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Development as its own Antithesis

Towards a Multi-disciplinary Exploration of the Neoliberalization of Development

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ABSTRACT

Though a historical ally of capitalism, development in the past few decades has been dominated by a neoliberal orthodoxy that promotes market logic and individual freedoms while eroding collectivism and depoliticizing social issues and power inequalities. Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, this study explores the lifeworlds of development practitioners as an often-overlooked entry point to contribute to new insights on the neoliberalization of development practice. Building on a broad theoretical foundation informed by both structural and post-structural ideas and using a three-tiered conceptual framework of neoliberalism, depoliticization, and empowerment, my findings show that development practitioners identify neoliberal development both as a capitalist class pursuit and as a technique of governing, while unequivocally establishing individual empowerment and depoliticization as the source of development failure. I concluded that rather than solely being a binary between conflict and discourse, development in the neoliberal orthodoxy is alienation, self-regulation, and fundamentally, its own antithesis.

Development as its own Antithesis: Towards a Multi-disciplinary Exploration of the Neoliberalization of Development

Lisar Morina

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Development as a body of knowledge and as a practice in the past 70 years has been so fraught with transgressions and double-dealings to the detriment of the Global South that perhaps it would be a transgression in its own right to disagree with the growing chorus of voices bemoaning its very existence. As European colonial domination foundered after the end of the Second World War, the vacuum of power and influence it left behind was immense. Yet if there was one thing that the burgeoning anti-colonial and liberation movements and the creation of new sovereign countries starting in the mid-1940s had made clear, it was that new methods of social control and domination, far less conspicuous than the bare-knuckle approach of colonial rule would have to be invented for the West to reconsolidate its position as the global hegemon. And there stood the looming figure of development: unhackneyed and tantalizing; a beacon of light promising to usher in a new era of transnational magnanimity, prosperity, and solidarity. Few in the 1950s—not least the Global South—would have imagined just how radically the invention of development would remake geopolitical relationships. Fewer still would have envisaged how deleterious an effect it would have on those millions of people who were discursively constructed as 'underdeveloped'. It was on January 20, 1949, that development was used for the first time in a political context. In his inauguration speech, US President Harry S. Truman discursively constructed the Global South as 'underdeveloped'— that is to say, as second-fiddle to developed Western nation-states (Escobar, 2011). So powerful was this discourse of development—in part due to its coinage by the President of what was to become the undisputed global superpower of the time, and in part because it was uttered at a unique juncture in history—that Esteva noted it was "universally accepted" the same day it was invented (2010: 2). Thus, the binary of development and underdevelopment became an inescapable, perduring global truth (Escobar, 2011). It formed the frame and setting within which any deliberation on the matter could transpire, to an extent that it would be nonsensical to contradict its existence (Ferguson, 1994). Perhaps similarly staggering was the dexterity with which development discourse effectively

dehistoricized and depoliticized the reasons for what it denoted as underdevelopment, making it an ostensibly 'causeless' phenomenon and delinking it from historical conditions of colonial extraction, discrimination, and subjugation that left the Global South in abysmal socio-economic and political conditions (Rist, 2008: 73–75). Yet, importantly, the idea of transformation to a 'developed' state remained a possibility for the newly 'underdeveloped' peoples—inspiring at once self-doubt among Global South countries and self-righteousness in the North, whose increasing penchant for development interventionism was embraced by those who had been led to believe that they could and must remold themselves according to the only permissible and virtuous image there is—that of the West (Sachs, 2010: 16).

The personal meaning of this study

Fast forward some 65 years after President Truman first uttered the word development, I found myself flung into the development field in my early 20s, doing communications work in a range of local contexts. What stood out from the outset was that many of the interventions of the organizations I was working for were clearly ineffective and showed no meaningful results. Much of the work that we were doing seemed to be of a purely economic nature—plucking out individuals from their communities and ostensibly empowering them economically. We did this while strangely neglecting political issues and disregarding power inequalities hailing both from outside and within communities. Skilling, labor market, and private sector initiatives were promoted far and wide. But what stood out in particular was entrepreneurship. In a profoundly unequal world, entrepreneurship was used to paint an image of the playing field being levelled for everyone. Entrepreneurship had been naturalized to such an extent that it seemed it had become ideological. I should note that when I say ideology, I draw from two of Terry Eagleton's definitions thereof, namely a 'conjuncture of discourse and power' and an array of "ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power" (1991: 1-2). Neoliberal ideology was 'saturating our consciousness' and becoming the fundament of our ideas about the world (Apple, as cited in Macrine, 2016: 313). Entrepreneurship was simply the apex of this neoliberal ideology that held that individuals

must become responsible for investing in their human capital and employ economic logic in all aspects of social life (Rose, 1998; Schram, 2018). Yet, crucially, ideology, I believe, is not indelible. Just like the Gramscian conception of common sense—i.e. "self-evident truths" that govern the lives of individuals (Crehan, 2016:10)—ideology can yield, bend, and transform; it is a site of political struggle (Rupert, 2005). And that is also what underpins this study. I aim to deconstruct the practices of the development apparatus, exposing its ideological elements in full, and in the process, show that its rationalities are not—nor should they be—inevitable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Paradigms of Development

The modernization paradigm—the first development paradigm to emerge—was pointedly Eurocentric and sought to prescribe the means through which to transition from a traditional to a modern state, of which capitalism served as a centerpiece (McEwan, 2018: 122). Modernization was to be achieved through material means, capital expansion, fiscal policy measures, and free trade, whereas culture was viewed as a hindrance to development (Escobar, 2011: 40; Tufte, as cited in Scott, 2014: 17). It conceived of development as linear, preordained, and attained through large-scale transfer of capital and expertise (Servaes and Malikhao, 2008). Among those who shaped the epistemological framework of modernization were thinkers such as Walt Rostow, Everett Rogers, Wilbur Schramm, and Daniel Lerner. Rostow (1960) contended that high mass consumption does not come about from within, but rather must be introduced exogenously by developed nations. Later, Rogers put forth an elaborate means for the diffusion of modernization, includingindividual value and behavior change (Melkote, 2002). He identified media as a crucial conduit for value change (Rogers, 1983: 10), arguing that communication should become the vehicle through which Western values such as capitalist accumulation will spread to local communities (Melkote, 2002). Similarly, Lerner propagated a top-down notion of social transformation using mass media

and communication to spread modernization ideas (Servaes, 2007; Sparks, 2007). The list of modernization scholarship is replete with similar ideas that many now consider ill-founded and ahistorical, but their impact has been enormous (Mansell, 1982: 44). Importantly, modernization lacked sound empirical foundations, disregarded local knowledge and culture, and wreaked havoc on local economies, public life, and ecologies (McEwan, 2018; Servaes and Malikhao, 2008). The first critics came from the dependency/structuralist school of development—the second major development paradigm (Hills, 1994). Informed by Marxist thought, Latin American thinkers of the structuralist school—the dependistas—such as Andre Gunder Frank, Theotonio dos Santos, and Raul Prebisch contended that development and underdevelopment were inextricably linked and that the periphery's underdevelopment allows for the center to be developed (Parpart and Veltmeyer, 2004: 43). The dependistas showed that underdevelopment is caused by asymmetrical trade relations between center and periphery in which the latter is dominated by the former, thereby creating a chasm between the periphery's export and import sectors (Kay, 1989). Crucially, they also demonstrated how industrialization had a completely different effect on Global South countries: instead of evenly diffusing across various economic sectors as it had in the center, it concentrated instead in primary-commodity export sectors, leaving out large swathes of the economy and curbing socio-economic development (Kay, 1989). Another notable development paradigm is alternative development. Arising in part as a rebuff to Rogers' diffusion theories, alternative development propagated autonomy, self-sufficiency, and endogenous change (Waisbord, as cited in Morris, 2001: 4; Wangari and Friedmann, 1994). It turned development into a human-centered operation, employing, in particular, participatory development and participatory action research approaches (Melkote, 2002; Pieterse, 1998). However, a slew of problematical considerations hover over participatory development—notably, it has widely been coopted and used to mask and validate modernization approaches (Scott, 2014: 63). Kapoor (2005) called alternative development a Trojan horse despite its well-meaning goals, Craig and Porter showed how it is a new instrument for "management and control" (1997: 229), and Cooke and Kothari (2001) called it a new tyranny, showing how it props up those already wielding

disproportionate power in a community and embeds power inequalities. It is these flaws and limitations of the various development paradigms that later gave rise to post-development, which advanced the most scathing criticism of development to date. Post-development contends that development as a mechanism of modernity has laid waste to the Global South, bringing about new types of poverty and worsening global inequalities (Shaffer, 2012: 1776). Drawing on Foucauldian perspectives, post-development regards development as a regime of discourse and representation that createsknowledge of and exercises power over the Global South (Escobar, 2011). I should note that I refer to discourse in the Foucauldian sense of a "historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of representations" (Baaz, 2005: 11). Crucially, post-development rejects the whole idea of development, criticizing its Eurocentricity and drawing attention to the parallels between development and colonialism (McEwan, 2018).

Neoliberalism and the rise of the market mentality

It becomes clear from the short history of development thinking I have provided above that development is a widely contested concept (Wilkins and Enghel, 2013); it is 'not a known fact, it is not given, nor is it common sense' (Manyozo, 2012: 4). Yet, if there is one insight we can glean from the previous section, it is that at least in its hegemonic configuration, development practice has always been a capitalist endeavor (Kapoor, 2008b; Patel and McMichael, 2004). However, ever since the 1980s, capitalist market economies and economic growth are progressively regarded as the one and *only* way to achieve development, depoliticizing and altogether shunning issues of power, social justice and redistribution (Berthoud, 2010; Manyozo, 2012). The development apparatus has been subsumed into neoliberal ideology, promoting economism, deregulation, shrinking of the state and rolling back of welfare policies (McEwan, 2018: 40–41). Propagated in particular by supranational development organizations such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), neoliberal privatization and free markets are touted as an incontrovertible order of the world, leading

thinkers such as Sparks to denounce development for having uncritically accepted a supposedly amiable character of capitalism (Sparks, as cited in Wilkins & Enghel, 2013: 179).

Let us explicate neoliberalism as a specific capitalist conceptualization of economic and social life. Neoliberalism posits that privatization, the retreat of the state from social welfare provision, deregulation and marketization are crucial to enabling the entrepreneurial capacities of individuals to create capital and achieve prosperity (Harvey, 2007). Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman are the thinkers recognized to have established the epistemic foundation for neoliberalism (Weiss and Tribe, 2021). They contended that the free market exemplifies rationality and efficiency unlike planned social orders where government intervention works to curtail individual freedoms (Munck, 2005). Importantly, whereas markets have traditionally been a component of social relations, in neoliberalism, social relations are subordinated to the primacy of the market, wherein matters previously belonging to the public domain are privatized and commercialized to comply with market logic (MacEwan, 2005; Schram, 2018). Friedman contended that free economic transactions benefit all parties involved equally; however, evidence quickly showed that the benefits of unregulated markets were reaped predominantly by the already economically powerful (S. Clarke, 2005: 50). Critics such as Brown (2019) and Harvey (2007) showed how unregulated markets enforce historical inequalities, power imbalances and social stratification along gender, race, and class.

Development thinking, at least since the 1980s, has been dominated by a neoliberal orthodoxy that was extended across the Global South through Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and policy packages known as the Washington Consensus (Hill et al., 2016). After the global crisis of capitalism in the 1970s, the Bretton Woods supranational institutions (WB and IMF) conditioned emergency aid to the Global South on the adoption of neoliberal policies such as fixed exchange rates and market liberalization (Bienefeld, 2000). Between 1975-1990, a staggering 378 structural adjustment aid packages worth billions of dollars were made to 71 countries, and conditions keep increasing—currently, loan recipients are forced to fulfill no

less than 67 conditions (Kapoor, 2008a: 83). These wide-ranging neoliberal market-based reforms, dubbed as "steps to hell" by the former chief economist of the WB Joseph Stiglitz, crucially also included the shrinking of the state and weakening of collective bargaining power (Parpart and Veltmeyer, 2004: 45). Since the engine of neoliberal capitalism is accumulation, the system requires an ever-increasing demand to support growth by increasing supply; integrating Global South economies into the global marketplace fills this demand (McKenzie, 2012). This was the truth of the Washington Consensus—to remodel the Global South so as to create new markets for western capital. This caused unprecedented global instability and exacerbating the already dismal conditions of the Global South (Stiglitz, 2002). Whereas these neoliberal policies promised development, they were more akin to debt collection systems (Bienefeld, 2000)—they triggered extraordinary debt crises, worsened livelihoods, encouraged monopolies and corruption, and widened inequalities between rich and poor across the globe (Kumi *et al*., 2014; McEwan, 2018), so much so that Escobar calls them "onerous and menacing" (2011: 90). Ferguson calls the belief that privatization and deregulation would provide economic growth a phantasm, showing how structural adjustments saw "the lowest rates of economic growth ever recorded in Africa" (2006: 11), and demonstrating that instead of less government interference, neoliberalism has caused "less order, less peace, and less security" (2006: 13). Similarly, Cheru also showed that SAPs have dramatically decreased living standards in Africa (in Osimiri, 2013: 66). Neoliberalism is, therefore, part of a capitalist world order that engenders inequality and unequal development—it portrays international markets as equal and efficient, removes government welfare support for disadvantaged communities, and convinces us that alternative routes to development are flawed and deficient (McEwan, 2018). This is why Beck calls neoliberalism an ideological "thought virus" (in McEwan, 2018: 41). Yet, because neoliberalism is the unquestionable hegemonic doctrine of our time (Harvey, 2007), the market mentality continues to sweep Global South countries' development agendas (Kumi *et al*., 2014), reorganizing economies in the service of capital and, as we shall see, restructuring social relations by giving rise to self-regulating individuals (Berthoud, 2010; Flinders and Wood, 2014; Litonjua, 2012).

Constituting subjects: neoliberalism as a government of life

The critiques of neoliberalism above all come from a structuralist[1] perspective. Structuralism studies neoliberalism from a macro-phenomenon and institutional lens, framing it as a hegemonic ideology of the capitalist class that grows via structures of class oppression (Brown, 2019; Laruffa, 2022; Springer, 2012). From this prism, neoliberalism strategically subordinates the sovereignty of nation-states to supranational institutions such as WB and IMF, whose aim is to extend the reach of capital (Slobodian, in Brown, 2019: 18–19). But there is another potent critique of neoliberalism that hails from the post-structuralist[2] school, critiquing neoliberalism, more subtly, as "thought and reality" and as an "experimental dispositive" (Lagasnerie, as cited in Dean, 2018: 40). In his lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault put forward a radical thesis on neoliberalism as a type of 'biopolitics' that creates a new type of subject—the entrepreneur of oneself, operating within an artificially-construed freedom that rests on the perpetual competition of economic-rational subjects (Dean, 2018; Lemke, 2001; Vatter, 2014). Foucault contended that neoliberalism is a specific technique of governing—a governmentality—which is not merely about free markets but about "permanent vigilance, activity, and intervention" (2008: 132). Foucault's studies of governmentality show that the state in neoliberalism takes on a new type of function—to indirectly control individuals' subjectivities while not bearing responsibility for them (Lemke, 2001). Collectives are individualized, and individuals are turned into self-governing entrepreneurial subjects whose morality is borne out of self-determined, economic considerations (Lemke, 2001). From this perspective, neoliberalism produces specific types of subjects through the conduct of conduct (Lewis, 2016). Neoliberalism, hence, does not only frame the economic system, but also the principles of social life and the web of meanings of the individual (Harvey, 2007; McGuigan, 2014). The 'homo economicus' of classical liberalism is transmuted from a subject of exchange and economic utility to one of competition and entrepreneurship—he is an entrepreneur of

[1] I use structuralism inter-changeably with neo-Marxism

[2] I use post-structuralism interchangeably with Foucaldianism

oneself who deliberates the cost-benefits of action across the entirety of the domain of life (Brown, 2019: 20; Kiersey, 2016). Through Foucauldian governmentality, therefore, we can expose the real nature of the neoliberal pursuit: that of using deregulation and free enterprise to engender a wholesale reorganization of the "totality of human existence" (Mirowski, in Kiersey, 2016: 167). Importantly, this demonstrates that viewing neoliberalism simply as an economic system is deeply myopic—as, indeed, we have shown how it is also a radical new understanding of the individual and her place in society (Read, 2022: 26). However, my view is that it would be similarly short-sighted to view neoliberalism solely as governmentality. I argue that a rigorous study of neoliberalism and its effects necessarily demands a merger of structuralist and post-structuralist ideas. I will expand on this merger in my conceptual framework section.

Undoing the political

A central feature of neoliberalism is what we call depoliticization (Madra and Adaman, 2014). Literature on depoliticization can be traced as far back as the Marxian critique of classical political economy, where Marx, inter alia, denounces Smith's naturalization of historical social relations (Burnham, 2017). Depoliticization is a process where "concepts and elements are removed from the sphere of political contestation and displaced to a realm of technical deliberation" (Stahl, 202: 410). Importantly, the political does not simply refer to politics and institutions, but rather encompasses a 'theater of deliberations, powers, actions, and values' where public life and social justice are defined (Brown, 2019: 56). Neo-Marxist thinkers such as Habermas maintain that this gradual dissolution of substance from the political and the transformation of governance into technocracy serves to naturalize power (as cited in Burnham, 2017: 359). Foucault, on the other hand, would argue that depoliticization is a technique of organizing the exercise of political power on competitive market logic (in Madra and Adaman, 2014: 3). Both, nevertheless, would agree that the neoliberal order reorients the original responsibilities of all societal subsystems towards market principles (Laruffa, 2022). By marketizing hitherto non-market-driven activities and economizing all of social life,

neoliberalism narrows down the sphere of politics, constricts the political nature of policymaking, and sidelines key political issues such as entrenched power inequalities (de Nardis, 2017; Flinders and Wood, 2014; McCloskey, 2019). Politics is reduced to a managerial enterprise of governance devoid of political character that reinforces neoliberal hegemony (Hoppania, 2019; Jessop, 2015). Some authors such as Colin Hay (2014) argue against attributing an excessive amount of power to depoliticization, whereas David Mitrany maintains that a technical approach to social issues can promote peace by offsetting the politics in those issues (in Louis and Maertens, 2021: 6). I disagree with these positions, siding instead with Burnham (2001; 2017) who contends that depoliticization functions as a shield protecting the government apparatus from the repercussions of its decisions; it forms part of the total restructuring of social relations under capitalist market relations (Gruber and Scherling, 2020).

Engulfed in neoliberal rationality as it is, by a similar logic, development today claims to be based on impartial technical knowledge (Wilson, 2006). Functionalists such as Claude and Haas have insinuated that international organizations work outside the field of politics (Louis and Maertens, 2021: 6). I disagree with this position—development is a pointedly political endeavor that makes decisions that define social relations, resource allocation, and political power (Wilson, 2006). The work of supranational institutions such as WB and IMF, for instance, has always been of a pointedly political nature, therefore any claim that international organizations transcend the political should be viewed with caution. It is true, however, that there is a collective effort to portray development as apolitical by depoliticizing it. Organizations such as the WB have aided depoliticization not just through structural adjustment programs, but also by deliberately presenting almost no political analysis in their whole body of work, favoring instead a technical modus operandi that wantonly ignores power relations (Storey, 2000). Wilson claims that the underlying aim of this depoliticization in development is to deflate criticism of the global neoliberal order and install it in contexts where it does not yet exist (2006: 503). Issues once denoting power and politics, according to Cornwall and Brock, have been transfigured within a logic of "one-size-fits-all development recipes" depoliticized to an extent that "everyone can agree with" (2005: 1043). The Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015 emblematize this trend. They conceive of development as a purely technical, expert-led, and measurable practice, dehistoricizing power inequality and reinforcing the status-quo (McCloskey, 2019). By a similar logic, poverty in Africa has been unscrupulously turned into a technical problem by the development apparatus, which pushes managerial solutions to the suffering of the oppressed, thereby depoliticizing both structural challenges as well as development as a practice (Ferguson, 1994).

Depoliticization in development is also strongly linked to its technicization (Wilson, 2006). By framing development issues as technical, organizations mask political decisions, "epistemological positions" and "professional biases" (Louis and Maertens, 2021: 27). Kothari shows how a growingly technical and managerialist "tool-kit approach" has entrenched depoliticization in development and further aided the field's gravitation towards neoliberal rationalities (2005: 425). This is evidenced, for example, by development aid having historically been framed as "technical assistance" that exists outside of ideology and politics (Wilson, 2006: 504). A central figure here is the development expert, who devises technical development interventions based not on contextual knowledge but on technical expertise, mirroring what Kothari calls the 'universalizing principles' of neoliberalism (2005: 430). By invoking neutral expertise, the development professional becomes a technocrat whose authority rests on impartial knowledge and managerialism (Louis and Maertens, 2021). Indeed, it can be said that depoliticization is at its most extreme when an institution or undertaking is ruled by technocrats whose work is depoliticized under the protection of an institutional "shadow of hierarchy" (Papadopoulos, 2017: 141). Development, according to Escobar, is ruled by such an institutional, professionalized network that produces knowledge and exercises power over the third world via ostensibly neutral, scientific—as opposed to political—means (2011: 46).

Empowerment and the individualizing of responsibility

Empowerment was first conceived as a means for "conscientization and grassroots political mobilization" pointed at transforming the unequal loci of power in society (Calvès, 2009: 1). Originating within feminist and theological movements, empowerment has traditionally sought to use the views of disadvantaged peoples to enable them to gain political power and liberate themselves from structures of oppression (Calvès, 2009). Thus, in its early stages, empowerment gravitated around notions of community, democratic participation, and resource distribution, linking individual prosperity with the broader socio-political environment and public policy formation (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995). It was a process that sought to improve the ability of communities to make informed choices and take collective action (Albuquerque *et al.,* 2017). Paolo Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'—perhaps the most important body of work on empowerment—made the case for empowerment as an awakening of critical consciousness—a way to transform oppression through community participation and self-determination (Miraftab, 2004: 242; Scott, 2014: 49). However, empowerment—once a tool for conscientization and rights activism—has now been pointedly co-opted by the development apparatus, stripped of its political nature, and used to naturalize the relocation of responsibility from the state to the individual (Rushing, 2016). Guided by neoliberal logic, development has detached empowerment from the systems of subordination, individualized it, and spun it as a means to promote idle notions of confidence and self-esteem, frequently reducing it to entrepreneurialism (Miraftab, 2004: 242). Development has not taken the power out of empowerment, however; it has simply imbued it with a new sort of power—that of reconstituting subjectivities (Bacqué and Biewener, 2015). Entrepreneurialism serves as a set of principles according to which individuals must conduct themselves; it is an image in which to remold individuals and inculcate personal responsibility into them (Rose, 1998: 154-155). Instead of awakening a critical consciousness among the disadvantaged, empowerment now universalizes neoliberal social norms via self-regulation (Kothari, in Wilson, 2006: 506). It disparages traditional experiences, decouples the individual from the community, and offloads the responsibility for social risks such as poverty and unemployment from the state

squarely onto the individual under the realm of 'self-care' (Lemke, 2002: 54, 59). Indeed, empowerment reifies the 'moralistic' and 'tutoral' characteristics of neoliberalism, teaching the poor how they must live rather than addressing the political structures that oppress them (Schram, 2018: 313). Empowerment is, then, part of the neoliberal depoliticization of human life, constricting it to a number of individual activities and delegitimizing other collective forms of life that are not subsumed into this substructure (Gautney, 2009).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the literature review above, I assert that neoliberalism is simultaneously a pursuit of the ruling class concerned with consolidating class power *and* a technique of governance that naturalizes the decentralization of government via self-regulating individuals (Springer, 2012). Based on Springer, who insists on a multi-dimensional understanding of neoliberalism that is anchored on hybridity (in Macrine, 2016: 311), I maintain that building a complete picture of neoliberalism requires reconciling structuralist and post-structuralist ideas. On one hand, neoliberal capitalism is contingent on growth and must therefore always expand to new contexts and commodify new social spheres to tap into new avenues for capital accumulation (Laruffa, 2022). The neo-Marxist macro-phenomenon critique of neoliberalism, consequently, is an extremely potent analytical framework to employ as it exposes the class interests at play behind the spread of neoliberalism. On the other hand, there is neoliberalism's unmistakable construction of a new governing mentality that creates self-regulating, entrepreneurialized subjectivities. Post-structuralism, hence, is crucial for understanding how neoliberalism secures consent for its hegemony, more diffusely, through conducting conduct (McGuigan, 2014). Therefore, instead of pitting the poststructuralist governmentality framework against the class analysis of neo-Marxism, the former can instead be cast in a light in which it does not deny Marxian economic base but builds on its "liminal formations" on socio-political institutions by analyzing the diffuse character of power (Springer, 2012: 140). For all the

epistemological disagreement, Springer rightfully claims that structuralism and poststructuralism are not inevitably incompatible (2012). It is important to note that this study is also markedly post-developmental in that it echoes a call not for "development alternatives, but alternatives to development" (Escobar, 2011: 215), that is to say, abolishment of the whole concept of development (McEwan, 2018: 132). I maintain that this theoretical posture, which I hope transcends false dichotomies and moves beyond the binary thinking that instinctively demurs the synthesis of structuralist and post-structuralist ideas, will allow for a multi-faceted, interdisciplinary, and holistic inquiry into development practice in the neoliberal era. Based on these considerations, my conceptual framework uses a three-tiered approach to studying contemporary development practice, namely the concepts of neoliberalism, depoliticization, and empowerment.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Development has been studied extensively from both an institutional and biopolitical perspective (see, for example, Escobar, 2011; Manyozo, 2012; Mezzadra *et al*., 2013; Sachs, 2010). Manyozo, for example, employing a Marxist reading, defined development as a "class conflict" over "resources and power" between antagonistic classes (2012: 3). Escobar on the other hand, using a Foucauldian lens, postured that development is a regime of representation: a 'historically produced discourse' (2011: 6) that allowed for the Global South to be 'known, specified and intervened upon' (2011: 45). Though these are diverging views, what unites these authors is that both have written predominantly from a theoretical standpoint, providing meta-level analyses of development and neglecting the lifeworlds of people involved in development practice. Although some authors do focus on practitioners (see Baaz, 2005, for example), studies taking development professionals as an entry point to examine the field as a whole remain comparatively sparse. This study endeavors to fill this gap. I aim to bridge the theoretical with the practical, and on a more granular level, point my magnifying lens on the

development professional to reveal the grievances that come with working in an increasingly depoliticized and ideologically neoliberal development field. I aim to achieve two things: first, to investigate the ramifications of the macro-level phenomena and micro-practices of neoliberal development for the development worker and the communities she works with, but also the opposite way around: to examine what new insights we can gather on development through exploring the lifeworlds of practitioners. Therefore, the Research Question (RQ) of this study is: What are the consequences of the neoliberal depoliticization of development and the conception of empowerment as individual according to development practitioners—both for themselves and for the communities they work with.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative data collection methodology consisting of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. I used a qualitative approach to data collection because the latter's interpretive epistemology (see Mayan, 2016) suits my research question—which chiefly aims to explore stories, people, and their experiences. Second, based on Rubin and Rubin, whenever a study demands richness of information or when it looks at something distinctive and unfamiliar, naturalistic research approaches are the recommended methodological approach (2011: 3). In-depth interviews allow for a deep comprehension of the lifeworlds of people and the meanings they construe (Seidman, 2006), which suits the inherently naturalistic character of my inquiry. The consciousness of individuals allows the researcher to tap into complex social issues, because, as Seidman adroitly notes, social issues are themselves 'based on the concrete experience of people' (2006: 7). Second, I chose semi-structured interviews because they are a more fluid and versatile way of gathering information (Robson and McCartan, 2016). Semi-structured interviews excel at obtaining lucid accounts of the lifeworlds of participants and they also allow for a high degree of interviewer-interviewee reciprocity (Brinkmann, 2013;

Galletta and Cross, 2013). This allowed my participants a high degree of freedom and flexibility in their responses (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

SAMPLING, DATA COLLECTION, AND SAMPLE SIZE

This study conducted a total of eight interviews with experienced development workers of different backgrounds. The participants (half of whom hail from the Global South) included regional directors, country representatives, regional head of sectors, senior consultants, and a couple of mid-level professionals, and all recruited via a purposive sampling methodology. Patton has written in great detail about purposeful sampling, outlining in particular, the method's ability to recruit information-rich participants (1990: 169). Echoing Patton, Gutterman similarly points out that since all qualitative research aims to 'describe and interpret', cases are sampled solely on the richness of information they can provide (as cited in Staller, 2021: 2). Guided by this logic, I therefore purposively sampled individuals who can offer a great deal of experience and can also eloquently articulate their opinions (Palinkas *et al*., 2015).

Perhaps the most common criticism of qualitative research is that it fails to adequately justify sample size (Boddy, 2016). For example, Schreier notes that positions on sample size range from 'specific numbers to 'it depends'' (2018: 89). Others such as Patton have contended that qualitative study has no rules for sample size at all (in Marshall *et al*., 2013: 12). Moreover, whereas some writers point to the need to select sample size before data gathering can commence, others argue that this type of "a priori" sampling is incommensurable with the methodological foundations of qualitative inquiry (Sim *et al*., 2018: 619). My stance, however, is in line with that of Emmel (2013), who argues that sampling in qualitative studies should not be a one-off decision, but rather an iterative part of the research process. Schreier (2018) points out that one can start with an a priori minimal sample size, which can then be adjusted

during the research process. In my case, the a priori enumeration was eight to twelve participants. However, during the research, I decided to stop after my eighth interview as I believed I had reached saturation—a concept that holds that a researcher may stop recruiting new participants when data starts replicating and becoming redundant (Marshall *et al.,* 2013: 11). Miles and Huberman contend that saturation immediately succeeds the development of a comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand (in Palinkas *et al*., 2015: 3). Saturation, in my case, transpired after my eighth interview, i.e. when I had sufficiently explored my topic from a diverse enough angle that an additional interview would yield no significant new themes or information (Mayan, 2016).

The eight interviews were conducted from June 7, 2022 to July 18, 2022 via the online platform 'Zoom'. One of the benefits of semi-structured interviews is the "attention to lived experience" while simultaneously examining "theoretically driven variables of interest" (Galletta & Cross, 2013: 24). This allowed me to ask open-ended questions while also probing more theoretically-leaning issues of ideology, hegemony, and subjectivity using a topic guide (see Appendix D). The interviews were recorded and later transcribed using verbatim transcription, the most popular transcription method (McGrath et al., 2019).

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This study employed a thematic analysis (TA) methodology for data analysis, which is a method for 'identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data' (Clarke and Braun, 2017: 297). TA identifies explicit and implicit themes within a body of empirical data, and then codes those themes to scrutinize the data in substantial detail, including for frequency and concurrence (Guest *et al*., 2011). There are several reasons that underpin my decision to choose this method. First, themes as a technique of analysis can yield a deep and multi-layered account of a data set (Hawkins, 2017). Second,

thematic analysis remains one of the best methods for analyzing the multi-dimensional nature of meanings within a data set, which my in-depth interviews call for (Guest *et al*., 2011). Third, it is a flexible methodology with regard to size and depth of data, research question, and crucially, theoretical perspective (Clarke and Braun, 2017). This study's unusual theoretical framework—combining structuralism and post-structuralism—demands this kind of flexibility vis-a-vis theoretical structure. This is also one of the main reasons why I did not opt for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Even though my previous work has shown that CDA is highly efficient at exposing the ideological dimensions of development discourses (Morina, 2022), I contend that it lacks epistemic flexibility and is heavily post-structuralist-leaning, focusing chiefly on the linguistic properties of ideology (Fairclough, 2003, see 2013).

Furthermore, I employed Crabtree and Miller's template approach to analyzing text, in which data is categorized via a codebook (1992: 93). Following Hawkins (2017), I did multiple in-depth readings of my data, pinpointing pertinent codes and themes and then identifying their frequency and meaning across my data/ Building on Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, I followed a six-stage data-coding process which involved devising the code manual, testing the relevance of codes, condensing data, employing a coding template, identifying themes, and validating and justifying themes (2006: 84). Given my specific interest in depoliticization and empowerment, I used a theoretical/deductive approach to focus my analysis on specific aspects of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 81, 84). After labeling all codes and themes, I used illustrative quotes for each theme. The result of this process can be found in Appendix A.

ETHICS

Participants were informed of the nature of my investigation and were provided with an information sheet and a consent form to sign before the interview. These documents served to outline the contingencies of participating in the study, including issues of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Prior to the commencement of data gathering, initial plans for this study

were reviewed by the LSE's Research Ethics Committee and it was decided that the interviews be made anonymous. Interviewees were made aware that no information that could reveal their identities would be made public. This was done so as to ensure participants can talk openly about the challenges they face as development practitioners.

LIMITATIONS

One limitation of this study is that interviewees come from the same four organizations in which I was interested in (UNICEF, USAID, World Food Programme, and The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement). A similar study with other organizations might have yielded different themes since different organizations might have different modus operandi. Nevertheless, as I have already established, replicability is not the aim of this qualitative study but rather depth of understanding. Another set of limitations pertain to the analysis of the themes themselves. I recognize that my analysis is an interpretation and that there may be multiple alternative readings of the same data set. Indeed, a dataset will seldom be irrefutable and a pattern of themes will rarely be fully complete (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Because my dataset was coded and interpreted by myself only other useful perspectives may have been missed. This is also why reflexivity in the research process is crucial.

REFLEXIVITY

There is some sense in which I cannot help but be reminded of Du Bois' 1897 essay, 'Strivings of the Negro People', in which he first used the term 'double consciousness', to refer to the character of being split into two distinct consciousnesses at odds with each-other (Bruce, 1992: 300). Although uttered in a different context, Du Bois's idea resonates—I am at once a staunch critic of the development apparatus and a development practitioner, often in positions

perpetuating the very misgivings that I so scathingly criticize. It is true that I am invested in the ideas of Marx, and by extension, wary of the nature of development as a tool of exploitation of the Global South. But there is another personal element that may make me doubly critical of the work of development practitioners: the grievance that comes with being part of a class of people responsible for sustaining this status-quo. This speaks to the need to question my subjectivities, values, and opinions, and remain critical of my positionality as researcher vis-a-vis the subject and context that I investigate (Rau *et al*., 2018)**.** As Bourdieu so aptly puts it in his work on reflexive sociology, a researcher must "methodically distrust" (in Rau *et al*., 2018: 301). By exercising this distrust and awareness of my own biases and leanings, I also assert that I could have inadvertently led some of the interviewees. The questions were often very theoretically probing, and whenever issues of ideology and subjectivity were touched on by the participants, I would occasionally expound at length on the theoretical reasons why I believe these things occur, thus, perhaps influencing their perspectives.

INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Below, I have categorized all identified themes into sections. Each section contains theoretically-informed analyses and interweaves relevant quotes by participants.

Development as an ideal vs. development in practice

Upon being asked to contemplate on what development as a body of knowledge and practical undertaking means to them, participants said that development should be about notions such as fairness, justice, structures, systems, multipolarity, livelihoods, and equal distribution.

> Participant 2: Development is about improving livelihoods, giving everyone a chance to have a good life (...) it means wealth is evenly distributed (...) that we're all equal and human.

For all participants, however, this ideal of development is pointedly not what development currently is, or ever was. Participant 1, for example, stated that although those who are engaged in this work predominantly do it because of 'justice and commitment to fairness', they noted that this commitment tends to manifest differently in reality, alluding to how development is not always commensurate with those ideals.

> Participant 1: We want pluriversality, we want multipolarity, but we haven't quite reconciled the desire for a world where many worlds fit with the essential practice of development.

By and large, participants showed to be keenly aware of the wrongdoings of development, in particular when discussing it from a neoliberal perspective. Participant 2, for example, called development a form of neocolonialism, stating that it often perpetuates inequality. This echoes the literature that capitalism, and by extension neoliberalism, should be seen from a frame of imperialism, as it was the latter which erected these two ideologies as global systems (Donnelly, 2019).

In a similar vein, participant 5 noted the ideological subsumption of development into neoliberal rationality, which reflected critical literature that shows how mainstream development logic today is not only overwhelmingly neoliberal, but also wholly 'intolerant of alternatives' (Fine, 2009: 885).

> Participant 5: There is this neoliberal thought and this perception that it is the only system of government, or only political system that really works and has any traction or credibility (...) in my opinion, I see how this is a very ideologically neoliberal discourse of the international development sector.

Macrine contends that neoliberalism has reached a status of 'doxa', a doctrine that functions as indisputable objective truth (2016: 309), and participants all seemed to recognize this widespread adoption of neoliberal orthodoxy in development. They saw this ideological dimension of neoliberal development as negative, as it, inter alia, leads to an indiscriminate

adoption of western models of development at the detriment of alternative, community-led ways of development:

> Participant 7: The danger of being too ideological is that you fail to try to just understand how communities live, how they cooperate, how they see the world, what their beliefs are (…) it's a question of ideology. Development comes because of many other factors most of the time, not because of external interventions.

Participant 1 contended that it is hard for the development apparatus to escape the shadow of "bearing with it the hallmarks of a high modernist origins", i.e. alluding to the institutional practices of development organizations still largely being driven by modernization-era beliefs of "steps and stages". Relatedly, participants recognized the negative effects that macro-economic development reforms have had on African countries, saying they were driven by a capitalist neoliberal rationality that has dismantled the public sector (Participant 8) and denouncing neoliberal development for having reduced public services while bringing no positive change in Africa (Participant 7):

> Participant 7: We have the same recipe, to develop the private sector and entrepreneurship. And we have seen it has failed many places of the world; we look at 50-60 years of development work in the world, the result is not so good (...) it's a complete failure.

Development as a Capitalist Class Pursuit

A crucial finding is that predominantly, participants referred to a type of 'elite capture' of development. Although definitions of this elite varied from donors to corporations or even broadly the private sector, participants claimed in various ways that the engine of development is largely determined by a tiny class of people who have the resources and power to define what development is and how it must be conducted, echoing neo-Marxist literature that defines development as a class pursuit controlled by an elite corpus of interests (see, for example, Patel and McMichael, 2004). Concurring with the assertion that the development

apparatus is increasingly a vehicle for the private sector to expand its influence, Participant 2 said:

> It is evident that what we're doing is in the interest of those who have defined what development is (...) we're only perpetuating an agenda that has been defined by somebody else for other people.

In a similar vein, Participant 1 stated:

> The very same engine of development can be used to tackle, to disrupt, to address the frame that we're offered (...) but again here, we've seen it captured, we've seen it pointed towards a different end (...) we have given up, we have ceded the right, the space, the ability, to confront this dynamic [of elite capture].

I interpret the 'elite' that participants referred to as being primarily private, capital interests, who are increasingly setting the agenda of development. These findings support Wallace's observation that the conditionalities of donor aid—which is the main lifeline for development organizations—increasingly transcend economic matters to encapsulate all of social and political life, essentially turning development into a vehicle for the spread of a transnational 'regulatory system of global capitalism' (2004: 202).

> Participant 3: People say the system is broken, but I think increasingly people are recognizing that systems are working the way they've been set up to, and that is to kind of protect the interests of those who have power and wealth right now.

Importantly, participants expressed that the way this neoliberal development is being defined by the elite is dichotomous with that of practitioners. For example, Participant 1 said that the current frame defined by elite interests is about 'rational consumers', 'economic development' and 'skills', whereas the engine of development ought to 'tackle', 'disrupt', and be pointed towards justice.

The Political Dimensions of Depoliticization

When asked about the presence and effects of depoliticization in development, participant responses varied. Some, such as Participant 1, defined depoliticization as an "intentional refusal to acknowledge that problems come from systemic places", and asserted that depoliticization is not a 'bug' but rather a 'feature' of development:

> Participant 1: If you've got a capitalist ethos that is inherently apolitical, or that benefits, I should say, from presenting social scenarios, social challenges as apolitical, it found in development a natural partner (...) [Depoliticization] is a feature, not a bug, of development.

This reflects the views of scholars such as Burnham, who contend that depoliticization is one of neoliberalism's principal features, and not its byproduct (in Stahl, 2021). However, in a slightly different manner, Participant 7 and 2 stated that development is not, in fact, depoliticized; quite the opposite:

> Participant 7: For me, it's a kind of illusion. There is always politics, in humanitarianism and in development (…) we have this ideological background behind us.

> Participant 2: It's politics that actually governs development and development aid. And I think that the world's structure is that there are nations that are developed and hold the power, and there are nations that are subdued and that are kept in that position so that they do not contest or stand up against the powers.

Naturally, the above assertions are right: the fundamental structures that undergird the idea of development are deeply political and inhere global power inequalities. However, a more nuanced approach to depoliticization shows that it is not about the "removal of politics" but the "denial" thereof (Flinders and Wood, 2014: 136). Development interventions in the neoliberal orthodoxy are depoliticized precisely so as to conceal the responsibility of politics over decisions that organize political, social, and economic life (de Nardis, 2017).

Professionalization of Development

Participants all agreed that one of the ways in which development work is depoliticized is through its professionalization. An interesting finding was that some participants said that because development has become a technical endeavor requiring reporting, tracking, and measuring, only big organizations have the resources to do carry out development projects, which deprives grassroots NGOs and movements from becoming meaningful contributors.

> Participant 3: To get that level of reporting and tracking (...) requires a certain level of organizational capacity that few local organizations have, and so what you have is you know the system of larger entities that win the awards and carry out the awards, so that they can report at the level that.

By focusing on technical solutions, development organizations not only depoliticize the reasons behind social challenges (Louis and Maertens, 2021), but also embody what Kothari (2005) contended is a cultural imperialism that is based on the authority of experts. Technicization and the quantification of development, from this prism, can be viewed as a language of western interests that create what Wilson called a 'knowledge elite' (2006: 504) and exclude anyone who is not part of this group. This is why Participants 4 and 7 lamented the uniformness of development and repetition of the same conventions that ensue due to professionalization:

> Participant 4: The problem is that you work with the same people. And in this field, everybody knows everybody. It's cyclical. So even if you change organizations (...) you still are working with the same people in the same context (…) that's a difficult thing, same actors means same mindset.

> Participant 7: The profile of people has been increasingly a profile of professionals, of experts. Many of these experts and professionals come with the same background (...) we replicate all the time, the same model.

Consequences for Development Workers

The consequences of this kind of ideological and depoliticized work turned out to be quite dire for the majority of participants. There is a disconnect between their value systems and those of their organizations, which causes major grievances and discouragements. They are acutely aware that they themselves have to internalize the rationalities of their organizations, becoming the main people responsible for carrying out depoliticized interventions and inculcating individual responsibility in the communities they work with:

> Participant 4: It feels a bit demoralizing in the sense that we're not helping the way that we think we should help. And I think everybody is a little bit conscious of, at least if you're being honest with yourself, of how much difference we're actually making

> Participant 6: I wanted to help. But I got sucked into the whole narrative and I perpetuated it. I took it in, I internalized it, I perpetuated it, I started reproducing it.

> Participant 5: There are overlaps and disconnects between my own value system and that of the organization (...) and that is a conversation that I have with myself (...) then I say to myself, who would take our places?

Participant 6 and 4 offered a particularly grim account of how this affected them:

> Participant 6: I feel vile and filthy, and I feel like I played a role in not just dehumanizing my people and depoliticizing everything that affects them and kind of like running them to the ground.

> Participant 4: But we are complacent, in a way. I think we are complacent (…) I guess, because we also need a job. We also have our own aspirations. This is also a career. So it is hypocritical to think that people are not thinking about their career themselves.

On a slightly different note, Participant 1 spoke of a 'false consciousness' that practitioners are imbued with:

> There's a bit of a false consciousness around that that's built into our understanding of the world (…) the way humans move from least developed to more developed…and so we have that mental model of how development happens regardless of whether we acknowledge that that is influencing how we approach development.

Similarly, many participants spoke of a change in subjectivities that they had undergone at some point in their career:

> Participant 6: That was me, 22, adopting their narrative (…) they [the development organization] circulated the internal narrative that makes sense to you when you lack the vocabulary to critically name it and critically think about it

> Participant 4: We follow the system and we change with the system, because if you don't, you're out.

The above perspectives corroborate Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, i.e. the operation of 'micropowers' within institutions that serve to control and regulate individuals by fixing 'rules of conduct' (van Wijk, 2021: 5). Development workers in the neoliberal orthodoxy are disciplined so that they can then discipline the communities they work with, supporting Schram's assertion that 'neoliberal paternalism' transmutes human services into a disciplinary apparatus for controlling people (2018: 317).

Predominantly, though, participants felt that the burden is on them to change this system, which is also the reason why they persist and try to fight from within:

> Participant 2: I'm fighting from within (...) and I hope there will be a critical mass soon that will also fight it. The voices are coming up.

> Participant 4: I always had this idea that if you can help you help, even if it's a little bit, so I still feel like, I can help a little bit.

> Participant 5: One of the coping mechanism that we have is to tell ourselves that we have a 5th column role, ensuring that change is affected from the inside.

Consequences for Communities

When asked to reflect on the ramifications that this depoliticized development orthodoxy spells for communities, an interesting theme emerged which saw overwhelming agreement that depoliticization renders development ineffective and makes meaningful change an impossibility:

> Participant 1: As soon as we try to sidestep the fact that there are conditions, there are structures that give rise to that problem (…) you will not change the conditions that give rise to the problem in the first place.

> Participant 4: We are perpetuating a system that maintains communities satisfied enough. But without the ability of actually, realizing this western ideal of development.

This echoes Bryld's assertion that depoliticization is inextricably tied to development failure (in Wilson, 2006: 506), and speaks to the fallacy of the neoliberal illusion that development problems are best solved by the technical practices of deregulation and marketization (Kumi *et al*., 2014).

> Participant 6: Even if it [development] does that tiny bit of good work, it doesn't make up for the immense damage and the reproduction of the social structures, the power structures, and everything that produces a very, very unjust and unfair world where victims will always be there.

Concurring with literature, Participant 6 also noted that this development discourse and practice is also depoliticized because it absolves those in power of responsibility at the detriment of communities:

> It [politicizing issues] would lead to a lot of questions that would have to be answered and people would be held accountable and they don't want that. In a way, you're stripping away accountability which is a huge part of giving answers (...) The language that we use depoliticizes it and takes away from the essence of the issue.

Participant 7 also made a noteworthy claim that a consequence of the current development orthodoxy is that it misses 'culture and anthropology' and neglects 'how communities live and develop themselves'. Indeed, culture is rarely articulated in neoliberal development conventions; it is 'marginal to development policy' even though the act of formulating development policies is themselves a product of (western) culture (Kapoor, 2008b: 19).

Individual Empowerment and Navigating Inequality

When asked about empowerment in the development sector, all but one participant asserted that empowerment, when framed as an individualistic undertaking, loses its essence and becomes vacuous and ineffective. In varying ways, participants expressed that empowerment must be structural and collective, since, one the one hand, it is structures that give rise to disempowerment, and second, because people cannot be separated from the community structures they are part of.

> Participant 1: I think it's profoundly disempowering to imagine trying to move toward a desired future as one person (…) authentic empowerment is about being able to shift your conditions; we can only do that together (...) when we define empowerment—as the narrative of development has recently—as individual empowerment, we can only ever shift within the frame, we can't change the frame.

> Participant 8: We cannot work with individuals only (...) you need to empower the community structures that exist; you need to engage with them, so that the individual has a chance to make use of those opportunities (...) [empowerment] cannot be done systematically, and impactfully and sustainably without addressing what are the drivers of inequity. And the drivers of inequity cannot be addressed only by individuals.

For an ideology to become accepted as common sense, Harvey argued that a conceptual network of meanings has to be created that taps into our "intuitions and instincts", arguing that neoliberalism has done this by appropriating ideals of individual freedom (2007: 5). By the same token, the development apparatus has co-opted empowerment, framed it as

individual and apolitical in a way that conceals systems of domination and oppression, and effectively turned it into what Miraftab calls a 'non-emancipatory tool' (2004: 239, 242).

In a similar vein, a couple of participants said that they do not use the term empowerment at all because it has been rendered meaningless (Participant 4) and that they prefer to use 'community engagement' and 'accountability to affected people' (Participant 5). This supports the assertions of Petchesky who calls empowerment an "empty signifier" (2010: 181) and echoes McFadden's argument that empowerment is "ideologically flawed" and unable to address the collective issues that disadvantaged communities are faced with (2010: 162). In the neoliberal orthodoxy, empowerment is explicitly individual—it is about the ability to make "utility-maximizing choices" in competitive market economies (Bacqué and Biewener, 2015: 66). Echoing this outlook, participants often linked empowerment with entrepreneurship, and did exclusively with negative connotations.

> Participant 1: The narrative of the heroic entrepreneur, systems be damned, just try harder and be smarter and you'll succeed (…) resilience isn't a thing you have or don't have. It's a set of systems that you find yourself in. You are not resilient as an individual. You are resilient because you sit in a web of conditions, of structures that enable your resilience.

Indeed, Koggel says that individual freedoms can only be realized within the wider social structures that delimit those prerogatives (2010: 175-176). But participants expressed that individual empowerment and the inculcation of personal responsibility and entrepreneurialism largely ignore these structures under which freedoms materialize, depriving development workers of the ability to create systemic change and address deep-rooted political issues.

> Participant 7: I'm very, very skeptical at simple approach of saying, okay, all people will become entrepreneurs. The world has never worked like that. We need different people, different skills, different professions. And yeah, I think it's too simplistic.

Participant 3 is the only one who insinuated that individual empowerment works because 'people act principally out of their own self-development', but as the conversation went on, they reflected that individualism rarely results in change.

> Giving individuals, a strong sense of confidence and empowerment and self-efficacy, all of which is good but rarely doesn't result in change versus helping young people understand what is collective action.

DISCUSSION

We have stated previously that for Manyozo, development is conflict (2012) whereas for Escobar, development is discourse (2011). What does our study add to this debate? First, both our theoretical framework and our empirical findings allow us to bridge these two exegeses, showing that development is simultaneously about material flows such as loans, aid, and investment *and* about the spread of discourse and ideology (McEwan, 2018: 210). Crucially, however, our findings allow us to move well beyond this definition of development and derive important new theoretical insights. I argue that in the neoliberal orthodoxy, we find ourselves in a new era of development: development practice is alienation for development workers, it is self-regulation for communities; and ultimately, it is its own antithesis.

What do we mean by development as self-regulation? We have established that one of the key neoliberal forces at play is its reconfiguration of subjectivities and modification of values and principles that "conduct conduct" in society (Brown, 2019: 20). Neoliberalism propagates a view of the world that consists of lone individuals detached from the communities, structures, and systems that operate around them (Read, 2022). It is legitimized by notions of inclusivity, personal freedom and individual empowerment (Burnham, 2001). Yet, based on the findings of this study, I maintain that whereas neoliberalism and depoliticization prove inimical for collectivism, they do not benefit individuals either. This is because the diminution of

collectivism leads to a diminution of publicly-minded individuals (Flinders & Wood, 2014), which, in turn, works to moderate the effects and bargaining power of critical, anti-systemic grassroots movements (Romano, 2017). So, what does this mean? If we take seriously Rose's assertion that the one unquestionable value emblematic of the ethos of our time is the self and its imperatives of "individuality, liberty, choice, fulfillment" (1992: 1), then I contend that empowerment is used as the primary means with which the development apparatus spreads this ethos, i.e. by infusing in individuals the doctrines of entrepreneurialism and individual responsibility (Bacqué and Biewener, 2015). If self-regulation is the aim of neoliberal governmentality, then I can argue on strong grounds that empowerment is the means toward that end. In "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed", Paulo Freire argues that oppressors do not vie for transforming the situation of the oppressed, but rather for remolding their consciousness, as "the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated" (2005: 74). I have established that empowerment in the hegemonic development frame strives first and foremost to turn individuals into entrepreneurs of the self who can navigate existing structures of inequalities—not overthrow them—which obscures the real causes behind their oppression (Cummings *et al*., 2020; Scott, 2014). My empirical findings corroborate this view—participants claimed that individual empowerment allows one to merely navigate the existing frame, not overthrow it. Echoing Foucauldian governmentality, I argue, therefore, that empowerment under neoliberalism is not just a thinly veiled disciplinary apparatus engendering compliance and consent, but more perniciously, a de facto form of oppression perpetuating the subjugation of the same underprivileged people it purports to help.

This line of reasoning is further supported when adding depoliticization into the fray. This study's empirical findings opened a discussion on the political nature of depoliticization, in which the latter is not about undoing politics, but rather relocating the "regulatory competence of the state" onto self-interested individuals (Lemke, 2001: 202). Two things stick out from the findings: one, participants unequivocally established depoliticization as the basis of development failure, and two, they showed that depoliticization is not a bug of development,

but a central feature. This may seem odd at first—how can the source of development's failure simultaneously be one if its central features? What does it mean for the development apparatus to have embedded an orthodoxy that causes its own demise, rendering void any prospect of fulfilling its alleged objectives? I argue that development has become, or perhaps always was—strategically concealed, but it was—its own antithesis. By depoliticizing its work, development not only fails to address structural problems, but it gives rise to new problems that it then claims to fix. Failure, according to Ferguson, is the "norm" of development projects (1994: 8); they fail with an "astonishing regularity" (1994: 9). No sooner does a development project fail than it is replaced by a new one—employing the same logic, institutions, and expertise in a seemingly unending cycle (Ferguson, 1994: 8). Neoliberal development does not drive development but impedes it; it is incompatible with it (Ferguson, 1994: 11). International development in its hegemonic configuration *is* underdevelopment; it is its own antithesis. But then how does it persist despite its failures? It persists because failure, I argue, is irrelevant in the face of the true ideological ambitions of development as an undertaking. This pursuit aims chiefly to eliminate the political and cultural out of development issues and consolidate of a 'network of power' (Escobar, 2011: 45–46) that obfuscates the ramifications of neoliberal globalization (Scott, 2014). Depoliticization is there to stamp out dissent and "dethematize" class antagonisms, replacing them with classless and individual economic-rational interests (Jessop, 2015: 10). It persists despite its failures because neoliberalism restrains and 'dedemocratizes' the political, subordinating national economies to supranational financial institutions that push a world economy agenda (Brown, 2019: 57); because it employs with it an array of ideological mechanisms that invalidate and delegitimize alternatives (McEwan, 2018: 210); and finally, because interventions are presented as technical, neutral expertise rather than ideological rationalities, and as such, there can be no alternatives to them (Wilson, 2006: 504).

Finally, for the development workers, who our findings show are driven by ideals of justice, fairness, and equality, and predominantly oppose the hegemonic practices of development, development is alienation. It is alienation of two different kinds, to be precise. First, it is

powerlessness. As described in the Marxian view, powerlessness refers to an alienation when, inter alia, authority and decision-making are 'expropriated by the ruling entrepreneurs' (Seeman, 1959: 784). The ruling entrepreneurs in this case are capital interests which participants expressed had 'captured' the field and whose disproportionate power and resources allow them to determine what development must look like. The increasing number of conditions they attach to aid and donations have left little space for practitioners to exercise agency and authority, thus leaving many feeling powerless and clinging to hopes of being able to affect some change from within the system. Participant 4, for example, repeated the phrase, 'I'd rather do something than nothing' over and over again. The second type of alienation for workers is self-estrangement, a type of 'depersonalized detachment' from one's work and alienation from one's own self (West, 1969: 5). Development workers are perpetually exposed to a western-centric development discourse (Kapoor, 2004) that gives rise to 'permissible modes of being and thinking' and delegitimizes others (Escobar, 2011: 5). Their identities are constantly 'constituted and reconstituted' within this discourse (Baaz, 2005: 17). Few can claim immunity from these subjectivity-altering forces, as many participants noted that they had often unwittingly embodied the discourses and norms of their organizations. To a considerable extent, development professionals internalize the conventions of their organizations to carry out ideological work that many of them immanently eschew. Thus, becoming what Mills called an 'instrument of an alien purpose', the (development) worker becomes 'self-alienated' (in Seeman, 1959: 789); for her, development is alienation.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed at exploring the lifeworlds of development practitioners to derive new insight into development practice in the neoliberal age. I have asserted that structuralism and post-structuralism are not unavoidably incompatible, showing that they both hold that neoliberalism is guided by the twin phenomena of depoliticization and individualism, with

the former underlining capital accumulation as their driver and the latter framing them as technologies of governance (Laruffa, 2022: 133–134). Combining neo-Marxism and Foucauldianism into one broad theoretical framework, I probed my research question: What are the consequences of the neoliberal depoliticization of development and the conception of empowerment as individual according to development practitioners—both for themselves and for the communities they work with. Findings suggested that development professionals are largely driven by ideals of egalitarianism and fairness but that they are acutely conscious of working in a field that is marred by transgressions, noting in particular the ideologically neoliberal dimensions of development that discount non-western models of development and neglect culture. The participants discussed development using perspectives associated with both structuralism and post-structuralism, validating this study's theoretical stance of merging the two frameworks together. The participants maintained that depoliticization renders development ineffective and that empowerment, when framed as individual, loses its essence and becomes incapacitated since one cannot detach the individual from the community structures they are inherently part of. The ramifications of being pushed to internalize a development discourse that naturalizes ideologically-motivated, depoliticized development interventions were striking for the vast majority participants, who expressed that they often find themselves embodying their organizations' ethos and perpetuating—rather than solving—systems of inequality. Based on these findings, I argued that rather than being merely a dichotomy between discourse and conflict, development in the neoliberal era is self-regulation, alienation, and, au fond, its own antithesis, engendering *under*development while persevering in spite of its failures as it undoes the political and presents its work as technical expertise with no alternatives.

Lastly, I wish to make three short suggestions for any future research seeking to build on these conclusions. First, the multi-dimensional nature of development necessitates interdisciplinary inquiries employing various critical frameworks that probe social, political and economic issues from diverse angles (Brohman, 1995). To this end, continuing to build bridges rather than drawing dichotomies between Foucauldian and neo-Marxist accounts remains

paramount. Second, my view is that critical inquiries into contemporary development practice must aim to denaturalize the subtler practices of neoliberalism, i.e. depoliticization and individualism, revealing how and why they come about, who they serve to benefit, and what effects they pose from both a structural and post-structural lens. Third, and finally, a natural companion and crucial extension of this study would be an inquiry into the same subject but through investigating the lifeworlds of communities rather than practitioners. It would be highly interesting to juxtapose the themes deriving from community members with those of practitioners to see what similarities and tensions exist between the two, and what new implications and theoretical insights they would yield for development practice.

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APPENDIX A: CODING FRAME

Research Question: What are the consequences of the neoliberal depoliticization of development and the conception of empowerment as individual according to development practitioners—both for themselves and for the communities they work with.		
Themes	**Codes**	**Examples**
#1 Development as an ideal vs development in practice	Fairness	Participant 1: "My starting point was this this deep-seated sense of unfairness and this sense of fairness, this belief that everyone should have opportunity, everyone should be safe and happy and all sort of, wouldn't it be great if the world was great, disposition"
	Livelihoods	Participant 2: "Development is about improving livelihoods, giving everyone a chance to have a good life (…) [Development] means wealth is evenly distributed. I don't think development is about UN agencies or donor governments coming to the Global South to tell them what it is they need to do."
	Inclusion	Participant 3: "Development at the end of the day is about, making sure that there is inclusion in the local and national the global level in how we look at what our priorities that advance people's opportunities to choose, politically, socially, economically, to add those opportunities to, you know, have their basic needs met and to"
	Inevitability	Participant 5: There's this neoliberal thought and this perception that there is really only…the only system of government, or only political system that really works and has any traction or credibility in the bigger conversations (…) In my opinion I see how this [is a] very ideologically neoliberal

		discourse of the international development sector."
	Neocolonialism	Participant 2: Wouldn't you argue in another vein that development aid and development is actually another form of neocolonialism? And that in actual fact we are just perpetuating inequalities within the underdevelopment constituencies, because what we're doing is a different way of siphoning expertise?
	Institutions	Participant 1: "The tools, the structures, the things that we have built for ourselves to do development, bear with them, the hallmarks of that high modernist origin." (…) "The structure of how funding works, how decisions are made around development priorities, you know, even if we want justice, we're still working with tools that point us, or that inculcate a directionality that is perhaps different than the folks that we serve, the cultures that we're working in.
#1 Development as an ideal vs development in practice	Failure	Participant 7: And the big danger of that approach (…) we have the same recipe, to develop private sector and entrepreneurship. And we have seen that has failed many places of the world, we look, look at 50-60 years of development work in the world, the result is not so good. I worked in Africa and sorry, but in countries where I work, young people still most of the time, my only two options either to leave, to migrate, to find a better life, or to start fighting for some armed groups. And so it's a complete failure"
	Ideology	Participant 7: "The danger of being too ideological is that you fail to try to just understand how communities live, how they cooperate, how, they see the world, what their beliefs are (…) it's a question of ideology. Development comes because of many other factors. Most of the time, not because of external interventions."
	Structural adjustment	Participant 8: "In the mid to late 80s, there was a discussion about how we can moderate the

		impact of structural adjustment by doing development programming, which is basically identifying who the most vulnerable, who is most negatively impacted by these structural reforms, these macro economic reforms, and trying to develop different kinds of programs to mitigate the negative impact of such macro economic developments on the most vulnerable"
	Neoliberalism	Participant 8: "But definitely, they [SAPs] were driving by, by a capitalist neoliberal agenda that has dismantled a structure of (…)the public sector and has not done enough to replace it with a similar engine of growth (…) But this economic liberalisation was not met with a kind of a freedom of association that would enable communities to sustainably take forward a genuine development work."
	Justice	Participant 1: "By a pretty large margin those who are engaged in this work do it because of feelings of justice and commitment to fairness, and equity. How that manifests, again is very different"
#2 Development as a capitalist class pursuit	Corporations	Participant 2: "It is evident that what we're doing is in the interest of those who have defined what development is. Secondly, we are most definitely missing the mark, as the UN, as NGOs…we're only perpetuating an agenda that has been defined by somebody else for other people."
	System	Participant 3: "People say the system's broken, but I think increasingly people are recognizing that systems are working, the way they've been set up to, and that is to kind of protect the interests of those who have power and wealth right now."

#2 Development as a capitalist class pursuit	Instrumentalization	Participant 1: "We're still working with relationships with donors where, if you've got money you get to decide. You get to frame the problem. You can decide what development looks like. You can decide what to invest in"
	Co-optation	Participant 1: "Instead, we accept the frame that development has been given, which is about that we have rational consumers and this is about economic development, and this is about skills…all the things we hear, that this is a neoliberal frame, hegemonic frame. That engine is used to serve that end. The very same engine of development can be used to tackle, to disrupt, to address the frame that we're offered that is giving rise to and sustaining some of the problematic conditions that we're seeing. But again here, we've seen it captured."
	Self-serving	Participant 4: "You need to create results for the people that are funding you (…) there is the reality that you are in a system where you know, you are dependent on showing your work to the donors, it's imperative that you do that."
	Agency	Participant 8: Development organizations are donor driven. And priorities for donors has been a key determinant of how much funding is available to do this kind of a change"
	Capture	Participant 1: We have ceded the right, the space, the ability, to confront this dynamic. And we've made ourselves part of (…) this dynamic of sort of elite capture."
#3 The political dimensions of	Depoliticization	Participant 1: "It's impossible to separate the emergence of this development in development from the broader ways in which the public has been ceded to the private (…) It's a broad problem that manifests in development in this way that, again, we've

depoliticization in development		just lost the ability to even define the work as political"
	Illusion	Participant 7: "For me, it's a kind of illusion. There is always politics, in humanitarianism in development (…) we have this ideological background behind us. Therefore, I think, to say that there is a complete depoliticization is an illusion.
	Overpoliticization	Participant 2 "It's politics that actually governs development and development aid. And I think that the world's structure is that there are nations that are developed and hold the power, and there are nations that are subdued and that are kept in that position so that they do not contest or stand up against the powers."
	Systemic	Participant 1: Depoliticization is about an intentional refusal to acknowledge that problems come from systemic places"
#3 The political dimensions of depoliticization in development	Structures	Participant 3: "You and I both know there are a lot of systems set up to keep people the way they are; I won't name countries but, there are a lot of countries that could improve their educational system but it's not in the interest of some of the people in power to see people who are not empowered to be more empowered."
	Optics	Participant 4: I had a really bad experience because it was it's extremely fake. And you define fake in the sense that nobody's really interested in doing work, like, the results don't matter, the optics matter (…) all international organizations get into that industry of optics.
	Feature	Participant 1: "[Depoliticization] is a feature, not a bug, of development. If we look back at the high modernist origins (James C. Scott), the belief that we can engineer the world, there was (…) a decision perhaps practitioners were not aware of the alternatives they were deciding between, that there was a choice to say, we are going to make this a technical act.

#3 The political dimensions of depoliticization in development		We are going to make this about the application of knowledge, we are going to make this scientific…we are not going to ground this in the realities of human difference, the realities of culture, and to the extent that we are, we are going to approach that in a scientific fashion."
	Capitalism	Participant 1: "If you've got a capitalist ethos that is inherently apolitical, or that benefits, I should say, from presenting social scenarios as apolitical, it found in development a natural partner (…) development made a choice, development as a practice, decided to put aside politics at the start"
	Public Opinion	Participant 4: We are following into this net, which is public opinion (…) Our job is not just, okay, what's going to work for that community? And what is the targets? And the subjects that are good right now, in terms of optics, so we can, you know, work more? So is like, what's
#4 Professionalization of Development	Political-Neutrality	Participant 8: "There is a sense that the professional development work is primarily a technical work. But and this is something that that I think is done but not said often, that a effective development work cannot be done in a political vacuum. We cannot be completely politically neutral"
	Cyclical	Participant 4: "The problem is, is that you work with the same people. And in this field, everybody knows everybody. Like, it's cyclical, and it's, it's, it's like a, it's a bowl of. So if you even if you change organizations in Switzerland, because that's where it stands in Geneva, you you still are working with the same people in the same context, you use the same people (…) So, but is still the same people. Right? So that's difficult thing, actors, means same mindset."

#4 Professionalization of Development	Experts	Participant 7: "The profile of people has been increasingly a profile of professionals of experts. Many of these experts and professionals come with the same background (...) we replicate all the time, the same model."
	Professionalization	Participant 2: "What is the incentive to send somebody from a developed country through the UN to work in another context? It is not their country, it is not their context, they're there for a few years, and they move on to another country. Where is the actual investment in the people who are left behind (…) to give them the opportunities and build the potential to be able to develop and be competitive.
	Evaluation	Participant 3: "To get that level of reporting and tracking (...) requires a certain level of organizational capacity that few local organizations have, and so what you have is you know the system of larger entities that win the awards and carry out the awards, so that they can report at the level that."
	Technicization	Participant 2: "Whose definition is development by? The west. That's why we're doing this numbers game (…) Doesn't that show that this numbers game that we play is for the benefit for those who have defined what development is?"
#5 Consequences for development workers	Demoralizing	Participant 4: "It feels a bit demoralizing in the sense that we're not helping the way that we think we should help. You know, and I think everybody is a little bit conscious of, at least if you're being honest with yourself, of how much difference we're actually making"
	Questioning	Participant 2: "And also because I can do things my way and try and move the needle a little a bit. I don't believe that fighting form the outside can make sense, because that would be seen as noise. So I'm fighting from within."

#5 Consequences for development workers	Self-Regulation	Participant 6: "I think I wanted to help. But I got sucked into the whole narrative and I perpetuated. I took it in I internalize it, I perpetuated it, I started reproducing it"
	Change	Participant 2: I think of myself as a coward because I should be able to step away and do things differently, but I know that if I do that, I'll be crushed. (…) I fight it form within. And I hope there will be a critical mass soon that will also fight it. The voices are coming up. The voices are growing."
	Complacency	Participant 4: But we are complacent, in a way. I think we are complacent (…) I guess, because we also need a job. We also have our own aspirations. This is also a career. So it is hypocritical to think that people are not thinking about their career themselves"
	Vacuum	Participant 5: "One of the things, if you only speak about the technical side of things then you leave a vacuum, it's then a free-for-all to define the cultural values and beliefs that ultimately affect and guide your activities as a worker in the sector, and it also leaves it for example to the individual, if you see something, some consequences of that…to question, to push back against that, if you have the energy."
	Reconciliation	Participant 4: I don't feel another job for me would be like (…) I always had this idea that if you can help you help, even if it's a little bit, so I still feel like, I can help a little bit. And that's how I reconcile not changing the system."
	Complicit	Participant 6: ""I feel vile and filthy, and I feel like I played a role in not just dehumanizing my people and depoliticizing everything that affects them and kind of like running them to the ground."
	Coping	Participant 5: "There are overlaps and disconnects between my own value system and that of the organization, of the movement that I work for. And that is a conversation that

#5 Consequences for development workers		I have with myself. Often. And it's a conversation I have with my colleagues. And we say "where would we go" firstly, and then I say to myself, who would take our places. So one of the coping mechanism that we have is to tell ourselves that we have a 5th column role, ensuring that change is affected from the inside
	False-consciousness	Participant 1: "There's a bit of a false consciousness around that that's built into our understanding of the world, it's built into the stories that we tell of human development (…) the way humans move from least developed to more developed, and so we have that mental model of how development happens regardless of whether we acknowledge that that is influencing of how we approach development."
	Adaptation	Participant 4: "We follow the system and we change with the system, because if you don't, you're out"
	Narratives	Participant 6: "That was me, 22, adopting their narrative (…) They [the development organization] circulated the internal narrative that makes sense to you when you lack the vocabulary to critically name it and critically think about it"
#6 Consequences for Communities	Communities	Participant 1: "As soon as we try to sidestep the fact that there are conditions, there are structures that give rise to that problem (…) You will not change the conditions that give rise to the problem in the first place."
	Change	Participant 2: Change "when that funding is withdrawn from that context, nothing has fundamentally change there"
	Perpetuating-status-quo	Participant 4: "We are perpetuating a system that maintains communities satisfied enough. But without the ability of actually, realizing

		this western ideal of development. I think if we, if we realize development in countries we are we are out of a job. But that's just me being cynical, okay. It's, this is I don't say that to anybody."
	Exacerbation	Participant 6: "Even if it [development] does that tiny bit of good work, it doesn't make up for the immense damage and the reproduction of the social structures, the power structures, and everything that produces a very, very unjust and unfair world where victims will always be there"
	Culture	Participant 7: "I think you miss very often the main point, which is culture. And you miss anthropology, you miss how communities live and develop themselves."
#6 Consequences for Communities	Language	Participant 6: "The language that we use depoliticizes it and takes away from the essence of the issue. We treat it as if all of these people thousands, and wars on that, they got lost on the street. No, they were stopped and checked and "oh you're of that ethnicity or background" and they were taken. In a way it depoliticizes it to a point that is absurd."
	Accountability	Participant 6: "It [politicizing issues] would lead to a lot of questions that would have to be answered and people would be held accountable and they don't want that. In a way, you're stripping away accountability which is a huge part of giving answers (...) The language that we use depoliticizes it and takes away from the essence of the issue."
#7 Individual Empowerment	Disempowerment	Participant 1: "I think it's profoundly disempowering to imagine trying to move toward a desired future as one person (…) authentic empowerment is about being able to shift your conditions; we can only do that together (...) when we define empowerment—as the narrative of development has recently—as individual empowerment, we can only ever

		shift within the frame, we can't change the frame (...) it's the atomization that capitalism performs on us all, like, you can't change conditions as an individual, inherently, others are part of the conditions that you need to change."
	Entrepreneurship	Participant 7: "I'm very, very skeptical at simple approach is saying, okay, all people will become entrepreneurs. The world has never worked like that. We need different people, different skills, different professions. And yeah, I think it's too simplistic."
	Victim	Participant 6: "The premise that someone is better than you are more cultured, has more tools to empower you, when it's just simply that I wasn't the victim of the structure. But you were, and I'm going to give you this very limited assist. Completely."
#7 Individual Empowerment	Meaningless	Participant 4: "I think it's a meaningless term. So I'm not going to define it for you because I don't use it (…) empowerment of the individual is also a way of chasing success stories. mean, if you're chasing success stories, you're not showcasing everybody's experience (…) it's demeaning.
	Skilling	Participant 1: "The narrative of the heroic entrepreneur, systems be damned, just try harder and be smarter and you'll succeed (…) Also you don't think that there's someone in google saying you know, if everybody learns how to become a software development, then software development is going to become cheaper?. Offshoring…that's part of it."
	Engagement	Participant 5: We don't use the term [empowerment (…) We talk about community engagement. We talk about accountability to affected people.
	Self-interest	Participant 3: "So I think you know economic empowerment, because I actually do believe that people act principally out of their own self-development, preservation opportunity

#7 Individual Empowerment		(…) giving individuals, a strong sense of confidence and empowerment and self-efficacy (…) is good but rarely doesn't result in change versus helping young people understand what is collective action"
	Unfairness	Participant 8: "I think it is unfair. Because it's recognizing that not everybody has enough opportunities to be able to take it to that level. So, it's really about the ability to exercise choice and to use what opportunities you have and to maximize your opportunities"
	Resilience	Participant 1: "Resilience isn't a thing you have or don't have. It's a set of systems that you find yourself in. You are not resilient as an individual. You are resilient because you sit in a web of conditions, of structures that enable your resilience."
	Community-Structures	Participant 8: "We cannot work with individuals only (...) you need to empower the community structures that exist; you need to engage with them, so that the individual has a chance to make use of those opportunities (...) yes, individuals do make a difference. Absolutely. But it cannot be done systematically, and impactfully and sustainably without addressing what are the drivers of inequity. And the drivers of inequity cannot be addressed only by individuals."
	Systems	Participant 6: This person now has a business, an income, it's supported by an international organization. Around him there's people still impoverished (…) you are helping one person succeed, but it's coming at what expense?"
	Atomization	Participant 1: ""It's the atomization that capitalism performs on us all, like, you can't change conditions as an individual, inherently, others are part of the conditions that you need to change (…) so they need to be part of that process."

APPENDIX B: TOPIC GUIDE

- Introductions
    - What drew you to the development field?
    - What does development mean to you?
    - Has your idea of development changed over time?
- How does your organization design projects/interventions?
- What do you think are some of the shortcomings of development?
    - (If yes) How would you change it if you could?
    - (If no) Was there something that you always looked and thought you would want to change?
- What does the term depoliticization mean?
    - Do you believe it happens in development? If so, why?
    - (if yes) What do you think about depoliticization of structural inequalities in development?
    - Do you think development organizations tend to frame development problems as technical, measurable? If so, why?
    - (If yes) Do you think that even structural issues such as poverty are depoliticized?
    - Do you think development misses the mark if it doesn't address these deep-rooted political issues?
    - What do you think could be the consequences of defining development as technical for development workers?
    - If someone goes against the grain and challenges ideas, what happens? Will they be heard?
- Do you think development is ideological? If so, what ideologies do you think it is driven by?
    - Do you think the development agenda is affected by neoliberalism?
    - Does the focus on economy actually sideline issues such as social inequality?
- How do you as a development worker make sense of issues of power and redistribution?
    - The poor lack access not just to economic power, but also social and political. Are these issues factored in? Explain why
- What about failure in development?
- Authors show that development has a colonial and capitalist history to it. Are you aware of this dynamic? Do you think that affects your work?

- What does empowerment look like in your organization?
    - What kind of programs are designed to empower people?
    - How do you choose which communities need empowering and what kind of empowerment they need?
    - How do you define empowerment?
    - Do you think the current definition of empowerment is ideologically capitalist/neoliberal? If so, why?
    - I believe that part of empowerment is turning people into self-governing, entrepreneurial individuals; do you agree with this, if so, why?
- There is a discourse around the private sector having to play a big role in the development of underdeveloped countries. How do you view the private sector's involvement in development?
    - Do you think the privatization of development aid works to imbue corporate logic in development?
    - Does this help the framing of development as capitalist, neoliberal?
- What's the way forward? How do we reimagine development?

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