Development is a fight between modernity and traditionalism. Discuss.

This essay will reflect on whether there is an irreconcilable tension between the use of methods sanctioned by Eurocentric conceptions of modernity and traditionalism to the design and implementation of development programmes and practices. It will consider some of the evidence for this as set out in the literature and in so doing will consider and define some of the key terms in order to base the discussion on a stated understanding of the concept. It will then go on to consider both the claims made for modernity in a development context and the substantial body of critical literature to come to a conclusion about the extent to which modernity and traditionalism may be in conflict.

Modernity as a concept is simply the progress of society in technological, social and economic relations over a certain period of time. 'European' modernity evolved from ideas born out the neoliberal and Marxist theories, suggesting a 'dramatic and unprecedented break between past and present' (Appadurai, 1997, p.3). These theories were heavily reliant on evolutionary schemas in order to act as a guide for the transition of societies from primitive to more civilised. The concept of traditionalism emerged in critique of this inevitable process of modernity. Many underdevelopment theorists, for example, Gunder Frank found fault with these assumptions that all societies follow the same development trajectories as the west. (cited in Crewe, 2011) This was as a response to the observed failure of much of the developing world to develop out of conditions of poverty. They suggested that the concept of modernity was fundamentally Eurocentric. This provides an explanation for why I have referred to the predominant concept of modernity as 'European' throughout the essay. Mudimbe (2004) emphasises this point, with the statement that, evolutionary processes repress 'otherness' in the name of sameness and evades the task of trying to make sense of other worlds. (cited in Crewe, 2011) There was much importance afforded to the various cultural differences of different societies. Each form of society needs to strive towards its own imagined modernity. There should be no hegemonic template. As this illustrates there are profoundly different ideas surrounding the concept of modernity. My predominant concern throughout the course of this essay will be an examination of these two opposite contestations of modernity, within the recent development and anthropological discourse. This will involve critically engaging with the literature and attempting to trace the processes that allowed for the shift in ideology from modernisation theory to an idea of 'indigenisation of modernity.'(cited in Hannerz, 1996: p.51) This will lead to a conclusion about the key question; whether development is indeed a stark fight between modernity and traditionalism, or if there is a more complex answer, which takes account of the complexity of the processes that are intrinsic to the effective developmental experiences of societies.

At the outset of the 1960s, modernisation theory developed in development discourse, as a result of particular dissatisfaction with the realities of many 'third world' political economies, in comparison with those of the 'developed world.' These developed economies were seen as having conditions of European

modernity, which the rest of the world should aspire to replicate. Wilmot Moore stated that developing economies should modernise through the,

'total transformation of traditional or pre modern society into the types of technology and associated social organisation that characterise the advanced, economically prosperous, and relatively politically stable nations of the western world.'(cited in Hulme and Turner, 1990, p.35)

This binary distinction between two forms of society had originally been made by Durkheim, who distinguished levels of 'organic' and 'mechanical' solidarity within a society. He suggested (Hulme and Turner, 1990, p.35) that in societies where people often performed the same economic tasks and shared the same objects of belief, conditions of mechanical solidarity existed. Durkheim suggested that society under these conditions was in a stage of Gameinshaft, translating roughly as community, and suggested that over a process of increased social interaction; this smaller, more traditional form of community would develop into a much wider more complex 'modern' society, Gesellshaft. (Hulme and Turner, 1990, p.36) Ferdinand Tonnies conceptualises this transition from tradition to modernity, by associating society and its warlike competition, to the atomization of the individual, and the breakdown of solidarity and cohesion. (Muller, 1994, p.77)   Nisbet suggested that this process occurred when, 'human relationships were characterised by a higher degree of individualism, impersonality and proceeding from volition of sheer interest.' (Hulme and Turner, 1990, p.36) This brings back to ideas spawned during the French revolution and the enlightenment and, represented in contemporary neo liberal policy, stressing individuality and hard work as key to success.

The theory of modernisation emerged with Robert Redfield (cited in Hulme and Turner, 1990, p.38) describing it as the, the movement of isolated folk communities to more complex urban societies. He suggested that many saw folk societies as 'small, isolated, non-literate and homogenous, with a strong sense of group solidarity.' (Hulme and Turner, 1990, p.38) This view came under an increased amount of criticism for replicating the previously exploitative ideas of evolutionism (idea that there was a distinction between undeveloped 'savages' and developed modern people) which preceded it. Roxborough coined the phrase 'neo-evolutionism,' (Hulme and Turner, 1990, p.38) emphasising the formation of these values as just as exploitative as those which had been of prominence before. Eisenstadt among many others, (Hulme and Turner, 1990, p.40) found fault in this modernisation theory. He found that the eagerly anticipated process of modernisation had not occurred (in many societies) and in fact had increased conditions of poverty indebtedness and stagnating growth in much of the developed world. Following this realisation, the concept of modernity within development and anthropological spheres moved into a deeply contested arena. The nature of these contestations will be further unpacked below.

The predominantly Eurocentric concept of modernity behind the modernisation theory has been heavily criticised as being substantially flawed. Apparadurai espouses a differentiated theory of 'multiple modernities,' (Larkin, 1997, p.407) where he suggests that each society aspires to a different idea of modern. Closely linked to this idea is Larkin's concept of 'parallel modernities,' (Larkin, 1997, p.407) where

there is a 'co-existence in space and time of multiple economic, religious and cultural flows.' (Larkin, 1997, p.408) The emergence of these new concepts has been linked to substantial de-territorialisation of the globe and an increased freedom of movement across boundaries. Tsing describes the concept of 'complex networks of mutual entanglement' (Osella, 2006, p.569) throughout the world, also, being named by Osella (2006, p.570), as the 'cosmopolitanism of local cultures.' This leads to suggestion that any concept of modernity is an abstraction. Osella (2006, p.570), in a study about South India, suggests that, 'while modernity corresponding perfectly to classical theories might never exist, concepts, images, and practices of something called modernity certainly do exist.' Latour (cited in Osella, 2006, p.572), emphasises this point by stating that no concept of modernity is solid but all 'theories (of modernity) are themselves always actually stories, narratives about modernity itself.' Appadurai (1996, p.35) further sustains that concepts of modernity are fluid and irregular shapes, and are 'deeply perspectival constructs'. (Appadurai, 1996, p.37). Modernity should be seen as a socially constructed image, and people's relationships and specific contexts need to be studied in order to understand their different narratives.

If this fluid concept of what is modern is correct than how has European modernity become the 'master narrative' that much of the developing world assimilated to? Many suggest that this was due to the belief that the European world had the ideal characteristics for the development of modern values and techniques. Perhaps as a result of the conditions that emerged from their former colonial histories and more advanced literacy. Others suggest that it is because these countries are particularly characterised by conditions of reflexivity and rupture. However, many commentators have questioned whether this 'master narrative' of modernity really originates from European roots. Brennan (cited in Osella, 2006, p.573), stresses that many 'post colonies are sites of modernity as much for the identity formations they foster as for wilder excesses in capitalist production, such as slavery and plantation, that they promote.' Millar (cited in Osella, 2006, p.574) supports this alluding to the fact that 'it would be hard to find comparable examples of unremitting rupture, alienation, or denigration in Europe,' as opposed to many developing countries. There is substantial evidence to suggest that developing countries have it within their abilities to aspire to modernity, and little evidence to suggest that the European experience is a template to aspire to. In one illustration of this, Osella (2006, p.581) finds evidence to show that Mumbai's entrepreneurs 'have been from the outset' involved in a process of modernity. These are arguments that allowed the concept of traditionalism, within development discourse, to emerge.

On the other hand, there is substantial evidence, in both Africa and Asia, to show that developing countries do aspire to the European 'master' narrative of modernity. Comaroff and Comoroff (Osella, 2006, p.586) highlight that, in Africa, 'Europeans enjoy mastery over motorised and airborne movement…(are able) to collapse space and time, and to control the velocity of movement.' Although this may be the case, the 'European' path may not be the most effective. There has been much written about the negative effects on different societies following the European path of modernity. Many commentators have recorded the

process as causing drastic ruptures of society. Possibly as a result of increased rural-urban migration and producing negative power structures. Pigg (1992, p.511) in a study of Bikas, the Nepali term for development, suggests that the 'ideology of modernization saturates local societies and alters the formation of local identities.' The language of development, particularly the western image of development, forms social categories, so that 'cosmopolitan Nepali's stake out their place in global society and legitimate their political authority over villagers who do not understand their villageness.' (Pigg, 1992, p.511) This is an example of the language of modernisation, when based on 'master narrative' of European development, dividing and fragmenting different sections of society.

As a response to the criticism of 'European modernity' and the failure of this modernisation theory, there has been emergence of a new form of 'bottom up,' participatory development, espoused by key academics such as, Robert Chambers. This articulated a much more inclusive process of needs assessment within practices of development. Nikolas Rose, followed this with a concept of 'government though community.' (Tanya-Li, 2005, p.4) Rose explains that community development is not simply concerned with imposing state control over a given socio-economic arena but making collective existence more 'intelligible and calculable.' (Tanya-Li, 2005, p.4) It involves gaining a deeper understanding of the specific community and developing a more context-specific framework for implementing development. Tanya-Li explains that, within this concept, issues are 'problematized in terms of features of communities and their strengths, cultures and pathologies.' (Tanya-Li, 2005, p.4) This conveyed a new idea of development as giving local people the power to create of their own development. It projects an image of inclusion of traditional knowledge within development projects and signalled the emergence of traditionalism in the development discourse. However, a vast array of problems emerged with this new framework of practice.

In detailed analysis of this idea of 'community development,' Tanya-Li (2005, p.5) articulated a paradox within it. She suggests that communities, within this new discourse, are assumed to be natural and have the 'secret to the good life.' However; she mentions that in order to achieve this 'good life,' experts are often required by aid agencies to intervene in order to develop the society's ability. Scott explains this by suggesting that, 'states need to make landscapes, populations, and other domains of intervention and control legible in order to act upon them.' (cited in Guggenheim, 2006, p.6) State and donors complete this by 'institution-building' and using 'local participation' in order to upgrade the 'social capital' of the communities they are attempting to develop. The concept of developing 'social capital' lies at the centre of this new development policy. Putnam defined it as, "understanding how and why particular networks are structured, the consequences for those who are and those who are not members of these networks, and what can be done to shape social networks so that they are conducive to building more democratic, supportive and inclusive communities''.'(cited in Guggenheim, 2006, p.4) In other words, Putnam is suggesting that social capital 'constitutes a key component of people's identities and the strategies they deploy for survival and mobility,' (Guggenheim, 2006, p.4) and understanding of these factors is vital for

successful development projects. In short, it refers to the important need to develop people's abilities to work in more efficient networks, leading to more efficient communities.

Many criticise this idea for still being relatively Eurocentric, mainly due to the involvement of western 'experts' being required to develop the 'others'. A key criticism refers to the considerable lack of attention given to indigenous and traditional knowledge within these new development programmes. Harriss (cited in Tanya-Li, 2005, p.12) expands this critique of enhancing 'social capital' by suggesting that it serves as a very 'consistent screen' for neo-liberal market agendas, basically acting to the same ends as did the theory of modernisation. He observes that it appears to address social problems while leaving power relations and inequality intact. An example from Indonesia provides evidence that the goals within projects are geared towards the interests of the west, rather than towards development success. The project gave the illusion it was going to build civil society, alleviate poverty and manage conflict, through the means of social transformation by returning the society to authentic, traditional ways and by incorporating expert design into the project. However, Tanya Li's (2005, p.34) research further emphasises Harriss's statement. She (Tanya-Li, 2005) talks about how members of the World Bank positioned themselves as experts, controlling not just the policy of the project but also the ways in which empowerment of the people should take place. An Indonesian critic, Vedi Hadiz, emphasised this western control by stating,

'experts intent on devising optimal institutional arrangements overlook the fact that democracy, public participation, accountability and social and economic rights are all historically tied to the outcome of struggles of social forces and interests that have been the product of grinding social change over centuries.'
(Tanya- Li, 2005, p.35)

It is extremely evident that western organisations and governments still viewed development as a process where 'European experts' were needed, to build the capacity of poorer, less developed countries so they could more effectively assimilate into the 'modern world'. This new discourse of community development was not a movement towards a more inclusive traditionalism but one mirroring the previous modernisation theory. Appadurai summed up the need for movement away from this ingrained modernity versus traditionalism argument by stating that, 'the United States are no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes.' (Appadurai, 1996, p.31)

Washbrook (cited in Osella, 2006, p.584) emphasised the need for an alternative discourse within development, he speaks about 'the virtues of a more multi-centred approach, in which no centre is explicable except in terms related to others.' In other words, there is a need to look at the relationships within the development trajectories of all the countries rather than applying a model based on one specific world view. To support this, Appadurai (1996, p.43) emphasises that, 'the new global cultural economy has been seen as a complex, overlapping and disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models.' These alternative models emerged parallel to ideas of the post

development theorists, such as Escobar and Esteva, who suggested that modernisation theory was fundamentally a method of asserting western influence and domination.

This alternative discourse leads the discussion to Sahlin's term 'indigenisation of modernity.' (Robins. 2003, p.2) Within this term, he describes a process of integration of industrial technologies into indigenous repertories, in an attempt to aid the survival of their particular indigenous culture. (Robins, 2003, p.3) This idea of indigenous modernity is a critical reaction to the post-development thinkers such as, Escobar (cited in Robins, 2003). Robins expressing dissatisfaction with their viewpoint, emphasises that there is an 'over emphasis on language, labels, text, culture and meaning in postmodernist critiques of development that draws attention away from material realities.' (Robins,2003, p.4) He feels they omit important ideas about what interventions actually mean to people's lives. He suggests that these post-development theorists only talk about criticisms and that they fail to enunciate effective alternatives. Robins, like Sahlins, along with Washbrook and Appadurai see that hybrid conditions between technological and societal advances ('European' modernity) and traditional knowledge should be adopted; Robins suggests that a 'desire of traditional people to be modern does not make them docile, detribalised consumers'. (Robins, 2003, p.15) Nor does it imply cultural homogenisation by the west.' (Robins, 2003, p.15) There is a need to engage with modern forces of production, however, not to be swallowed up by homogenizing forces of modernity and globalisation. Traditional groups have to adopt certain modern technologies for survival, but do not need to embrace the whole idea of aspiring to Western culture.

Although, this essay has almost entirely been constructing a critique against the claims made for 'European modernity' in development, Sinha (1998, p.97) has seen in a study of new traditionalism in India, that absolute traditionalism is not an effective alternative. He emphasises that the traditionalist idea enunciates that there is essential difference between the 'west' and the 'non-west' and that this differentiation between 'modernity' and 'tradition' echoes the contemporary critiques of the heavily critiqued post development theorists.' (Sinha, 1998, p.98) He suggests that the new traditionalist position actually states that the Indian tradition is under assault from western forces, and that traditional movements represent a collective rural wisdom. Conversely, Brass (cited in Sinha, 1998, p.98) finds that actually some of these new agrarian movements are attempts by rural elite to grasp hegemony over rural sector. Sinha (1998, p.98) sums up nicely that, 'rural sectoral unity and collective identity is a political project, not an already given fact.' There has been much other work suggesting that traditionalist and indigenous movements have been similarly unrepresentative of the population. Karlsson (2003) in an article about indigenous characterisations suggests difficulties with attaching universal rights to indigenous peoples. Bowen (cited in Karlsson, 2003, p.417) emphasised that loose characterisations of 'indigenous peoples' is neither a helpful as an analytical tool, nor a basis for policy intervention. He suggested (2003, p.417) that in Indonesia the use of the term indigenous or traditional would lead to ethnic polarisation and undermine larger project of 'peaceful transition towards a decentralised Indonesia.' Karlsson (2003, p.417) concludes his article by

suggesting that there is no blueprint for indigenous sovereignty but asserts that the right of self determination need not necessarily mean the exclusion of ethnic others but facilitate 'peaceful alternatives.' This reiterates the point that creating a binary distinction between traditionalism and modernity is inefficient and ineffective. There needs to be much more of a dialectic relationship between the two antitheses in order for development programmes to be successful.

To conclude, the idea of modernity within development has been a heavily contested concept. The fact that modernity means the technological, social and economic advancement of a society over a period of time, gives license for those that develop faster to suggest that their methods in the process are the correct ones. However, what has been seen from this review of some of the literature is that there is no linear route to a uniform version of 'the modern'. People adapt their imaginings of modernity and development due to many different factors, including ethnicities, cultures and politics, between and within cultures. Clear cut boundaries cannot be drawn between the modern and the traditional. Anthropological approaches to specific development programmes have to be entirely contextual and dependent on multiple factors rather than adherence to polarised or ideological belief. Development can therefore be seen as a fight between the need to impose European modernity on totally different societies and the need for local and traditional societies to attempt to maintain fidelity to their cultures, while also moving through the development process.

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