs but also for achieving modernity and emancipation (Jaffrelot and van der Veer, 2008; Posel, 2010). More instrumentally, growing consumer power in the South offers the antidote for maturing markets in the North (Fernandes, 2006). Those with buying power offer extensive opportunities for commodification through not only their insatiable demand for consumer goods but also their preference for private

services over publicly provided services. The explosive popularity of private hospitals in India and elsewhere is one example (Lefebvre, 2008).

The high consuming classes symbolically function as a validation of economic liberalisation, evidence that under conditions of free market growth those who exhibit hard work and ingenuity will thrive (Goodman and Zang, 2008: 10). Yet detailed studies of particular cases of wealth and capital accumulation show that it is the result of the interactions between a variety of context specific factors and changing economic conditions (Freund, 2007; Hart, 2002). It is enabled by various forms of already accumulated capital, which position these groups to successfully engage with contemporary economic conditions. For example the call centre industry in India 'draws its workforce from the privileged castes and classes' (Nadeem, 2011: 3). Privilege is reinforced by or the ability of better resourced citizens to more effectively claim and enforce rights (Chatterjee, 2004; Hunter, 2010). In Appadurai's terminology (2004), privileged individuals have a more developed capacity to aspire and thus divert resources according to their interests. However, privilege does not develop or reproduce itself in guaranteed ways. In Tiruppur, India, it is not elites who have thrived in the changing environment of clothing manufacture, but some working class Gounders whose subaltern knowledge enabled them to accumulate capital by managing intimate gender and caste exploitation (Chari, 2004).

Furthermore, trajectories of upward mobility can run out of steam when economic conditions change. Many well-qualified young people from middle class families are stranded by an evaporating supply of salaried jobs (Cohen, 2004; Jeffrey, 2010). In Hong Kong, authorities and researchers anxiously discuss the downward mobility of many erstwhile middle class people no longer accommodated by the new economic and political environment (Siu, 2011). In India, the 'new rich' or 'new middle class' is in fact a relatively limited group of beneficiaries from liberalisation, while many of the existing middle class have struggled to adapt to changing labour markets (Fernandes, 2000; Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase, 2009). In Latin America, public sector employment has declined, pushing many into micro-enterprise (Portes and Hoffman, 2003). In Kinshasa, Freund paints a picture of an 'impoverished and woebegone national elite' (2011: 43).

Some authors argue that more privileged groups no longer imagine their social membership on national terms, and are more likely to have an 'atomistic, nonlocated vision of social order' with primary fealty to shifting earning opportunities (Cohen, 2004: 5). The mobility of jobs has had a 'disembedding effect on

the accumulation of claims and benefits that we associate with middle-class citizenship' (Ong, 2006: 160). Meanwhile, privileged groups are said to have withdrawn from full citizenship and responsibility for others within the nation, exercising narratives of race, class, religion and provenance to justify their desire to define their compatriots as being outside of their own particular social membership (Fabricant, 2009). The 'dreams of human liberation or social transformation that animated earlier struggles' have been replaced with individualised notions of freedom based on consumption (Hylton, 2007: 163).

Crowding out poverty

Social concentrations of development have corresponding spatial concentrations of development. '[H]igh quality' people (Tomba and Tang, 2008: 180) live, work, consume and commute between variously constituted 'superior parcels of space' (Crush, 1995: 13) such as gated communities, urban renewal precincts, call centres, IT parks, religious centres, green spaces, private hospitals, private schools and malls. The kinds of spaces associated with the non-poor are celebrated by authorities as 'pacified, morally superior, and governable consumer paradises' (Tomba, 2009: 610). These are not limited to privately built enclaves but include the 'urban commons' reclaimed from the poor for the middle class (Roy, 2011: 265). Cities are shaped by processes described as 'embourgeoisement' (Ghertner, 2008), 'Hausmannization' (Merrifield, 2006: 94), the 'patrician agenda of urban planning' (Gidwani and Reddy, 2011: 1645) or, more broadly, planning according to the principles of urban modernism (Watson, 2009). These serve both to create the blight-free comfort zones required for consumption and also to enable the high valuations of space which have become such a central aspect of making money (Goldman, 2011; Lefebvre, 1991).

For Bauman, consumption is guided by aesthetics rather than ethics (Bauman, 2005: 31). De Boeck suggests that these kinds of spaces 'escape from the real order of things' by engaging the imagination through marvellous sights (2011: 278). Neo traditionalist, new urbanist, futurist, gigantist, ostentatious architectural designs use mimicry, fakery, spectacle, and bling to filter out unwanted aspects of local environments, to engage the fantasies and desires that undergird consumption, and to mask the actual production of space (Davis and Monk, 2007; Dirsuweit and Schattauer, 2004; Lefebvre, 1991; Mbembe, 2008). Judgements about formality and legality are made, at times, by entirely aesthetic criteria. Where poor neighbourhoods in Delhi are judged to be illegal, well-resourced spaces are considered acceptable irrespective of whether or not their developers followed proper channels (Ghertner, 2011).

Of course the material existence of these spaces depends on the poor, not least because they build, clean, and guard them (Baviskar, 2003; Brody, 2006; Searle, 2010; Tomic et al., 2006). Yet the problem of poverty is externalised and removed through exercises of policing and urban sanitization (Dupont, 2008; Huchzermeyer, 2011; Kamete and Lindell, 2010; Murray, 2008; Samara, 2009; Srivastava, 2009; Swanson, 2007). As a result the 'reproduction field' (De Angelis, 2010: 962), or terrain within which biological and social reproduction is supported, is limited to those deemed productive and valuable and excludes those defined as surplus. Development without the poor is a manifestation of development which does not treat the poor as a temporary category to be absorbed, but an 'eternal presence' (Bauman, 2005: 71) to be removed from what it considers to be dynamic and progressive spaces and populations. In such forms, development is a process of distillation, concentration, segregation, and exclusion. It locates agency for progress in those who are already successfully accumulating wealth and seeks to reinforce the conditions for their further accumulation.

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