

Encountering the Puritanism of Post-development Populism

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KEY WORDS Anti-development; post-development critiques; development interventions; cultural hegemony

ABSTRACT This paper challenges assumptions of post-development and anti-development critics such as Arturo Escobar (1995) and Wolfgang Sachs (1992) that imply that Third World people are themselves anti-development rejectionists. Drawing on field work encounters in Matabeleland (Zimbabwe) and Namaqualand and Northern Province (South Africa), I argue that development "beneficiaries" tend to have highly selective and situational responses, and development packages are resisted, embraced, reshaped or selectively accommodated depending on the specific situation and intervention. Moreover, villagers are seldom passive victims of western imperialism and hegemony, but tend to exercise agency in their complex negotiations with external social forces and agents. While they may not have "free choice" in their encounters with exogenous interventions, they are either not simply docile bodies enslaved by the tyranny of western development. Ethnographic case studies suggest that responses to development tend to be neither wholesale endorsements nor radical rejections of modernity and its fruits. Moreover, even when resisting and subverting modernist discourses, rural people do not generally do so on the basis of either radical populist politics or in defense of pristine and authentic local cultural traditions, as Escobar and Sachs *et al.* seem to imply. Finally, I argue that Escobar and Sachs's focus on development charters and plans privileges the "development-speak" emanating from the offices of the World Bank and IMF, thereby reifying text and obscuring human agency. Finally, the Zimbabwe and South African case studies suggest that anti-development critics tend to romanticize the realm of the local community by fetishizing cultural autonomy and cultural resistance to western imperialisms on every front.

INTRODUCTION

In January 1997 I returned to Sengezane village in Gwanda District, Matabeleland South Province, following a three-year absence from the field site where I did my doctoral research. Soon after my arrival in the village I was told that Agricultural Development Authority (ADA), a Zimbabwe parastatal, had withdrawn from the

village and the surrounding project area of the "Model D" Resettlement Scheme. After a decade in the area, and after having spent millions of (Zimbabwe) dollars attempting to introduce land-use planning reforms in Gwaranyemba Communal Area, the ADA management team and field workers had packed their bags. I wandered on foot through what ADA had once hoped would become the village paddocks. None of the million dollars worth of paddocking fencing remained intact. The fences had either been entirely removed or else torn down. New houses were being built and fields were being cleared in what ADA had once insisted would have to be cleared to make way for village paddocks. ADA's multi-million dollar land-use plan is probably now gathering dust in some Government office in Bulawayo. Villagers' slow and stubborn strategy of refusing to comply with a land-use plan that threatened to disrupt their lives had won at the end of the day.

ADA had touted the Model D project as a possible prototype for land resettlement programmes in the semi-arid Matabeleland South Province. In accounting for its dismal failure, state officials and planners blamed communal farmers for their adherence to outmoded traditional values and practices. Technocrats within the state viewed these communal farmers as conservative peasants who were unwilling and unable to modernize. However, my daily encounters with these Ndebele-speaking villagers suggested to me that they were by no means trapped within the straitjacket of tradition. Although they vehemently opposed paddocks and villagization by drawing on arguments about how these interventions undermined isiNdebele culture, they were nonetheless intimately enmeshed and engaged in modernist discourses and practices. They were certainly not incarcerated within a

pristine traditional world.

This paper looks at how arguments about the "Great Divide" between tradition and modernity function in both development discourses and in the more fashionable anti-development and post-development critiques articulated by Arturo Escobar and Wolfgang Sachs. Whereas modernization arguments claim that "peasant" opposition to development is a sign of "traditional backwardness", anti-development critics tend to valorize and romanticize subaltern resistance to development.

Such resistance tends to be viewed as acts of heroic defense of authentic cultural autonomy threatened by the intrusion of western capitalism and cultural imperialism. This post-development perspective celebrates "endogenous discourses" of local culture and tradition as acts of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist resistance. According to anti-development crusaders such as Escobar, all development interventions ought to be opposed because they are mere ideological and discursive vehicles of global capitalism and western cultural hegemony. Such anti-development rhetoric is, in my opinion, founded upon a naive cultural romanticism that essentializes and reifies notions of "the local community" and the autonomy of the subaltern. It could also be argued that Escobar *et al.* project their own revolutionary utopianism onto a subaltern Other of their own making¹.

Escobar (1995) calls for the reclamation and defense of "endogenous discourses" and the forging of "alternatives to development" that are rooted in grassroots social movements. According to Escobar (1995: 213), the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America did not always see themselves in terms of "development". This vision emerged "in post-war period when the apparatuses of Western knowledge production and intervention (such as the World Bank, the United Nations, and bilateral development agencies) were globalized and established their new political economy of truth" (see Sachs, 1992; Escobar, 1994, 1988). Escobar's project is to reveal how this regime of truth about the reality of "Third World underdevelopment" came to be internalized and taken for granted by people living in the "Third World". For Escobar, this process shares the same structural features of other

colonizing discourses such as Orientalism (Said, 1978). Like Orientalism, development functioned as "an all-powerful mechanism for the production of management of the Third World in the post-1945 period" (1995: 213). Escobar outlines his critique of this "all-powerful mechanism" in three propositions:

The argument can be summarized in three propositions. First, most critiques of development have reached an impasse. The present impasse does not call for a 'better' way of doing development, or even an 'alternative development'. A critique of the discourse and practice of development can help clear the ground for a more radical imagining of alternative futures. Second, development is not simply an instrument of economic control over the physical and social reality of Asia, Latin America and Africa. It is also an invention and strategy produced by the 'First World' about the 'underdevelopment' of the 'Third World.' Development has been the primary mechanism through which the Third World has been imagined and imagined itself, thus marginalizing or precluding other ways of seeing and doing. Third, to think about 'alternatives to development' requires a theoretical and practical transformation in existing notions of development, modernity and the economy. This can be achieved by building upon the practices of the social movements, especially those in the Third World. These movements are essential to the creation of alternative visions of democracy, economy and society.

The ethnographic material discussed in this paper suggests that such critiques not only romanticize the sphere of local cultural autonomy, social movements and subaltern resistance, but they also essentialize "development" as a monolithic enterprise. In other words, Escobar's anti-development critique tends to end up caricaturing and homogenizing the complex, chaotic and inconsistent history of development ideas and practices (Nederveen Pieterse, 1999: 21).

Notwithstanding Escobar's important and exciting post-development insights into the "development fictions" of the development industry

(see Ferguson, 199), his theoretical perspective shares with its political economy predecessors a tendency to engage in analysis at very high levels of abstraction. Whereas political economists focus on general theories of "the State", or else the role of development in accumulation on a global scale, post-development discourse deconstructs development-speak. But in the process it ends up constructing the "targets" of development interventions as more docile and passive than they actually are. In other words, Escobar *et al.*, privilege the "development-speak" emanating from the offices of the World Bank and Third World governments without adequately taking into account the agency of those deemed the "target populations". This focus on development charters, plans and proposals has the danger of reifying text and obscuring the complex ways in which "beneficiaries" resist, accommodate and collaborate in development interventions. Equally problematic, in my opinion, is the tendency of anti-development critics to reify and romanticize the realm of the local community. This results in the fetishization of cultural autonomy and cultural resistance to exogenous, alien forces².

My fieldwork findings based on rural research in Zimbabwe and South Africa challenge the widespread perception, shared by both modernization technocrats and anti-development critics, that local opposition to development interventions are attempts by rural communities to defend their cultural autonomy in the face of alien western influences. This view, whether articulated by modernization or post-development theorists, reinforces a perception of insulated and isolated traditional communities. By contrast, my ethnographic encounters in a variety of rural sites in Matabeleland (Zimbabwe), Namaqualand and Northern Province (South Africa), suggest to me that villagers are seldom trapped within the confines of "tradition" and locality. Let me illustrate what I mean by referring to a recent Northern Province fieldwork encounter.

THE MAKHULEKE, WHITE MAGIC AND CYBER-SPACE

I recently visited Makhuleke village in North-

ern Province along with a North American anthropologist and a colleague of his, a computer expert from Atlanta. The purpose of the visit was to introduce the chief and community leaders to possibilities for using the Internet to promote tourism and for collecting and downloading local histories of the village onto a Makhuleke website. Makhuleke village's brightly painted wattle and daub homesteads suggested that this was a typical Northern Province rural village. In 1998 this Tsonga-speaking ("Shangaan") community had successfully won back land in the Kruger National Park from which they had been evicted in 1969, when they were dumped along the western border of the Park in what was later to become the Gazankulu "homeland". After complex negotiations with the Departments of Land Affairs and National Parks, a legal agreement was signed whereby the Makhuleke community would co-manage the land with the Parks Board and thereby derive substantial benefits from eco-tourism.

Our meeting began with the American anthropologist introducing, in very basic language, the key features of this proposed internet project. He explained what the internet was, what a website looked like, and how all this could be of benefit to the Makhuleke in terms of stimulating international eco-tourism. At the conclusion of his presentation, there was a deathly silence. The community spokesperson, Lamson Maluleke then began to explain to us how the community had already initiated the process of setting up Internet facilities but were simply waiting for Telkom to install telephone lines. The great white men had arrived with their white magic only to find that it was too late. The natives were one step ahead in the cyber game. We were then taken to see the village's computer laboratory where Lamson Maluleke introduced us to about a dozen students from the village who were studying subjects such as business management and conservation through Pretoria Technikon's distance teaching programme.

The next time I met the highly eloquent and sophisticated Lamson Maluleke was at Johannesburg International Airport. He was accompanied by Coenrad Steenkamp, an anthropologist who is working together with the

Makhuleke community on various development projects, including the making of a video documentary archive.

Unlike anti-development crusaders such as Arturo Escobar and Wolfgang Sachs, who regard all development interventions as extensions of western capitalism and cultural imperialism, the Makhuleke people did not seem to have any problem in principle with modern technology and development. This did not mean that they devalued or compromised their cultural heritage. On the contrary, it was precisely their concern to disseminate representations of their cultural heritage that prompted them to attempt to establish a Makhuleke website in the first place. Tradition and modernity are two sides of the same coin in this Northern Province village. From the perspective of Lamson Maluleke, the arrival of cyber-technology in the village need not in any way undermine the cultural autonomy of the Makhuleke clan. It is another valuable resource available to the community.

Post-development populists such as Escobar argue that progressive scholars ought to participate in social movements rather than lend their expertise and credibility to development agencies and governments, which are seen to be mere discursive conduits for western cultural domination and capitalist agendas and interests. Like their dependency and underdevelopment predecessors, they believe that delinking from global capitalism is a viable and necessary strategy for Third World countries. They also argue that development interventions inevitably undermine the local cultural autonomy of Third World peoples by depoliticizing and disempowering them in the name of modernity, progress and technological advancement.

My own ethnographic encounters with development interventions in the Northern Province, Namaqualand (Northern Cape) and Matabeleland suggest to me that uncritical celebrations of endogenous social movements and cultural autonomy can often lead to the reinscription of static and bounded notions of local community and culture. Such an approach implies a "Great Divide" between modernity and tradition - an ahistorical binary that is challenged by the complex and hybrid character of discourses on tradition and modernity that were

situationally and selectively deployed by the rural villagers I met in Namaqualand, Northern Province and Matabeleland.

THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF LAND STRUGGLES

Moving beyond the rhetoric of blood and soil, the land claims process has, in a number of cases, become a catalyst for a form of identity politics that at times have seemed to draw on ahistorical apartheid and colonial categories and discourses on ethnicity, tribe, tradition, custom and community. In the case of the Makhuleke land claim, discourses on Tsonga culture and tradition were strategically deployed in a variety of different contexts and circumstances. In response to the successful Makhuleke claim, the neighbouring Chief Mhinga lodged a counterclaim seeking to nullify this claim on the grounds that Makhuleke was not a chief but merely a headman. As Chief Mhinga's subordinate, so the argument went, Makhuleke could not submit an independent claim. Chief Mhinga, whose father had actively participated in the Gazankulu homeland administration during the apartheid years, commissioned a Pretoria ethnologist to compile a report that was submitted to the Northern Province Land Claims Commissioner's office. The report, which drew extensively on ethnographers such as Junod and Van Warmelo, argued that "Headman Makhuleke" was indeed Chief Mhinga's subordinate and that Mhinga was the rightful claimant. Meanwhile, in an attempt to counteract Mhinga's challenge, the Makhuleke submitted an application to the Commission on Traditional Leadership for official recognition of the Makhuleke chieftaincy.

Driving through Makhuleke village in July 1998, I was struck by the newly-erected sign, "Makhuleke Tribal Authority", a sign that indicated that the language of Verwoerd's Tribal Authority Act was far from dead and buried. What was equally striking was the fact that Chief Mhinga's submission to the Land Claims Court drew extensively on the work of former apartheid's Volkekunde ethnologists such as Van Warmelo. The Makhuleke case reveals how both the Makhuleke and apartheid-created chiefs such as Mhinga were willing to reappropriate

"ideologies of tribalism" and strategically re-deploy them within the new political terrain of post-apartheid South Africa. Such strategies are by no means signs of a return to notions of pristine traditionalism, but they are rather attempts to synthesize claims based on tradition and cultural rights alongside demands for restitution through the modern legal system. Since legal discourse demands consistent and coherent claims, those appealing to the Land Claim Courts are tacitly encouraged to package their claims in terms of a historical and primordialist definition of "tribes". As Robert Thornton has noted, these claims often end up replicating the reified notions of "tribe" and ethnic group that were invented and sanctioned by apartheid's architects of the Tribal Authority Act. Yet, as I will argue below, such assertions of cultural rights and autonomy are by no means signs of a grassroots rejection of modernity and development as some post-development populists would have us believe.

Every time I teach a course on the "Anthropology of Development" to third year development students, I keep returning to the same question: How do we in South Africa respond to post-development populists who call for alternatives to development? This anti-development position seems to me, and to many of my UWC students, to be a luxury that we can ill afford in Africa given the dire need for the provision of housing, water, electrification and so on. Why then is it that Escobar and Sachs can be so stridently dismissive of the dream of development?

Like the Makhuleke case, my findings from fieldwork in Namaqualand and Matabeleland suggest that local responses to development interventions are generally neither wholesale endorsements nor radical rejections of modernity and its fruits. Instead, the 'beneficiaries' of development interventions are often highly selective in their responses to and engagements with development initiatives and the modern state. Although they may in certain circumstances resist and subvert modernizing agendas, they do not generally do this on the basis of either radical populist politics or in defense of pristine and authentic local cultural traditions. Instead, responses to development interventions are often selective appropriations of components and elements of development packages rather than

either an outright embrace or wholesale rejection of 'modernization'.

STRADDLING MODERNITY AND TRADITION IN NAMAQUALAND'S COMMUNAL AREAS

During the course of land struggles in Namaqualand in the late 1980s and early 1990s, United Democratic Front (UDF) activists and communal farmers synthesized modern discourses of democracy and legality with "aboriginal" claims to Nama "traditional lands". However, this discursive synthesis was extremely complex, ambiguous and contradictory. For instance, in the course of seeking to straddle the discourses of tradition and modernity, some UDF activists found themselves captive to modernist claims about "scientific" farming and, in the name of development, endorsed conservation policies that undermined communal farmers' access to traditional grazing land. In addition, by defending Nama cultural and land rights, these UDF activists found themselves unwittingly endorsing ethnicist demands for the restriction of access to communal land to residents (burghers) of Namaqualand's Reserves. This expression of ethnic particularism and exclusivism contradicted and compromised the commitment of these activists to non-racialism and democratic rights. In other words, it stood to reinforce Namaqualanders' attempts to exclude "inkomers" or "outsiders" (e.g., Africans) from access to grazing, arable and residential land in Namaqualand.

These dilemmas emerged out of the efforts of UDF/ANC activists and Namaqualand communal farmers to oppose attempts by the apartheid state, in alliance with local élites, to parcel off reserve commonage into individual plots for sale to commercial livestock farmers. The state land was to be sold to better-off local residents who could afford these individual plots ("economic units"). The privatization of commonage was done on the grounds that it would modernize and commercialize livestock production and conserve pastures from overstocking. Communal farmers whose poverty disqualified them from purchasing land, and who were denied access to communal grazing land vigorously opposed this development initiative. The latter

challenged the state-led privatization initiative by drawing both on modern discourses on rights and legality, as well as claims to traditional land rights based on their common Nama ancestry. Despite their hybrid discursive strategies, they were labelled as "traditionalists" by the state and by local advocates of economic units.

In their opposition to the privatization of communal land, Namaqualand's coloured farmers drew on ethnic particularist claims that revealed the Janus-faced character of traditionalism. In other words, tradition and local culture, like nationalism, can be either emancipatory and progressive or reactionary and exclusionary. While Escobar and his post-development fellow-travelers celebrate cultural autonomy and tradition as inherently emancipatory, the Namaqualand case study reveals that Nama tradition can be a double-edged sword; it can be either progressive and empowering, or racist and exclusionary.

In articulating their opposition to economic units, Namaqualanders and NGO and civic activists drew on discourses of modernity and tradition that included claims based on democratic rights, accountability and legality, as well as ethnic particularist arguments based on aboriginal claims to "traditional" land rights. Their use of ethnic particularist and exclusivist arguments produced just such profound ambiguity amongst civic activists committed to freedom of movement, nonracism, democratic rights, modernity and development.

The Namaqualand case study suggests that development is generally not perceived by "beneficiaries", or for that matter their allies and advocates, according to the bipolar logic and lens of anti-development populists such as Escobar (1995) and Sachs (1992). Neither can these post-development theorists safely assume that the targets of "development" share their radical democratic, anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist concerns and agendas (Pieterse, 1996: 21). While sympathetic to some of the arguments of the post-development school, my rural fieldwork encounters in both Namaqualand and Matabeleland make me extremely skeptical of some of the more polemical aspects of Escobar and Sachs's populist rhetoric.

THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF ISINDEBELE TRADITIONALISM

Rather than confirming the populist rhetoric of anti-development theorists, my findings from field work in Matabeleland in the early 1990s once again drew my attention to the diversity and complexity of the responses of "beneficiaries" to state-driven land-use planning interventions. It reveals how these responses straddled both modern and traditional discourses and the shifting and porous borders between exogenous and endogenous ideas and practices.

The Ndebele-speaking villagers I met in Sengezane village in Gwaranyemba Communal Area during the early 1990s did not appear automatically to privilege indigenous knowledge and "endogenous" development strategies. Instead, they were constantly engaged in complex cultural exchanges with external agents, cultural brokers and centres of knowledge and power. Opposition to the land-use planning did not arise from a principled rejection of exogenous modernist/capitalist development, but rather because of specific local conditions and circumstances. These village-level responses did not seem to reflect or resonate with the quasi-revolutionary agendas of anti-development and anti-statist critics such as Escobar who claim that what is "needed is the expansion and articulation of anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, anti-productivist, and anti-market struggles" (Escobar, 1992: 431. cf., Nederveen Pieterse, 1996: 21). Villagers' concerns were far more contextual and contingent, and were grounded within the more immediate and mundane realities of their everyday lives.

During the early 1990s, Ndebele-speaking villagers had been told they would have to relocate their fields and homesteads to comply with ADA's land-use plan. In the course of my fifteen-month stay in the village I encountered considerable opposition and resentment towards this development imposition "from above". I was able to observe both subtle and overt expressions of opposition to villagization. The story of the dramatic failure of this multi-million dollar land-use planning scheme in Matabeleland South is a sober reminder of the folly of planners who believe that they can "modernize" land-use practices that undermine the

interests and everyday practices of "beneficiaries". However, it was not that 'beneficiaries' were anti-modernist or anti-development, but rather that the specific form of this particular development project collided with local needs and land-use practices.

Development planners and practitioners, state bureaucrats and the mass media have drawn on cultural stereotypes and artificial dichotomies between "tradition" and "modernity" that have been persistently challenged by the culturally hybrid behaviour of both the local agents of the state as well as of the rural villagers. In other words, development rhetoric about the "Great Divide" between traditional and modern worlds has been challenged by village-level cultural politics that draws on both modern and traditional discourses, thereby collapsing the artificial boundaries of this divide. For example, in Matabeleland in the 1990s, the tactical manoeuvres of villagers amongst whom I lived, at times drew on collective imaginings of a pristine traditional Ndebele culture, and at other times participated in attempts to gain access to modern bureaucratic state institutions and the mass media.

Some villagers did indeed claim that villagization and modern land-use planning interventions undermined 'traditional' land-use practices. For instance, Baba Sibanda told me that being forced to live in close proximity in concentrated villages did not conform to "Ndebele custom" and would lead to an increase in conflict and witchcraft accusations. Similarly, the former Zipra guerrilla, Baba Moyo, told me the villagization exercise could create serious social and ecological problems because people would be uprooted from their homesteads and be unable to look after the graves of their ancestors properly. Yet, such arguments about Ndebele tradition did not prevent villagers from mobilizing support networks amongst relatives within the modern state and mass media, nor from using these kin ties to draw attention to their grievances. Despite the ability of villagers to straddle the imaginary divide between tradition and modernity, they ended up being constructed by government officials as a homogeneous population of "peasant conservatives" and "backward traditionalists" who refused to

modernize.

The fact that under certain circumstances Africans may draw on arguments about culture and tradition ought not to obscure the complex and multi-faceted ways in which struggles over access to land and state resources have evolved in rural South Africa and Zimbabwe. However, policy makers and development experts, as well as anti-development critics, all too quickly resort to "Great Divide" arguments to justify their interventions.

Technocrats within rural development sectors of the Zimbabwe state continue to construct communal farmers as traditionalists in order to account for their opposition to destocking, villagization and fenced paddocks. However, both "traditional" communal farmers and "modern" grasslands and livestock specialists seem to agree that many of these scientifically-based interventions are ecologically inappropriate and unnecessarily disruptive (Behnke and Scoones, 1991; Cousins, 1987, 1989). Nonetheless, these arguments about backward communal farmers continue to be used by élites to channel state resources to better-off, educated "progressive farmers", who are deemed to be more predisposed to commercial farming and less likely to participate in environmentally destructive and unproductive land-use practices.

In the early 1990s technocrat planners within the Zimbabwe state portrayed the majority of communal farmers as "traditionalists" in order to justify their endorsement of a land resettlement programme that stood to benefit better-off, "progressive" black farmers at the expense of millions of farmers in the communal areas. Media and official representations of "traditionalists" were used to legitimate policies in terms of which communal farmers were deemed to be in dire need of education and scientific agricultural knowledge rather than of access to additional state land. These development narratives about "backward traditionalists" deflected attention from land hunger in the communal areas, while at the same time enabling "progressive"/commercial black farmers to gain privileged access to state land and credit facilities. In the process, millions of communal farmers were being labelled non-scientific, ecologically destructive and economically unproductive. These

official representations of traditionalism obscured both the nature of Zimbabwean class formation and the cultural hybridity and complexity of struggles over access to state resources.

My fieldwork findings from Matabeleland indicated to me that opposition to land-use planning was not the result of peasant traditionalism or resistance to 'modernization', but was instead a response to the profound social, cultural, economic, political and ecological disruption that this specific intervention unleashed. Neither was the land-use plan and villagization opposed by Ndebele villagers merely because the project was conceived of and designed in Washington D.C. and Harare by western-trained development experts. Unlike the post-development populists who denounce all exogenous interventions, Ndebele-speaking villagers opposed the land-use plans of the Model D project, not because these undermined their cultural autonomy, but rather because of very specific and pragmatic reasons relating to everyday land-use practices. Moreover, most villagers embraced aspects of the Model D project, for instance the state's provision of village access to an adjacent state cattle ranch. What they rejected was the attempt by the state to intervene directly in everyday land-use practices within their villages. In other words, they wanted to be given the opportunity to negotiate the terms of their involvement with the development package placed before them. Their opposition began to surface only once it became clear that the project came pre-packaged and was therefore non-negotiable. It is not clear whether post-development critics engage with development from such a pragmatic position.

CONCLUSION

Revisiting Escobar in the Field

In recent decades there has been a proliferation of development paradigms and methodologies claiming to counteract what has been seen by some to be the Eurocentric imposition of western, technicist development in the 'Third World'. These initiatives have gone under various names and guises including ethno-development, indigenous technical knowledge (ITK), and, more recently, alternative development and

post-development. The common strand in these critiques is a challenge to what is perceived to be the imposition of external interventions that undermine local autonomy and cultural.

To critics of development such as Escobar and Sachs, western intervention in developing countries not only reproduces capitalist relations of production, economic exploitation and dependency, but it is also seen to be an ideological and discursive conduit for western cultural domination. Escobar (1984: 384) views development discourse as a political technology by means of which "the Western development world [attempts] to manage and give shape to the reality of the Third World". According to Escobar, the motivation for the creation of "abnormalities" such as the "underdeveloped", the "malnourished", the "illiterate" and so on, is to construct the Third World as an appropriate target for interventions by western development institutions. From Escobar's perspective, "underdevelopment" is a fictitious construct that is part of a global process of domination¹. The fieldwork encounters that I have highlighted in this paper challenge the radical assumptions of Escobar *et al.* Third World people are portrayed by these anti-development revolutionaries as the authentic insurrectionary Other, resisting imperialisms on every front. By contrast, the villages I encountered in Zimbabwe and South Africa had more diverse and situational responses to development: development packages were resisted, embraced, reshaped or accommodated depending on the specific situation and intervention. Unlike Escobar's imaginings of the ideological purity of the subaltern, the villagers I met seemed to exercise agency and savvy in their complex negotiations with external forces and agents. While they may not have been entirely free to choose whether or not to engage in exogenous development interventions, they were certainly not simply docile bodies enslaved by the tyranny of development either.

NOTES

- 1 According to Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1996: 21), Escobar's anti-development position supports bottom-up popular cultural struggles against externally generated interventions, but in the process ends up also romanticizing local and popular cultures.

- 2 These threats to local autonomy would no doubt include the Americanization of the planet by CNN, Coke, Nike, Reebok and McDonalds.
- 3 Similarly, Marc DuBois (1991: 4) concludes that development discourse constructs the "naturalness" of the need for Western development without revealing the "hidden costs". The intellectual and political challenge to DuBois, like Escobar, is to uncover these hidden costs, and to reveal "another interpretation of development, to corrupt the self-evidence of development in its masquerade as natural law" (1991: 4).

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