

# **The Waves of Post-Development Theory and a Consideration of the Philippines**

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## ***Introduction***

In the 1990s, post-development theorists argued against modernization and development for its reductionism, universalism, and ethnocentricity. Tracing the theoretical debates, I will identify two waves of post-development theory. While the first wave of post-development theory has been criticized for its rejection of development without qualification, there has been a second wave that responded and subsequently deepened the concept of post-development. Although there has been great strides to make post-development more inclusive and reflexive, the discipline has largely been rooted in experiences from Latin America, Africa, and India. What has been under-researched in the post-development literature is a consideration for countries in South East Asia. Acknowledging the diversity of culture, language, religion, heritage, and colonial experience, this paper will reflect on how the Philippine experience can make a contribution to post-development theory. In this paper, I will address three questions. First, what led to the second wave of post-development theory? Second, why consider post-development theory from a Philippine perspective? Third, what contributions can an analysis of a Philippine perspective offer towards the furthering of post-development theory? I will argue that categorizing post-development into two waves suggests that the theory has not stalled as a consequence of its initial shortfalls, but does in fact have room for growth as it will be demonstrated in the Philippine case. This paper will proceed in five steps. First, there will be a review of what I classify as the first wave of post-development theory. Second, the critiques against post-development will be outlined, namely for its essentialism, non-instrumentality, selectivity, and lack of reflexivity. Third, in response to these criticisms, a second wave of post-development theory will be identified. Fourth, after laying the theoretical foundation, as case will be made as to why post-development theory should consider the Philippines. Fifth, I will apply the contributions of post-development theory from the recent Philippines experiences to the 'Green Revolution' and illustrate its negative reaction to land reforms. The aim of this paper is to first catalogue the various streams of thought of the post-development approach, and second to build on the theory by taking into account of the experiences that occurred in the Philippines.

## ***First Wave of Post-Development Theory***

Within the social sciences and in the mindset of Western publics, development arguably remains a vehicle for modernism. The 'post' within post-development refers to the conviction that it is not a matter of identifying the most efficient way of delivering development, but questioning the very concept of development (McGregor, 2007:156). At *prima facie*, there appears to be little dispute over the contents and desirability of development in the post-World War II era. Development is generally understood as the intervention of aid structures and practices that would lead to rising living standards, manifested in an increase in income, which in turn would render better health and nutrition. This sympathetic vision has legitimized the rise of the development industry comprised of institutions, processes, discourses, and knowledges, which have systemically attempted to help those 'underdeveloped' nations into idealized societies modeled after 'developed' nations in the West. Global campaigns, such as Make

Poverty History, promote greater intervention by privileged societies into the developing world. In response to the uncritical acceptance of development, the last twenty years has seen the emergence of what can be broadly called post-modern critiques against Western development schemas.

Within the last twenty years, there was a sprouting of literature that rejects the very meaning of development. This body of scholarship, inspired by Michel Foucault and the post-structuralist school of thought, problematizes the political and power aspects of what can be seen at face value as a neutral and practical problem – how to deliver the technological and institutional advances of the First World to ‘poor’ people in the subaltern (Nusted, 2001: 482). Vexation over development is evident in statements which identify it to be “a ruin in the intellectual landscape,” and that it now “shows cracks and is starting to crumble” (Sachs, 1992: 1). Several scholars who assert this caustic view towards development are collectively referred to as first wave ‘post-development theorists’ (Alvares, 1992; Escobar, 1985, 1992, 1995; Ferguson, 1990; Kothari, 1988, 1995; Latouche, 1993; Rahnema, 1992, 1997; Rist, 1990, 1997; Sachs, 1992; Seabrook, 1993). This new chorus of critical theory proposes that development itself is an arbitrary concept rooted in a meta-narrative that, in turn, only benefits its practitioners. Post-development theorists maintain that the real aim of development is intimately linked to modernization, which broadens the control of the Western world and its nationalist allies within the ‘developing’ world (Rapley, 2004: 350).

Post-development theory has also been characterized as ‘beyond development’ and ‘anti-development’ for its disruption of development’s reductive nature. Development was subsequently rejected because its discourse essentialized non-Western cultures into their deficiencies, and thus portrayed it as a region in need of modernizing along Western models (Constantino, 1985; Nandy, 1988; Kothari, 1988; Rist, 1990). First-wave post-development theorists suggest that development processes undermine and destroy the diversity of social, cultural, economic, and political systems that pre-dated development, and were consequently replaced with externally imposed homogenous models of society. Inversing the logic of development, Sachs (1992) argues that we should not be afraid of development’s failures, but rather its success. Escobar (1992) proposes that the problem with development is that it is external, based on the teleological path of the industrialized world, and ‘more endogenous discourses’ are needed instead. The assertion of ‘endogenous development’ harkens to dependency theory and asserts that “foreign is bad, local is good” (Kiely, 1999: 30-55). Escobar (1995: 215) summarizes the hallmarks of the first wave of post-development theory: (1) an interest not in development alternatives, but in alternatives to development, and thus a rejection of the entire paradigm, (2) an interest in local and indigenous knowledge, (3) a critical stance towards established scientific discourses, and (4) the defense and promotion of localized, pluralistic grassroots movements. A common thread found in this first wave of post-development theory is that it derides development as a Eurocentric discourse and advocates for new ways of thinking about non-Western countries.

### ***Criticisms Against the First Wave of Post-Development***

While the arguments made by first wave post-development theorists uncover the uncritical discourse and practice of development, they have been accused of being careless in their own analyses. For their employment of discourse analysis, their use of language has been regarded as negligent. In referring to the processes and practices as ‘development’, therefore suggesting its homogeneity and consistency, Escobar endangers himself of essentialism

(Pieterse, 2000: 183). Pieterse (2000) alerts us to the monochromatic painting of development, its use in a straw-man argument, and ultimately post-development's arrival at its radical position. Without this convenient binary construction or anti-development pathos, the post-development perspective loses solid footing as a critical theory.

Since the first wave denies possibilities of improvements through development, including modern medicine that lowers child mortality rates and the spread of education that increases literacy rates, is there any real constructive value in post-development? Critics such as Lehman (1997), Corbridge (1998), Pieterse (2000), and Schuurman (2000) have recognized the discipline's ability to identify the shortcomings of development theory and policy, but complain that post-development offers no concrete alternatives to remedy the situation. As a member of the critical theory body of literature, the first wave of post-development disregards the potential and dialectics of modernity – democratization, soft power technologies, and reflexivity. As Corbridge (1999: 145) points out, a complete rejection of modernity and development ignores the numerous positive aspects related to them, ranging from the promotion of human rights to the achievements of medicine. Ironically, it is not difficult to see the nexus of post-structural discourses identified by Escobar – democratization, respect of difference, and anti-development – arise out of modernization themselves.

While the shift towards cultural sensibilities that accompany post-development is welcomed, the plea for indigenous culture can also lead to ethno-chauvinism and 'reverse-Orientalism' (Kiely, 1999: 30-55). Pieterse (2000) cautions that there is the potential for a reification of both culture and the local. Some post-development texts seem to offer 'the last refuge of the noble savage' by idealizing life in pre-modern communities and projecting images onto the grim reality in these 'alternatives-to-development' (Kiely, 1999: 30-55). Similarly, Spivak (1998) underlines how our representations, especially of marginalized subaltern groups, are intimately linked to our positioning (gendered, socioeconomic, cultural, historical, geographic, or institutional). From this point of view, Spivak demands a heightened reflexivity by mainstream development analysts and post-development theorists, to be more aware of how researchers imprint values and experiences upon those they represent in their studies. Such cultural reflexivity enables scholars from the West to carefully engage in a respectful relationship with the subaltern.

### ***Second Wave of Post-Development Theory***

In response to calls that post-development theory is inherently flawed and lacks alternative proposals to replace development, Nusted (2001: 479) points out that a lack of instrumentality are not substantive enough grounds to dismiss post-development in its entirety. Acknowledging that development is far more complex and diverse than originally illustrated by the first wave of post-developmentalists, Nusted posits that post-development can indeed be instructive. First, post-development sheds light as to why development interventions have not lived up to its expectations. By drawing our attention away from the hegemonic discursive in development studies, post-development initiates a wider critique of development on all levels than has not been possible beforehand. An interrogation of development helps us take a full account of what works and what does not work, of which programs do more harm than good, and most importantly of the disparity of power relations between those offering and receiving development.

In response to criticisms of post-development's possible return to ethno-chauvinism, post-development analysis must acknowledge not only the differences between the West and

non-West, but also the diversity *within* these dichotomized regions (Matthews 2004). Countries and regions are not homogenous entities. For example, while Canada as an aggregate has lower levels of poverty when compared to the Philippines, there are pockets of communities within Canada, such as the Kasechewan First Nation Reserve, that can qualify as ‘subaltern’ for its failing water safety standards (Eggertson 2006, 1248). Similarly, while the staggering heterogeneity of African cultures, languages, histories, and traditions receive marginal attention in the discursive practise of development, the basic thrust of modern development scholarship and application returns to the essential notions of Africa’s inadequate characteristics (Andreasson 2005). By disaggregating regions, we can better understand the diversity of thought, culture, language, or values within these regions, and thus address reverse-Orientalism.

To clarify what it means for ending development, as espoused by the first wave, this should not be interpreted as a belief that the bettering of social organization is impossible, nor is it a call for a return to earlier ways of primordial life. Although the post-World II development endeavor may be obsolete and bankrupt, the goal of improving people’s lives must not be abandoned. Thus a call for ‘alternatives-to-development’ is an appeal for a “new way of changing, of developing, of improving, to be constructed in the place of the ruin of the post-World War II development project,” (Matthews, 2004: 367-377). More importantly, these ‘alternatives-to-development’ must be inspired and led from within the subaltern. Udombana (2000) argues that the developing world has a responsibility for their own economic and social development in accordance to their own priorities and plans, reflected by their political and cultural diversities. There is a necessity for the subaltern to turn inward, as opposed to being dependent on external agencies, to devise more effective and meaningful programs and policies for improvement. It must be stressed that empowering the local does not mean that this level becomes co-opted or becomes a token of external agents. Development projects require meaningful consultations with those directly affected.

Recent work by Wood (2001) and Lind (2003) add greater nuance by offering a gendered corrective lens to post-development theory. Wood and Lind respond to Spivak’s previous criticism through their discussion on the disparity of understanding between Western and non-Western feminists. Typically, women’s lives and struggles in subaltern regions of the world have been understood from within ethnographic imaginations of the West (Mohanty, 1991). Wood (2001) warns scholars against the simplification of the women from the subaltern and recognizes that their voices are needed without the expectation of ‘authentic native voices’. This argument is similar to Escobar’s original warning that “one must be careful not to naturalize ‘traditional’ worlds, that is valorize as innocent and ‘natural’ an order produced by history... The ‘local’... is neither unconnected nor unconstructed” (Escobar, 1995: 170). People directly affected and studied by post-development scholarship need to be heard without preconceptions and prejudice, to allow them the same opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns, and therefore offer a genuine contribution towards prescriptions through ‘alternatives-to-development’.

On a similar trajectory, Lind (2003) argues against the academic exploitation and romanticizing of the ‘Third World’. Lind uncovered the negligence of Western scholars who over-valorized and exploited the life story of Domitila Barrios de Chungara and her contributions to the antipoverty struggle in Bolivia, “[Barrios de Chungara] was embraced by Western WID feminists [and subsequently forgotten], yet the underlying causes of her community’s and country’s situation remained underexamined,” (Lind, 2003: 238). Incorporating these lessons from third-wave feminists, post-development theory promotes the idea that subaltern voices

should not only be heard, but must also be interpreted in a fair and transparent manner. For Western scholars doing otherwise would mean extracting peripheral knowledge for central academic benefits. This would be going against the non-exploitive spirit of post-development.

### ***Why Consider the Philippines in Post-development Theory?***

The cases cited in the post-development literature mainly concerns itself with Latin America, India, and recently Africa; or that reflections are put in general terms and no cases are brought up (Nandy, 1989). The experiences of newly industrialized countries in East Asia, or other countries in East Asia, are only emerging in the literature. Similarly, a number of post-development theorists come from subaltern regions of the world, but none of the prominent scholars who are linked to this school of thought are East Asian, or Filipino for that matter. Furthermore, the Philippine experience has not been a center of discussion by these theorists, and as such, one could be led to assume that the findings of post-development theory are less relevant to the Philippines than they are to the rest of the developing world.

The lack of discussion related to post-development perspective is not a consequent of an absence of interest in the topic of development in the Philippines, as the question of development in this East Asian country is featured in many pieces of academic work. The country has endured a colonial past, imposed through the Spanish and the Americans, and has struggled to find economic prosperity and political stability amidst the importations of foreign religions, economies, and political systems. Despite the promises of modernization and improvement in the global political economy, the country is marred with political and economic uncertainty, but does have a growing and active civil society who demands changes from within (Coronel-Ferrer, 2005).

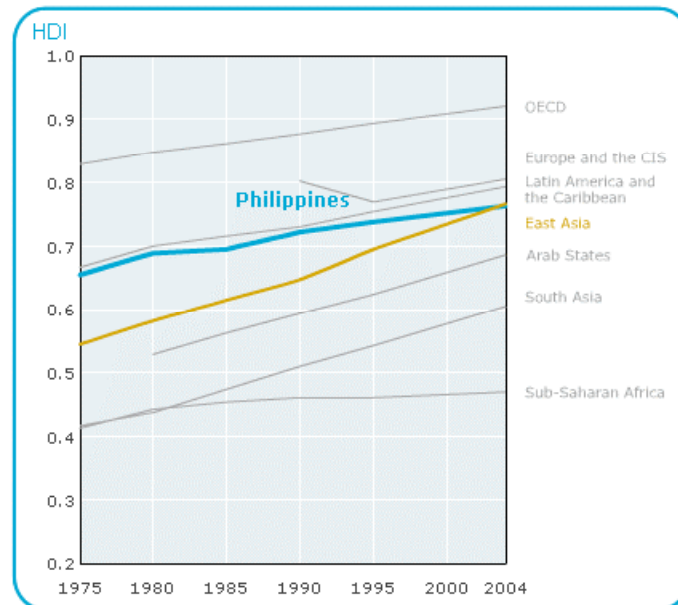
Given the context of the Philippines, it is striking that many of the issues that post-development theorists have a problem with are evident in this country. While post-developmentalists are a variegated group, they are linked by their disillusionment with the post-World War II development project and as this paper outlined, there are several reasons that are frequently cited as the cause for dismissing foreign development. Environmental degradation, economic disparity, and extreme poverty are just some of consequences left in the wake of the disappointing platitudes of development. These causes for dissatisfaction are apparent in the Philippines. The country has been subject to colonization, and afterwards, development projects imported one after another, with no drastic improvements in the standard of living. The United Nations Human Development Index HDI measures the average progress of a country in human development. According to the 2007/2008 HDI, the Philippines ranks 90 out of 177 nations. This ranking is lower than other developing countries located in East Europe or Latin America (United Nations Development Programme, 2008).

The Human Poverty Index for developing countries (HPI-1) focuses on the percentage of people below a threshold level in the same dimensions of human development as the HDI - living a healthy and long life, accessibility to education, and a decent standard of living. By considering income deprivation, the HPI-1 represents a multi-dimensional alternative to the \$1 a day (PPP US\$) poverty measure. The HPI-1 value for Philippines, 15.3, ranks 31st among 102 developing countries for which the index has been calculated (United Nations Development Programme, 2008).

The HPI-1 measures severe scarcity in health by the proportion of people who are not expected to survive age 40. Education is measured by the adult illiteracy rate, and a decent standard of living is measured by the unmeasured average of people without access to an a better

water source and the proportion of children under age five who are underweight for their age. *Figure 1* below shows the values for these variables for Philippines compared to other countries.

*Figure 1: Poverty in the Philippines 1975-2004*



*Source: United Nations Development Programme, 2008.*

While the scope of this paper is to not look at the root causes for the disparaging conditions in the Philippines, the figures as shown by the HDI and HPI-1 demonstrate that the Philippines is a comparable country with others, particularly those from Latin America, that have been the focus of post-development theory.

### ***The Philippines and Its Contribution to Post-Development Theory***

Following Matthews' (2004) warnings against homogenizing a region, it is important to first differentiate the Philippines colonial experience, which is separate from the colonization of other Asian countries, such as the French in Vietnam or the Dutch in Indonesia. In 1996, the Republic of the Philippines celebrated its centenary of their nationalist revolution against the Spanish, which lasted from 1896 to 1902 (Doran, 1999: 237). In August 1896, the Philippine Revolution broke out against imperial Spain. The revolution was the culmination of over three centuries of revolt and resistance against the Spanish imperialists, who began their colonization of these South East Asian Islands in the mid-sixteenth century. Igniting around the Manila region, the revolution quickly spread to other parts of the northern island Luzon and to other islands. At the end of the nineteenth century, emerging nationalist sentiment provided a sense of unity among Filipinos who resided throughout the archipelago. Despite some military setbacks, the Filipino revolutionary army made headway against the Spanish. However, the true goal of removing the yoke of colonial rule was disrupted by the intervention of United States (US) forces in the conflict, first in an alliance with the Filipinos against Spain, and then from early 1899, denying the Filipinos' right to rule their own country (Agoncillo, 1956; Strurtevant, 1976; Iletto, 1979; Schumacher, 1991). Filipino revolutionaries, both militant and intellectual, resisted the American intrusion, officially until 1902, and into at least the second decade of the century

vis-à-vis guerilla warfare. Nonetheless, American rule was imposed, and lasted for nearly fifty years. The Philippines finally gained formal independence in 1946 despite the residue of continuing US domination is evident to this day in economic, political, social, and cultural life (Doran, 1999: 237).

In addition to being different from other countries in Asia, from the standpoint of colonial history, various Philippine communities are different from each other. The Philippines has over 7100 islands and 85 million people of various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities. Because of its history of colonization, the predominance of Roman Catholicism, and the lack of a unified or prestigious pre-modern religious, political, or economic order, the Philippines is frequently positioned as 'in but not of Asia' (Hogan, 2006: 115-132). The recent work by Hogan (2006) illustrates the political diversity as measured by how different groups and elites translate or react to nationalism. For example, nationalist discourses range from the People's Revolution of 1986 and 1998, the communist insurrections, the ethnic resistances of the Cordillera, the semi-autonomous governance in Northern Luzon and Mindanao regions, and the overlay of religious and ethnic claims for autonomy by the many Muslim 'nations' in the southern region of Mindanao (Hogan, 2006: 116). Although the nationalist fervor arguably began with the Philippine Revolution against the Spaniards, these variations of nationalism are anything but congruent. Within the Philippines' diversity, there is a rich variety of ways of understanding and being, and the recognition of this mixture can be instructive to those who question development, and to those who would like to find different ways to improve the human condition beyond typical development schemes.

Second wave post-development theorists have attempted to move away from the pitfalls of essentializing development, as Ziai remarks, "It is possible to find a post-development perspective in the skeptical texts which is based on the radical repudiation of the concept of development without necessarily condemning everything that has been given the name of development" (Ziai, 2004: 1054). Nusted also encourages us to study the implications of development in real terms in order to see that social life is less determined than an analysis that focuses solely on 'development' as a discourse would lead us to believe (Nusted, 2001: 487). Following Nusted's suggestion, a look at the reaction against the 'Green Revolution' in the Philippines offers a scenario in which post-development can provide some insight.

Locating the origins of the 'Green Revolution' can be traced back to the middle of the 1940s when US Vice-President Henry Wallace toured Mexico as a special ambassador. Appalled by the state of Mexican agriculture and, upon returning to Washington, urged the Rockefeller Foundation to seek ways of 'helping' the Mexican people. Independently, the Foundation realized that its health improvement programmes for developing countries were fruitless if those people it tried to save subsequently died of starvation or malnutrition. Scientists were sent to help the Mexican Agricultural Ministry, and devised a new technological strategy of 'shuttle breeding'. By growing his breeding plants in central Mexico during the summer and then in Northern Mexico during the winter he was able to double the rate of the wheat-breeding programme. By 1948 Mexico was self-sufficient in grain and by 1965, despite a dramatic population increase, the country had become a net exporter of wheat (AgBioWorld, 2005). The success of the Mexican program encouraged a similar mode of development for rice. In the late 1960s, a new program was based at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines and funded jointly by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations.

The introduction of fertilizer-responsive and high yielding modern rice varieties (MVs), commonly linked to the 'Green Revolution', has been a significant technological change in

Philippine agriculture during the post-World War II period. Adoption of MVs, however, has been concentrated in irrigated and favourable rain-fed areas with adequate water control (Barker and Herdt, 1985). Consequently, the productivity gap between favourable and unfavourable rice production environments widened, and fears have been expressed that regional income distribution worsened (David and Otsuka, 1990: 132-146; Lipton and Longhurst, 1989). The influence of differential technology adoption regional factor prices and factor incomes depends critically on the mobility of factors of production. A recent study on rural labour markets in the Philippines found that differential adoption of MVs was followed by interregional labour migration from unfavourable to favourable areas, which greatly contributed to the equalization of agricultural wages across production environments. (Otsuka *et al.*, 1990: 297-314). In addition, because land is an immobile factor of production, productivity growth in favourable rice growing areas will be expected, to widen returns to land from rice production across production environments. Because of this initial success, the Philippine government implemented land reform programs in the early 1970s and continued to be implemented there afterwards with the hope of increasing productivity and fostering economic prosperity. Some scholars have defended these reforms and the implementation of this modern technology by arguing “that the ultimate income distributional consequences of differential adoption of MVs have not been significantly adverse, in part because the inequitable effect of MV adoption on regional income distribution in favourable areas was mitigated by the implementation of land reform and reallocation of non-rice production activities in unfavourable areas” (Otsuka *et al.*, 1992: 738).

Unlike past theorizing and practise of land reform, where the central state took a commanding role, current mainstream thinking assigns a decisive role to free market forces. The new land policy thinking has ignited heated debates between its promoters and critics (Deininger, 1997: 1317-1334; Griffen *et al.*, 2002: 279-330). The conventional definition of redistributive land reform, as a consequence of MVs, is limited to the redistribution of land from large private landholdings to landless and near-landless farmers and farm workers. This framework has inadvertently missed a significant portion of pre-existing agrarian structures in developing countries, leading to incomplete and even flawed conclusions about the extent and implications of land redistribution (Borras Jr., 2006: 95).

While some argue that the “poor are geographically mobile, and hence their relative incomes are not significantly affected by differential MV adoption or by the production environment, at least in the long run,” post-developmentalists would be quick to point out structural failures of how this condition came about, and more importantly, they would be interested at the impacts on the local population, cutting across gender and class lines (Otsuka *et al.*, 1992: 738). Borras Jr. suggests “the land-based production relations that ought to be adjusted by redistributive land reform in such a way as to explicitly favour the landless and near-landless classes” (Borras Jr., 2006: 95). Leading scholars on gender land rights who contributed to a volume edited by Shahra Razavi called into question several of the conventional wisdoms in land reform scholarship (Razavi, 2003: 2-32). Post-developmentalists may look at the importation of the ‘Green Revolution’ as another poorly designed Western project for failing to consider local traditions, and its neglect for class and gender differences among the populations. The trends found with the recent 2007/2006 HDI indicated that income distribution and wealth has not significantly improved. Recent critical literature disputing the current mechanisms of land reform demonstrates a negative reaction to the foreign import of agricultural technology for its negative impacts on the local populations. What would prove to be more instructive, from a



post-development approach, are further studies of civil society groups and collectivities that are reacting to MVs and their consequent land reform policies.

### ***Conclusion***

This paper endeavored to sort out the successive schools of thought within the post-development literature. By first locating the first wave of post-development theory, evident in the writings of scholars such as Escobar (1992, 1995), Esteva (1992), Kothari (1988), Nandy (1988), Rist (1990), this essay then identified the arguments of critics, such as Corbridge (1998), Kiely (1999), Lehman (1997), Schuurman (2000), and Pieterse (2000), who were uncomfortable of post-development's initial under-theorizing. In response, a second wave of post-development theorists, as found in the scholarship of Lind (2003), Matthews (2004), Nusted (2001), Rapley (2004), and Ziai (2004), sought to widen the meaning of post-development by making the theory more reflexive and nuanced in its analysis of development and of people from the subaltern. This process of refinement has given post-development theory greater utility and opportunity for growth. Recognizing that the theory has been largely silent on the experiences of countries in South East Asia, the paper argued that the Republic of the Philippines is worthwhile investigating from a post-development perspective. By taking into account of the Philippines' difference and diversity, as well as the effects of importing foreign agricultural technologies and subsequent policies, the paper has argued that there is still much to ground post-development to cover, at least from a Philippine point of view, and at most an East Asian perspective.

While the scope of this paper was concerned with Philippine land reform, there is potential for further research in the areas of civil society political participation as a reaction to foreign intervention and development. Given its recent history of 'hyper-democracy', cyclical political change, and economic instability, the Philippines would be good case study to further reveal how local peoples are reacting to the imposition of foreign development. Development in the Philippines can vary, either taking the form of military support for the 'War on Terror' against the Abu-Sayyaf Group in southern Mindanao, or aid packages from foreign NGOs in the wake of seasonal typhoons and landslides. Work by Gibson-Graham (2005) recently applied a post-development approach to the island of Bohol in the Philippines by working with a local NGO that encourages alternative community imaginings and a locally centred 'anticipatory consciousness'. By locating community assets rather than deficiencies, decentring capitalist economies and building upon pre-existing local structures and customs, there is a hope that locally valued and relevant 'alternatives-to-development' may flourish. This is one of several potential sites of expanding the literature in post-development. The second wave of post-development theorists encourage us to be reflexive in our analyses of 'developing' countries, like the Philippines, to recognize that the country is not homogenous, and that 'local' points of view should not taken for granted. By doing so, faulty policies, like current Philippine land reform proposals that disregard pre-agrarian practices and neglect for class or gender implications, can be avoided.

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