

Modernities for 'Alternatives to Development': Vietnamese Colonial Modernity

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To the post-developmental[1], development[2] has implied a top-down exercise of power. Yet 'alternative development' is not enough since the very notion of 'development' reproduces the idea that the rest are underdeveloped until they live like the West. What is needed are 'alternatives to development.' It follows that the post-development agenda would be to lean out and thereby open space in that previously colonised field (development theory) for those alternatives, as opposed to contributing what could only be another imposition from the Global North[3]. In this space, alternative ontologies that is, claims about the nature of being, and concepts of a good society would flood in. "Creating alternatives to 'development'" and "reclaiming the commons" (ibid). Though Ziai's (2017:2548) above quotation highlights how underacknowledged this prescription of post-development has been. Ziai (2013) writes within post-development yet is critical of it. Whilst postulating the basis of post-development's agenda, rejects that it has one (Ziai, 2017:2549). This dissertation's defense of the post-developmental prescription will first need to justify how we can come to conclude it as the school's agenda. In Section 1.1, this requires an exploration of Modernisation Theory as its framework of a singular-linear ontology to be dissipated outwards from Europe had long guided development theory. This alone sounds as satisfying as the sound of a familiar tune, an old critique that also denied the Global South agency. Section 1.2 goes on to outline post-development's challenge to development. From a postcolonial foundation, this sees development an expansion of Western construction. Then critiques of post-development are illustrated — most central, that it failed to offer a prescription. However, after considering post-developments roots we can see how its agenda would become to leave behind notions of 'development' that continue a historical imposition, and instead open space for alternatives in what looks like an impasse of Western theorists. This is discussed in further depth as a means of 'decolonising development' in Chapter 2, named the same. A justification of this prescription would not be complete without the shared consensus of the Multiple-Modernities debate that alternative ontologies exist, this is discussed in Section 3.1. Where Bhabra's 'connected histories' could acknowledge the presence of alternatives to the one-world modern story, post-development can advance its conclusion by deepening the search for different but historically connected 'worlds' with a multiplicity of cultural influences — pluriversal thinking. In Section 3.2 this connects post-developments prescription in a through-line to literature on modernities and plural 'worlds.' The second part of this dissertation aims to explicate an alternative ontology. The case of colonial Vietnam can provide a stark example of multiple ontologies in the face of the imposed universal Euro-modern one. Section 4.1 reviews the literature in debate over the extent Vietnamese modernity followed the colonial French one or comprised its own ontology. Section 4.2. justifies a look at cultural works and specifically *Dumb Luck* by Vu Trong Phung (2002[1936]), before outlining the risk this holds of constructing out of him 'a noble savage.' In Section 4.3, Vu Trong Phung's (2002[1963]) novel places Vietnamese society consciousness. Demonstrating that 'Vietnamese colonial modernity' was borne out of contradictions between the Euro-modern ontology's imposition on the one pre-colonial. Ultimately, that there are alternative ontologies, modernities, or concepts of what it means to be developed. These 'alternatives' are what post-development's agenda steps back to leave space for in the previously colonised field of 'development'. Such can therefore only come of the Global South and have been existing within the complexities and hidden underneath Modernisations impositions. Underpinning the central argument of this dissertation — that post-development does provide a prescription.

In terms of methodology, this dissertation compromises a theoretical engagement with literature and a discourse

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analysis of a novel for the study of 'Vietnamese colonial modernity' in the final section. This approach is the most appropriate since the crux of this dissertation comprises a defence of the prescription of post-development theory. To situate colonial Vietnamese's alternative notion, a qualitative discourse analysis of primary literature is carried out. A discourse analysis is used since the agents involved and the social purpose are analysed in relation to its social context to comprehend its meaning. Section 4.2 expands further on why this literature (Vu Trong Phung, 2002 [1936]) is best suited to provide a window into 1930s Vietnam society's ontologies. To overcome resource limitations this dissertation mobilises secondary literature around the key source to place its context in literature (especially section 4.1 that discusses both sides of the debate on *Vietnamese colonial modernity — a project of France?*) (Goscha 2004 , Bélanger, Drummond & Nguyen-Marshall, 2012, Dutton, 2012).

This dissertation does not attempt to change the course of development theory. Simply that post-development's prescription and thereby also its connection to plural 'worlds' literature has been underacknowledged. So too has there been an under acknowledgement of Vietnamese ontologies as its own, perhaps due to its continuous and changing hands of oppression. Just as the post-developmental prescriptions opens a space in its conclusion to avoid another top-down imposition of ideas — myself, a white-westerner will not claim the understanding to pinpoint Vietnamese colonial modernity. Only by an analysis of Vu Trong Phung's (2002[1936]) to add to the literature of alternative ontologies. The task of this dissertation is to bridge these gaps.

Chapter 1: Two Theories of Development

Section 1.1 On Modernisation Theory

Deciding the future of development has at its crux the issue of what progress of society looks like. For there is considerable inequality in the world, but the nature of this disadvantage depends on perceptions of deficiencies and thereby how a society should develop to make good those needs (Webster, 1990). These questions have been the point of debate for decades in economic and social development. The mainstream development policies to alleviate deficiencies today are rooted in conceptions of socio-economic progress that was inherited from Modernisation frameworks — a basis it cannot be separated from. This section proceeds by first outlining Modernisation theory, then the development theory that followed its logic and has some prevalence today. Its critiques are briefly discussed before what a modernisation assumption would mean for the case study of Vietnam.

Modernisation theory depended on a tradition-modern distinction that can be traced back to Weber and Durkheim (*especially*, 1893). It assumed the development of the West reflected a universal route to which the rest of the World would follow (Chirot and Hall, 1982, Bradshaw, 1987, Escobar, [1995]2011). It was by no means a coherent set of ideas. Rather, a variety of theories from a range of social disciplines. In the economic sphere, Rostow's *The Stages of Growth* (1960) argued that all states go through the same stages of modernisation beginning with a period of cultural change. In the sociological, Weberian classifications of society were expanded into role expectations of modern or traditional societies to explain that the latter need only adopt Western values to achieve economic growth (Parsons, 1951, 1964, Bauer, 1976).

Modernisation became mainstream in the 1950s and 1960s to create policies that would assist economic and social transition as the old colonial empires declined (Gwynne, 2009). These non-allied (so-called) 'Third world' countries became a focus of US policymakers (who amid the Cold War) sought to show countries pushing for independence that development was possible under the Western wing (Webster, 1990:49). Modernisation provided a non-communist solution to poverty (Gwynne, 2009). Hence, its development policies were encapsulated in the period's 'free world' agenda to counter communism (in an aid-donor competition) and thus contain it (ibid).

Modernisation theory went on to underpin policies of global development institutions (Webster, 1990:55). The height of Modernisation corresponded with the inception of many institutions of development that the schools very theorists were co-opted to work within — such as the World Food Programme (WFP) in 1961 and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)[4] in 1966 (Gwynne, 2009). Consequently, development suffered a case of "psychological modernism" and erected monuments to modernism in infrastructures and ideas that placed technological progress above human development (Pieterse, 2000:178). Their policies included the injection of

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capital to aid “industrial ‘take-off’ and the commercialisation of agriculture, the training of an entrepreneurial elite” in values that promote free enterprise, and “only assisting democratic countries” (Webster, 1990:55, Slater, 1995, Sumner and Tribe, 2008, Horner, 2019).

Modernisation is now widely considered outdated, yet still underpins more recent development thought. To Sachs (2005), indeed the “rich have gotten rich because the poor have gotten poor” but this is not a problem of the relationship between the Global North and South, rather a gap in technology (Radelet, 2006:31). Accordingly, their solution was an increase in aid to get the poor moving up the ‘Development Ladder’— starting at the bottom and climbing each stage to reach modernity (Sachs, 2005). In 1990 Development institutions seemingly moved away from economic growth as development, toward a people-centred development with the introduction of the Human Development Index (HDI) (Stanton, 2007:14). Despite reformulating their conceptualisations of poverty following Sen’s (1985) “capabilities” approach of people’s ability to achieve things they value, the World Bank’s HDI continued an assessment based solely on the level of income (Anand and Sen, 1997, Frediani, 2007, Selwyn, 2018). Whilst theoretically Sen’s approach saw widespread agreement, to Selwyn (2014) capitalism precluded any uptake of the vision. Hence, Modernisation’s assumptions had persisted to define social and economic development plans. Some argue this renders anti-development a roving criticism since “mainstream development is not what it used to be” (Pieterse, 1998). However, relevant is the continued top-down imposition of Western values (Easterly, 2006). Additionally, recent revisions of Modernisation theory were seen as explanations of development policies. Some claim a ‘developed’ society would also be a democratic one since the process of Modernisation emphasises individual autonomy, making authoritarian regimes less legitimate (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010). Others propose that Westerners innovations of competition, science and property rights gave them competitive advantage over “Resterners” (Ferguson, 2012). They argue the proof lies in imitation — Japans Meiji Restoration illustrated the Rest following the West’s (ibid).

The literature critiquing Modernisation is extensive, confined by space only a few critiques are presented. First, while it might be the case economic growth cannot occur without changes to technology and capital investment, this does not necessitate major alterations to value systems and social institutions (Webster, 1990:56). Second, little explanation is offered of the mechanism society develops from traditional to modern (ibid, 67). From a postcolonial perspective, the terms ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ could not be accepted. Their Eurocentric, that is, the centrality given to the Western model, reduces economic development to be devoid of external influences, such as colonial legacies and uneven relationships, and assumes the superiority of the West (Chakrabarty, 2000, Lawson, 2007). This is perpetuated by the intellectual dependence placed on restricted group of Western institutions (Brohman, 1995). In effect, unequal relations and inequality is naturalised as an inevitable route toward modernity. This reductionist view also makes devoid non-economic means of development — taking the state as a unit of analysis and proclaiming a universalisation of Western notions (Hettne, 1995, Sen, 1999).

In the economic sphere, Easterly’s (2006:189) refute of Jeffrey Sachs focuses on what they label “Planners” (big aid plans, agencies, and institutions). Three major issues come from long-term and sweeping strategies organised from the top and outside. (1) The top-down nature of their approach is coercive, (2) they involve a desultory knowledge of local conditions, and (3) engage little feedback from locals on what works (ibid:291-293). The result has been shared a responsibility of goals across different agencies, therefore a limited accountability to each (ibid, 189). It has also perpetuated a bias toward observable goals that leads to unproductive focuses on Western conceptions of “big splash objectives” — particularly of fixing societies with sweeping reform schemes (ibid,322).

All that remains is a discussion of what mainstream development theory underpinned by modernisation assumptions means for the case of Vietnam modernity. Following French defeat at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, Rostow was concerned the Vietnamese had not been successfully rallied against the Communists (Milne, 2009). Simultaneously, Rostow believed the Communist Viet Minh were a radical terrorist minority and so advised President D. Eisenhower to involve American units in combat (ibid). After publishing *Stages* (1960) Rostows understanding of the path of development led him to conclude the communist bloc was threatened by the prospect of developing nations evolving to high mass consumption societies that might align with the West (Armstrong, 2000:7). Hence, communists sought to disrupt the development process by guerrilla warfare (ibid). Then “Communism...is not the wave of future — it is a disease of the transitional process” (Rostow, 1964 in Armstrong, 2000:7). This reflects the

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logic of Modernising thought — the path of development and modernity is singular and linear. There is no room for alternative notions, such that the Vietnamese fighting for independence, who would later oppose South Vietnam and the United States in the Vietnam war, must have represented a minority. Since Modernisation guides mainstream thought, a similar discourse is undertaken. To Sachs (2005) a modern, developed society in the image of the West can be helped along the way by increasing Western aid efforts. To more recent Modernisation theorists, Vietnam today is still undeveloped. Its one-party system is not compatible with the process of modernisation which would have emphasised individual autonomy — though this may be because “Resterners” were not the pioneers of property rights (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010, Ferguson, 2012). Ultimately, development thought underpinned by Modernisation theory depends on a singular, linear, one-world ontology, that does not allow for multiple notions of what it means to be Modern.

On Dependency Theory

The Dependency school is briefly acknowledged for its critiques of linear and singular models of development to recognise the existence of other critiques to modernisation theory.

Its heyday saw Gunder-Frank (1971) refute that nations were not unable to follow the West due to their internal barriers, but because the West through history had maintained in its peripheries a state of dependency by exploitation (ibid). Throughout varying streams — of reformists (Cardoso and Faletto 1979[1969], Cardoso and Serra, 1978), to Marxist's (Bambirra, 2015 [1972], Marini, 2011 [1973]) — was the starting point that exploitation was being perpetuated through industrialisation (Dos Santos, 1970).

Fundamental was a denunciation of the ahistorical model in favour of a world-historical perspective. Here, Trotsky's (2008[1932]) concept of uneven and combined development was integral to allow a way to think of particular development trajectories. This could explain why mainstream developments' export of knowledge proved ineffective, they were incompatible with local needs and notions (Bradshaw, 1988, Grammig, 2002).

Section 1.2 On Post-Development — Conception and Critiques

The post-development school challenges the idea of development itself. At best, development has failed, at worst it was a “hoax” that masqueraded the damage being done (Thomas, 2000:3). This section will set the stage for the post-development school of thought. First, summarising its consensus along those two claims. This substantiates the reasoning for its central argument — to leave behind development. Then the importance (and indeed, very existence) of post-development's prescription is prefaced by discussing its foundations in postcolonialism in more depth. Finally, post-developments critiques are outlined.

The first claim, development had failed, was represented by *The Development Dictionary* ((Not Jeffrey) Sachs, 1992). The age of development was coming to an end: the instrument of the Cold war era was bound to exhaust itself; the industrial model proved contradictory amid the ecological predicament; development eliminated cultural diversity through the universalisation of Western institutions; finally, development had not caught up the ‘developing world’ but widened the inequalities gap (ibid, 2–4). Hence, this Western project had only led to the “progressive modernization of poverty” (Esteva, 1985:79).

The second claim, development masked those damages being done, was best encapsulated by Escobar's (2011[1995]) *Encountering Development*. This engaged post-development in the post-structuralist lessons of Foucault (1998:62, & Gordon, 1980) and Onuf (1989) to see development as a discourse that was inherently linked to systems of power. Like Said's (1978) *Orientalism*, that discourse was the production and management of the ‘truths’ about the Global South, rather than a reflection of it. It also took questions of origins of knowledges from social constructivism. On par with Said's (1978) imagined geographies, Anderson's (1983) imagined communities applied here mean's concepts (especially of regions) were based on an invention of adhesive language rather than something empirical. The cohesive notions were historical constructions and their expression reflective of hegemonic articulations (ibid). Escobar (2011[1995]) illustrated that such constructed ideas and discourse have material effects, and in the context of development, ‘development’ as a necessity comes to be an object of truth. This fetishization of

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development as required thereby concealed its damage.

Therefore, post-developmentalists necessitated not only an alternative development. This was not enough because first, it reproduces the idea of a majority as 'underdeveloped' for not living like the West (Ziai, 2017:2548). Second, it only questions procedures and so ultimately, is still about the achievement of the West to develop "transitional" countries (Kothari and Minogue, 2002 in Ziai, 2017: 2552). Rather, they required an alternative *to* development. To a "Neo-populist" stream of post-development, this meant all notions of industrial modern society and the development to achieve this, including the very expression of 'development' itself should be abandoned (Ziai, 2017:2549). To a "radical democratic" stream, there could be no ideal model of society (ibid). The consensus of both replaces Western imposed development with concepts to improve human life (Ziai,2007,2013). At first, this claim can seem somewhat inconsequential. However, the strengths of their argument (that in *Chapter 2* also constitutes a justification of what their prescription is and its very importance) can be gained by looking to the postcolonial concepts that led post-developments inception.

Post-development considers development an expansion of Western construction — "the Westernization of the world" (LaTouche, 1993:60). Hence, the school starts at postcolonial literature to consider colonial power continuances under the guise of development.

Postcolonialism could explain 'the how' development became dominant. The postcolonial lens criticises development as a Eurocentric (and thus hierarchic) construction. That is, the centrality given to the West in ideal notions of a modern society excludes others as inferior and in need of development (Stern, 1992, Escobar, 2011[1995], Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997, Sen, 1999, Ziai, 2007). Thereby, the labelling 'underdeveloped' was another means to justify subordination (Escobar, 2011[1995]:9). Fanon (1963), who contributed to decolonial theory describes that such discourse becomes internalised in the exploited into a natural condition of the world. Minds become colonised by the idea they are dependent on external forces. Taken up by Galleano (1993), "they train you to be paralysed, then sell you crutches". Therefore, from ideas of inferiority, it argues to universalise the ideal. For Chakrabarty (2000), that universalisation of political modernity and the transition to capitalism is simultaneously a translation of existing ideas into self-understandings of modern society. Implicit in this is a power dynamic — whoever gets to define one concept as universal in the face of heterogenous conceptions of a society is in a position of power (Cowen & Shenton,1996).

The lens of postcolonialism could also explicate 'the why'. This analysed development as a discourse imposed by the dominant powers of the North as a more "appropriate tool for their economic and geopolitical expansion" (Rahnema, 1997a:379). As already mentioned, the discourse of 'development' was created in part of Western modernity within the geopolitical context of newly ex-colonies (Escobar, 2011:4). Here, it was a legitimisation that promised material affluence to decolonising countries to prevent them joining the communist camp (Rahnema, 1997b:ix). Post-development theorists often refer to the "invention of underdevelopment" as President Truman's "bold new program in 1949 that defined Asia, Africa and Latin America as "underdeveloped areas" (Esteva, 1992:7, Ziai, 2007:4). "On that day, two billion people became underdeveloped" (ibid). Thereby, the 'developing' state was a constructed temporal category. It sought to maintain a colonial division of labour and continue to exploit their resources in a new system of domination (ibid). Kothari (1988:143) went as far to say, "where colonialism left off, development took over." Less explicitly, what Escobar (2007a) termed the modernisation/colonial project stated that modernisation could not be separated from its colonial roots (Mignolo, 2009). Continuations of this construct can only extend those power relations (Quijano, 1993, in, Grosfoguel, 2000:368). Therefore, post-development draws on a postcolonial basis to apply the colonial relations that are re-legitimised in developmentalist discourses.

Critiques

The critiques against post-development ranged through social science disciplines and how convincing they could be found. There is not sufficient space to discuss all, such as those from anthropological and actor-oriented (Little and Painter, 1995, Robins 2003) to historical perspectives (Grischow and McKnight, 2003). The critiques most relevant to this paper's argument in defence of post-development's prescription are briefly reviewed.

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Broadly put, post-development's proponents have been critiqued on three counts for failing to provide a real suggestion as to what the world ought to be (Pieterse, 1998, Kiely, 1999, Ziai, 2017). First, and least convincing, was Pieterse (1998) and Corbridge (1998). Their issue with post-developments proposition of alternative developments as an answer to alternative paradigms, is there is not an alternative development paradigm, nor should there be. "Beneath the pavement of modernity, there is only the hard soil of pre-modern times to be found, not the progressive beach imagined by post-development" (Corbridge in Ziai, 2007:6). Then, post-development reflects a rejection of modernity only. This by itself, indeed would be an unhelpful binary with no clear counter option (Pieterse, 1998, Corbridge, 1998:139).

Second, the post-developmental tendency to favour non-Western paradigms often results in a wobbly romanticism — that there is an ideal culture in the non-West and that they live harmoniously (Ziai, 2007:6). This is another form of othering (Said, 1978). Kiely (1999), from a more nuanced perspective of post-development's flaws and contributions, agrees on its issues of romanticism. For instance, within post-development Esteva (1986) argues locals' recovery of their "own definitions of needs" will look back to traditional ontologies. This particularly calls to mind 'foreign bad, local good' romanticisms (Kiely, 1999 in Pieterse, 2000:178). Crucially, by romanticising the alternative it makes false assumptions that those communities are not interested in development (Kiely, 1999:44). Hence, post-development represents a desperate resort to an idealized concept of an uncivilised man, unspoiled by the corrupting influence of civilization — in other words, *the last refuge of the Noble Savage* (Kiely, 1999). This in an image persistent in some civil society protests today (Wilson, 2017). Furthermore, this romanticism of the alternatives and implicit tendency to favour the non-West, is embedded in post-developments cultural relativist position. That is, one which posits truths in relation to its cultural context. Such that post-development takes up a cloaking 'modernity is bad' stance which fails to consider empirical successes, such as the reduction of child mortality (Corbridge, 1998:144). In this instance, to reject "any movement for development in the name of respect for cultural difference expresses the view not of the consistent multiculturalist, but of the patronising tourist" (Kiely 1999: 47). Furthermore, the rejection of European standards in favour of traditional cultures, can downplay the hardships faced in those communities whilst preventing critique "from outside" (Nanda, 1999, Kiely, 1999:44, Ziai, 2017:2551). This is refuted by Rist (2012 in Ziai, 2017:2551) who refuses to attribute exploitative practices to the 'non-Western other' while ignoring similar of 'our own' societies, thereby affirming a "civilisational superiority." However, the reinforcement of a West-non-West binary to romanticise the latter, and a denial of any exploitation in the name of cultural relativism does not pave the way for equality either. These contradictions adding to the unclear image of what they propose a good society.

Third, Kiely (1999, in Ziai, 2007:7) also points to an inconsistent anti-essentialism. While the conclusions of post-development rest on the heterogeneity of cultures and alternative paradigms, there is little regard for heterogeneity in development projects. Additionally, whilst recognising heterogeneity within a community, it imposes a homogeneity as victims to development (Nanda, 1999:20). At best, this is contradictory. At worst, post-development intentionally overlooks aspects of society in its image of progress, making it incomplete.

Fourth, these issues have contributed to discussions of the decolonisation of knowledges. Colonialisms disciplining of history had dominated categories and the ideas it produced which took shape in the West with totalising ambitions (Prakash, 1995:5, Manchanda, 2020). Though, whilst sometimes imposed, there are no pure knowledges. They do not exist in isolation and cannot all be a product only of imperialism (Kiely, 2005). Then, how can we say all principles categorised as modern are Western. Such would assume inferiority and reinforce another colonial bifurcation.

These four critiques points to an unclear picture of society post development. Either it can only critique modernity and there is no alternative, or it is inconsistent in its claims. In either case, it fails to suggest what progress could look like, in accordance with its own arguments. This leads to the critique most relevant to this paper — that it fails to provide a prescription of what next for development theory (Nustad, 2001). To Kiely (1999:45-6, 2005:215), supporting grassroots social movements of the Global South and rejecting 'development' indeed can "espouse a new openness in politics", but this position is so open-ended and vague on the criteria of the social movement groups, that it effectively "washes its hands of politics"— termed "Pontius-Pilate-politics". For one, these groups may not necessarily act in the interests of the poor and marginalized (Nanda, 1999). Ultimately, post-development fails to create an agenda in fear policy alternatives would be captured by the development discourse (Kiely, 1999:30). Accordingly, post-development can offer a political antagonism instead of a political programme, a "critique but no

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construction" (Ziai, 2017:2549).

This has amounted to the impasse of development theory. Empirically, this has seen a discrepancy between decades of development, yet relentless global poverty (Selwyn, 2014). This has been marked by stalemate of policy — merely reproductions of the same utopian goals (see: the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted 15 years later). In terms of theory, the development impasse looks like a gap in literature. Situated between post-developments rejection of 'development,' and that which must be reconciled with a mode of progress.

Chapter 2: The Post-Development Agenda: 'Decolonising Development'

However, failing to provide a prescription of what next for development theory is not necessarily a critique as it is not what post-development seeks to do. Post-developments prescription is discussed by first outlining what the theory instead pursued, then arguing the impasse in theory itself was a manifestation and action of this by ending the top-down imposition of development. This, as the post-development prescription is supported in its literature and by its very foundations in postcolonialism. Finally, its feasibility is discussed via where such discourses have been found.

Post-development was a point to motivate questions, imagine different futures based on different values, and open discourse on development (Escobar,2000, Ziai, 2007:9, Agostino, 2007, Ziai 2017: 2550-2552). Out of this, 'development' as a single path centred on a European ideal was well behind us (Pieterse, 2001 in Ziai, 2017:2551-2). The very use of 'development' could no longer be taken for granted (Ziai,2007,2017). The critics were correct that post-development had homogenised development, however it was post-development's deconstruction that had allowed this analysis of the contestation of development (Escobar, 2000). Thereby, the consensus of development was broken — the development monster was slayed (ibid).

Further, the creation of an impasse itself enacted a prescription. Empirically, the epoch of aid had ended (Sachs, 1992). Though this did not mean the West should forgive itself, nor did it result in inaction. An impasse was created in Western theories where it had previously claimed what development should be. Thereby, in an open-ended conclusion Western theorists leant out to create space for Global South voices and a bottom-up discourse that could replace Eurocentric narratives. 'Development' becomes a floating signifier to be interpreted and led by the narratives and paradigms that it is existing in.

This illumination of the post-development agenda has been underacknowledged in literature, yet it had been alluded to within the school. Escobar (2011:14) states their task is to "contribute to the liberation of the discursive field so that the task of imagining alternatives can be commenced." These would come of "endogenous" discourses, that is, articulated of internal referents (Escobar, 1992:429). Though Esteva (1986:21, in Ziai, 2017:2548) is charged with romanticism, they add that people would "recover 'their own definition of needs.'" While accusing post-developments lack of prescription, Ziai (2017:2551-2) notes its emancipatory potential will unfold when the implications of alternative developments are taken seriously. This involves a questioning of hegemonic models and a promotion of non-Western alternatives (ibid). The latter can describe the function of post-development's impasse, and see it is as it's prescription. Reconstructing Ziai's (2017:2549) own words — to step back, thereby leaving space for alternative narratives is surely a "construction", not only a "critique" of hegemonic ideas of development.

A justification of this as post-developments prescription would also be found in its postcolonial basis. "The paradigm of conquest" was a relationship of power domination that received a response (Stern, 1992). This response was the agency of the colonised to struggle for control and human initiative. With this view, the colonised are rehumanised from being thought as "devastated" objects to recognising the colonised as a diverse group of people with multiple values (ibid).

In development, the top-down imposition had reallocated colonial patterns of centre-periphery diffusions of knowledge. In other words, development theory had been a white space. To the post-developmentalists, there could be no privileged position to decide the future of development from. Alternatives are not for Western theorists to decipher and inevitably impose. Therefore, post-development makes room in a previously colonised field for the

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creation of counter-hegemonies that challenge the development discourse. A gap is opened, and discourses that do not fit the West's modernity perspective deconstruct and decolonise it because it "occurs outside such space, as a challenge", a political decision by its transfer of power (Escobar, 2010:39). This politics of accountability addresses whose initiatives are written over on behalf of who and then shifted the geography of knowledge systems away from the North. Hence, post-development is a practice of emancipatory politics, a link that has been insufficiently theorized (Nakano, 2007). Particularly, La Touche's naming of the informal transforms it into the subject of emancipation (Ziai, 2007:12). Post-development sought to disrupt the story of development based on colonial relations, and its impasse leaves space for the notions previously suppressed. It was not something that could be known, it is something that can be done. It refocuses our attention on power relations and thereby confronts them. It is not finding an answer but opening the door for alternative answers — to decolonise development.

What is left, is where these alternative discourses could be found. Esteva (1992) exemplifies the Zapatista's as promoting an alternative of development. However, this exemplifies a sweeping homogenisation that falsely reduces such social movements to anti-development forces, thereby also romanticising resistance (Kiely, 2005:204-213).

To Ziai, (2007:5) alternatives to development would draw inspiration from "vernacular societies" and be found in local communities^[5] and grassroots movements. To Escobar (2020:101) "it was not dissident vanguards" trying for alternatives to development, "but many grassroots groups reaffirming themselves in their own path". Easterly (2006) indicates the direction of development by a bottom-up, homegrown and feedback-based approach where foreign aid functions only to fund the baseline of local-level notions (ibid, 323). This means providing health, nutrition, and education — not making countries dependent but delivering the means to realise the pursuance of their own ontologies. As critiques increase within academia, they rise equally within the arenas of civil society, particularly amongst the victims of development (Demaria and Kothari, 2017:2589). Then the literature of localism could be looked to. These approaches make central the diversity of local knowledges, though have primarily been the focus within environmental politics (Ireland and McKinnon, 2011) and increasingly Global Health (Abimola, et al. 2021). With this literature in mind, what a post-development approach could come to mean to these fields is an analysis of the agenda's that shape discourse and an argument to begin from local notions (Ireland and McKinnon, 2011). This moves beyond the aid effectiveness dispute that was sensationalised by the Sachs-Easterly debate, now proven banal (Miller, 2012). In the context of social and ecological devastation, to think of "more of the same" is surely more romantic than looking to alternatives emerging at the grassroots level (Escobar, 2020:104).

Chapter 3: Beyond the One-World Ontology

Section 3.1 The Multiple Modernities Debate

A defence of a post-development agenda that prescribes space to be left for 'alternatives to development' requires an acknowledgment that there exist alternative ontologies. This can be found in the multiple modernities thesis led by Eisenstadt, which is widely accepted within non-Western studies. Yet it has also been the focus of debate. Critiques have challenged the thesis' analytical assumptions (Sinai, 2020), and cultural essentialism (Trakulhun and Weber, 2015, Schmidt, 2015). These critiques go beyond this chapter's scope. Relevant, however, is the postcolonial response headed by Bhabra (2007,2011,2021). This comprised the 'Multiple Modernities debate'. Fundamentally, Bhabra questions the assumptions of modernities origins (the ideas including singular-linearity that guided modernity as a concept during this period is what is referred to as the 'Modern ontology' and will have further importance in Chapter 4 for Vietnamese colonial modernity). In this section, the Multiple Modernity thesis is first outlined, followed by Bhabra's rebuttal. However, the debate on Multiple Modernities was not far developed meaning it did not advance beyond a recognition of its existence, leading to the essence of this chapter — the consensus within the debate that "modernity takes more than one form" (Delanty, 2006:273).

From one of the more historically sensitive of the modernisation school, the Multiple Modernity thesis went against the linear and uniform paths of the classical theories (Eisenstadt, 2000). Rather, modernity was a process of social change that takes many shapes (ibid, Assmann, 2005). It is driven by tensions at the symbolic-cultural and institutional-structural level (Sinai, 2020). Thereby, there are unique and "culturally specific forms of modernity" shaped by distinct cultures and socio-political conditions (Eisenstadt et al., 2002:1, in Sinai, 2020:299-300). By

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taking account diverse cultural contexts and their localised institutional constellations, the thesis offered a pluralistic approach that had “been depriving the West of its monopoly on modernity” (Eisenstadt, 2000:24).

At the same time, it was from the attraction of superior economic, military, and technological expansion that Modernity first moved beyond the West to the great religions and encompassed the world (Eisenstadt, 2000:14). In this process, elements of modernity were reappropriated by cultural codes into new collective identities, without giving up specific components of “traditional identities” (ibid,14-15). Then, modernity was a cultural program of transition. The result was the construction of multiple modernities with a multiplicity of cultural influences and social formations (ibid, 24).

The crux of the postcolonial reconstruction was that the thesis was contained within a framework initially conceived by the Eurocentric theories they respond to. This results in an abstraction from the colonial context of their frames construction (Bhabra, 2007:56). Even when particular histories are contested, the diffusion of European principles outward does not move beyond the Eurocentrism typical of classical Modernisation theories — that of the modern world emerging from political and economic revolution in Europe (Bhabra, 2011:653). By accepting modernities emergence as incontestably European, Multiple Modernities theorists follow Weber’s methodology to explore the causes of emergence and then assess others in relation (Bhabra, 2007:72). Rather than classical Modernisation’s evolutionary stages, this produces comparatively “ideal types” (ibid). Differences are understood as deviations, while the ideal is posited as a conceptual truth (ibid,73). This meant the thesis did not question ‘modernity’ as a paradigm but merely “decentralized its sources” with a plurality of cultural forms (Trakulhun and Weber, 2015:xvii). Crucially, by theorising modernity as a coherent concept of the West, “others” notions are disregarded (Bhabra, 2007: 72). Hence it bought into Modernisations assumption of the existence of one world- a universe (Escobar, 2011:139). We cannot understand the world from one narrative as universal theories attempt. To do so, would reduce the diversity of human existence (LaTouche, 2010:280).

Additionally, to render the process of development “one of endogenous European development” claims the rest of the world was external to the world historical processes that brought modernity (ibid). The colonial relations that underpin the processes which formed the modern global economic order —required for modernisations production — remains written out of it (Bhabra, 2007:11,2021). To Giesen (2014 in Sinai, 2020), the thesis does refer to colonialism by the context in which modernity initially developed. Though it overlooks the historical conditions in which multiple modernities emerged, that is, the historical conditions in which Western modernity became “the main reference point” among the non-West. Indeed, in the thesis, culture’s interaction accounts for difference. However, this neutralises “any challenge that a consideration of other histories could have posed” (Bhabra, 2011:255).

Accordingly, what the thesis misses is global interconnectedness. This understands that historical representation requires an establishment of the relation to that knowledge, because the way we understand the past has implications for the social theories that deal with our situations today (Bhabra, 2007:10-11). Bhabra’s application of ‘connected histories’ posits spatial boundaries (Subrahmanyam, 1997 in Bhabra, 2007:30). This locates intellectual endeavours and examines their connected networks and the ways those ‘flows’ transcend boundaries. This allows us to redraw maps for each problem we study rather than inventing problems to fit the boundaries that were created retrospectively since historical ethnographies come about through social and political contexts, as well as the travellers desire to classify (Subrahmanyam, 2005 in Bhabra, 2007:33).

Section 3.2 Route to the Pluriverse: ‘A World Where Many Worlds Fit’

The Multiple Modernities debate did not progress beyond its own recognition. Meaning it came to symbolise the shared consensus that alternatives exist. Where Bhabra’s argument for ‘connected histories’ could acknowledge the presence of alternatives to the one-world modern story, post-development advances its conclusion by highlighting the importance of uplifting those alternatives and deepening the search for them. This section proceeds by first outlining Bhabra’s impasse, then a proposed solution of the pluriverse, “A world where many worlds fit” (Escobar, 2020:9). This is a recurrent theme of Escobar’s work (2011[1995], 2018, 2020) and strengthens the post-development prescription to leave space for alternative ontologies. Finally, what post-development contributes to the pluriverse concept by deepening the search for alternatives is discussed.

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The concept of 'connected histories' is less an analytical tool, more a cue of context and knowledge flows to help us consider the gap between historical conditions and particular experiences that was ignored in modernity's universalisation. Indeed, categories are constructed in historical and cultural settings. Hence, the widening remit of "newly discovered histories" were not found, they were labelled insignificant to the major revolutions in Europe which brought about modernity (Bhambra, 2011:662). Then, they cannot now be recovered as additional to Europe — requiring more than an expanded pluralism of dominant paradigms (ibid). However, the caution away from identifying the alternatives for fear of our standards reflecting the cultural contexts we derived them, moves beyond cultural relativism to leave us with nothing. It risks more than ignoring particular experiences but of writing people out of history entirely. This was the quandary Bhambra had left.

This calls to mind earlier mentioned critiques of Keily (1999:47) on cultural relativism. Indeed, a post-developmental would not argue for an identification of the alternatives of the same fear. However, taking the post-development prescription to leave space for notions of the Global South into account, we can see how post-development could expand the search for alternative ontologies. The open-ended conclusion does not identify those ontologies themselves but argues to leaves space for their own declaration. Hence, post-development's agenda neatly aligned itself with this consensus of the Multiple Modernities debate—the feasibility of alternative ontologies. But it could also offer a way forward—to deepen the search for the alternatives. Our "modern/colonial world system" wants us to believe there are no alternatives possible (Escobar, 2020:xii). Given our humanitarian severe crisis, we need alternatives. A main objective of post-development is gathering other possibilities (Escobar, 2020:5).

Therefore, post-development's search for alternatives could constitute an agenda towards the 'pluriverse': "A world where many worlds fit," as the Zapatista's say (Escobar, 2020). The pluriverse argued there are Multiple co-existing worlds, but that are conceptually different. The concept asserts Western theories depend on: (1) a one-world Euro modern ontology (Hutchings, 2019:116). This constructs ontological dualisms (ie. between nature and human) and conceives difference in hierarchal terms (Escobar, 2011,2020). (2) A claim to universality (Hutchings, 2019:116). Whereas the Pluriversal: (1) states there are multiple, ontologically different worlds that can coexist without subsuming the other, and (2) takes up a position of relational ontology—that what distinguishes subject from subject is their mutual relations rather than substance (ibid,116). This deconstructs the general framework based on narrow histories, to instead consider their interconnectedness. "All entities that make up the world are so deeply interrelated that they have no intrinsic, separate existence by themselves," thereby providing a new dimension, rather than a different interpretation of the same ontology (Escobar, 2020:xiii). The concept was both a critique of the one-world Euro modern ontology's claim to universality, and the assertion of alternatives that sought to accentuate their difference therefore providing them a platform. In this assertion, the pluriverse had mapped ontological differences between worlds and conveyed agency to progress from a more concrete understanding of the bottom-up's notions. "The pluriverse is a tool to first, make alternatives to one world plausible to one-worlders, and second, provide resonance to those other worlds that interrupt the one world story" (Escobar, 2015 :22).

To post-development, pluriversal thinking contributed the consensus of alternatives but also the requirement for them to be found outside of the West. Those marginalised from the industrialised world work outside of dominant civilizations logic (i.e. feminist movements from the household sector in the Global North, or indigenous communities) (Demaria and Kothari, 2017:2589). Therefore, they are different from the dominant epistemologies and exist as a challenge (ibid).

To the pluriversal, post-development could contribute the expansion of the search for alternatives (Escobar, 2010:36, 2020). To Demaria and Kothari (2017: 2589), the post-development task currently is to break away "from the cultural and ideological bases of development, bringing forth other imaginaries, goals and practices". These alternatives already find concrete expression outside of the imposed Western paradigms and are mentioned here as the more visible examples of a "post-developmental epistemic-political field towards a pluriverse": *buen vivir*, degrowth, eco-logical *swaraj*, radical feminisms of various kinds, *ubuntu*, commoning, solidarity economy, and food and energy sovereignty to name only some (ibid). These alternatives show there are "relational worldviews or ontologies for which the world is always multiple — a pluriverse" (Escobar,2011:139). As such they can be read as ontological struggles (ibid). Whilst still marginal to the dominant narrative of development, the post-development agenda to leave space opened the door for a multitude of alternatives that emerged (and will continue to do so) from

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marginalised groups.

Schöneberg and Garcia-Arias (2021) add to the field from the Global North but scrutinise the post-developments commitment to pluriverse (Kothari et al. 2019). They agree with the need to reapproach what a 'good life' means from other cosmologies but acknowledge this act may result in knowledge-extraction — demanding the subaltern save us (Schöneberg and Garcia-Arias, 2021). Each alternative has its own capacity to be self-narrated without the West. Therefore, to them the main role of the post-developmental in the Global North is to scrutinise what guides its own ontologies (ibid,866). For instance, the euro modern conception of a good life proved unsustainable, nonetheless the 'Agenda 2030' claims to transform our world from the same perspective (ibid). Then what the pluriverse can provide is a showcase of practical alternatives to the extractive ontologies that are deemed universal (ibid).

Escobar's (2020) citation of the Zapatista's formula for a "world where many worlds fit" must be acknowledged. Heeding Kielys (2005) caution, this chapter does not claim Zapatista as an example of a solely anti-development struggle. Indeed, this would take away from its knowledges, claiming them all as derived from the West—not a decolonisation of knowledge's but washing them with Western imposition. It does, however, look to their self-proclaimed concept of multiple alternatives within the world as a challenge to the dominant modern ontology, and as exemplification that there exist alternatives to development. The post-development agenda expands this search in its deconstruction of development, making space for them in its prescription.

Chapter 4: Vietnamese Colonial Modernity

4.1 Literature Review of Vietnamese Colonial Modernity — a Project of France?

Vietnamese modernisation is situated as the ontology — that is, nature of being, including the idea of what it meant to be modern — specifically at the time of transition from 'traditional' to 'modern'. As mentioned, in Europe the modern ontology had been generated *by* internal cultural and epistemological conditions during its cultural and scientific revolution (Bhambra, 2011:653). While in Vietnam, the new paradigm between 'old' and 'modern' was imposed externally by colonial France *upon* cultural and epistemological conditions. 'Traditional' social structures then existed in conflict with new ideas of progression. As such, there is controversy surrounding the extent 'Vietnamese colonial modernity' was its own notion. This is telling of epistemological assumptions of where knowledge comes from and formulates the reason the case study of Vietnam is chosen. This section first reviews literature that assumes Vietnamese colonial modernity had copied the imposed Euro-modern one, followed by its rebuttal that exemplifies the plurality of modernities from a multiplicity of sources.

On the one hand, Vietnamese modernisation is witnessed in correlation to French colonialism and in accordance with it, describing it as a replication. Be that by defining a complete break from pre-colonial times to development in the West's image (Dutton,2012), or by identifying any 'modern' concepts as Western (Bélanger, Drummond and Nguyen-Marshall, 2012). Bélanger, Drummond and Nguyen-Marshall (2012) write the not atypical historical narrative of class development. That is, out of a feudal society with little prospect for social mobility, colonialism and modernity shaped a middle-class identity. In turn, the middle class shaped societies modern ideals and practices (Banerjee, 2004). As such, they generalise The Self-Reliance group (*Tu Luc Van Đòan*) — a collection of Vietnamese urbanites in the 1930s who wrote a "cosmopolitan nationalist" vision for a 'modern' postcolonial Vietnam — the Westernisation of Vietnamese society (Zinoman, 2002:19, Nguyen, 2020: 6). Whilst in fact constructing their own ideas of a modern society, the Self-Reliance identified any concepts of modernity as Western since that is where they began. The Self-Reliance was not alone in this agenda (see: The Tonkin Free school and Inter-war journalist Nguyen Van Vinh), who to Goscha (2004,135-140,143) served as propaganda for the colonial state to cut Vietnam from its Asian context. Though, the application of the 'Self Reliance group' to societies modern ideals defines all of society as uncritical accepters of global flows. The caution against generalisations is heeded and elaborated further for the case of *Dumb Luck* in section 4.2. Relevant for this side of the controversy, such reinforces a reliance on the European introduction to modernity and overgeneralises what it means to be developed — an illustration of one-world modernist arrogance (Chakrabarty, 2000).

On the other, 'Vietnamese colonial modernity' is explicated as emergent from traditional influences in contradiction

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with European standards (Vu Trong Phung, 2002 [1936], Nguyen-Truong-To, in, Vinh, 1999). Outside of the literature, Vũ Cao Cao Đàm's *Portrait of a Girl* (1940) (*above image*) demonstrates Vietnamese colonial modernity as an "active mediation" between multiple cultures (Scott, 2019:191). *Ao dài* (a modern form of Vietnamese traditional dress) and an ancestral type portrait met with the use of a new privileged medium (ink and gouache) that made it easily consumable to French buyers to utilise and fit into this new era of consumerism (Scott, 2019:191). In theoretical framing, the modern ontology was in tension with the ontology's pre-colonisation—the 'modern' and 'traditional' ways of being "interact and clash" (Escobar, 2020:27). This meant to some Vietnamese, French modernity had only reflected conflict and radical change. The 1930s bought the end of a decade long post-war boom and swelling urbanization, a violent confrontation between the colonial state and anti-colonial forces, and the onset of the Depression (Zinoman, 2002:4). *Dumb Luck* was published five months after the Popular Front's election in France—an alliance of left-wing movements (Zinoman, 2002:2). To some, this conveyed optimism that bought with it the modernising ethos of Europe (*ibid*). While to most, the Popular Front's victory was another episode of historically recurrent rupture (*ibid*,4). Fundamentally, out of the ontological contradiction produced a new ontology that was its own. This is explained by the Vietnamese attempt to mine tradition for a means to domesticate the unpredictable transformations from the clash of ontologies that an imposed modernity recurrently bought. In a Hegelian sense, out of this contradiction of cultures emerged a new unity — its *own* vision of localised modernity. In a Fanonian, the colonial world is a world is cut in two. The zone where the native lives is not complementary to the settler's, they are opposed but not in the service of a higher unity — rather, of "reciprocal exclusivity" (Fanon, 2001: 37-39 in Pham Ngoc, 2019:55).

4.2 Vu Trong Phung 'le Bon Sauvage'

This section justifies a look at Vu Trong Phung's *Dumb Luck* as a discourse analysis of alternative ontologies. First discussing the value of literary works. Then specifically *Dumb Luck* in reflecting society's ideas by; its commentary beneath and beyond a colonial state; its apolitical stance; its publication in the depths of urbanisation; and Vu Trong's low-class background. Finally, outlining the risk this holds, including constructing out of him 'a noble savage'.

Literary works are reflective of society as both involved in and influenced by it (Hoang Thi & Nguyen Hoang, 2019: 115). Culture refers to the "subjective aspect of a society's institutions: the beliefs, values, knowledge, and skills that have been internalized by the people of a given society, complementing their external systems of coercions and exchange" (Inglehart, 1997:15). The task of literary works then, is to exist in tandem with existing values so that they can be incorporated alongside them whilst adding something new in coherence (Dyczewski & Slawik, 2016:143).

Dumb Luck can be looked to as reflective of the values in society of 1930s colonial Vietnam. Those values are expressed plainly through culture-specific items, either explicitly by Vu Trong's names of characters or by describing their customs through idioms (Hoang Thi & Nguyen Hoang, 2019). Accordingly, Vu Trong was regarded the Balzac of his era (Zinoman, 2002:1-2). Rather than depicting a nineteenth century France, Vu Trong's account exposed, condemned and reflected Vietnamese society during the period of social change from feudal colonial life to Europeanization.

Dumb Luck existed beyond the reach of the colonial state power's extension to cultural knowledge. Vu Trong's works often even opposed the colonial state's interest. In contrast to claims Vietnam was prospering, *Luc Xi* (2011 [1937]) a reportage on sex work concluded that the industries immorality was symptomatic of ineffective colonial policies, structural exploitation and materialistic attitudes that increased poverty. *Dumb Luck* is the first colonial-era Vietnamese novel to be translated into English and published in the West. Writing beneath and of colonial oppression but outside of it provides a unique insight to the very instance where multiple ontologies collide in a society by one's attempt to make subordinate the other.

During the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam era Vu Trong Phung's work was charged counterrevolutionary and banned from North Vietnam until the late 1980s (Zinoman, 2002: 23). Its critique of all institutions, and realist take on the issues in society, even whilst critiquing Western modernity, was bound to be against official's favour. It was not until the economic liberal renovation and opening of Vietnam under Doi Moi policies that the ban was lifted (*ibid*). The Vietnamese communist party's suppression of the novel only strengthens

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the case for a modernist reading that reflects apolitically.

That *Dumb Luck's* was published in Hanoi (initially in newspaper form) best reflects the radical changes felt across Vietnamese society. The "ancient cradle of Vietnamese society" was transformed by the colonial administration into a "bustling metropolis" (Zinoman, 2002:4-5). Thereby *Dumb Luck* is a reflective narrative from a place witnessing most starkly the paradigm between epistemologies. For the process of urbanization "began with severe conflicts" between traditional and modern, rural and urban (Do Duc, 2000:55,181).

Finally, Vu Trong's low-class background place themselves in a position to reflect society from the bottom-up (Zinoman, 2013:28). Indeed, many of Vu Trong's characters share obvious likeness to their background (Zinoman, 2002:8). The importance of looking to Vu Trong Phung's analysis from his position is to avoid of our own extrapolated romanticisms.

At the same time, the assumption that *Dumb Luck* can be reflective of all of society is paradoxical. The risk lies in deducing Vietnamese society in the 1930s to Vu Trong Phung by want to favour his notions, making a *le Bon Sauvage* (Noble Savage) out of Vu Trong. Hence, Vu Trong's experiences of tumultuous change at the depths of a transitory environment can either explain *Dumb Luck's* modernist sensibility to reflect society's values, or their own subjective experiences. As such, characters such as Mrs. Deputy Customs Officer showing stark differences to his own mother means we must approach any broader applications to society's views on women cautiously. Then, did Vietnamese society view female sex work as immoral (Vu Trong, 2011 [1937])? Or did Vu Trong's mother (a widow at twenty-one who remained faithful to her late husband (Zinoman, 2002: 5)) mean Vu Trong had a personal distaste for women's promiscuity? Nonetheless, it adds to the problematics of romanticising the alternatives, they are not necessarily more holistic. However, this may also be commenting on the Euro-modern position towards women in the 1930s. In *Dumb Luck*, moderniser Mr. ILL (I Love Ladies), fabricated women's styles with names of culture-specific items (e.g. promiscuity). At the same time, he decries his wife when dressed in those styles — "What a slut! What a loose woman" (Vu Trong, 2002 [1936]:69). So too did the European cultural movements, political trends and artistic movements. Might Vu Trong have been mocking the modernisation reformers? As we will see, Vu Trong's mockery of elites constitutes a large part of the Euro-modern distinction.

Finally, an analysis of *Dumb Luck* via English translation is limited by the fact translation carries the view of interchange between different cultures (Hoang Thi and Nguyen Hoang, 2019:115). These cautions acknowledged; it remains that Vu Trong's reflections became famously valued depictions of Vietnamese society (Zinoman, 2002:1-2).

4.3 'Dumb Luck': Discourse Analysis of Alternative Modernities

While it is not the point of this chapter to pinpoint Vietnamese modernity — only to explore that there are alternatives — this final section analyses what *Dumb Luck* tell us of the alternative ontology. First Vu Trong's distinctions between the competing worlds are explicated, before discussing that out of their contradictions, came 'Vietnamese colonial modernity'.

Vu Trong (2002[1936]) recurrently makes distinct the dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'modern'. Rather than this reflecting a linear path, it described the two conflicting ontologies that colonialism bought. The Euro-modern is defined through culture-specific-items. 'Mr. Civilization', owns the 'Europeanization Tailor Shop' where dress names include Resolute Faithfulness, Conquest, and Innocence (ibid,67-9). 'Mrs. Civilization' organises a tennis court construction. Exercise resembles a reform of the self (as distinct from) only the outside "like those old-fashioned moralists in the past" (ibid,114-115). The clearest division between 'tradition' and 'modern' is represented by the road splitting one lake into "White Bamboo" and "West" (ibid, 96). Young girls and male students come to transgress their families, invariably jumping into one of the lakes (ibid). Initially the West Lake was favoured, but it was too deep and many suicide attempts were successful. White Bamboo Lake, now preferred, came to be a site that rejected "the evil Vietnamese family conspiracies to prevent free marriage, free divorce, free remarriage, and so on" (ibid, 97). The suicides a "contemporary barometer of the tragic conflict between old and new" (ibid). The conflict's embodiment ended when a patriot constructed a hotel on its banks (ibid, 97). "All self-respecting Vietnamese" stayed at the hotel to forsake being scolded for losing their roots to foreigners (ibid, 97). This reiterates the conflict caused by the

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bifurcation of tradition and modernity, the importance of maintaining some cultural identity, and that “self-respecting” Vietnamese masses at least, were not on board with Western modernity (ibid).

The contradicting epistemologies were attempted to be reconciled by domesticating the radically changing ‘modern’ one, making sense of it using the one ‘traditional.’ Where tradition prevails amid modern settings to explain them, could be seen by following the main character. Red-haired Xuan safely belongs to neither world. The success of his social mobilisation comes from luck, traditional rites and his knowledge as a vendor (Pham Ngoc, 2019:60). This allows him to fool the elites in the movement for social reform, mobilising from sidewalk salesman to social reformation leader. All through (mis)using the modern language of advertisement. That the modern ontology had to be reconciled rather than taken up was seen in *Dumb Luck's* (2002[1936]) persistent mockery. At the end of his speech, Xuan attempted ‘Hip-Hip-Houra’ instead, proclaiming “Lip, lip, lo...Hua rra!” to which the elites lap up (ibid,115). *Dumb Luck's* elite characters adopt Euro-modernity without reflection — “Grandpa Hong did not allow his utter ignorance of civilization to prevent him from supporting its merits wholeheartedly” (ibid,76). This defines Vietnamese modernisation as the cultural expression of a critical attitude toward the Euro-modern ontology, and that domesticates it using the one traditional. In other words, it was the “ongoing engagement with premodern traditions,” together with the “penetration of modernising, global forces into Indochina, that gave Vietnamese modernism its distinctive character” (Zinoman, 2002:13). Ultimately, there was an alternative. Not only was it in the face of the Euro modern ontology, but it also developed out of the two’s contradictions and in answer to it.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have refuted the post-development’s supposed lack of prescription by attempting to draw a line from what I defend as their agenda, through to arguments for alternatives in the face of one-world modernity literature. In doing this, I have demonstrated firstly, the pitfalls of Modernisation theory by the singular-linear trajectory they purport. These assumptions guided mainstream development approaches — the critiques of which post-development was borne out of. The crux of this theoretical engagement has been a proposition of the post-development agenda. Its open-ended conclusion was a creation of space for the multiplicity of Global South notions in what had been a previously colonised field — the decolonisation of development. The consensus within the Multiple-Modernities debate contributes to the fleshing out of ‘alternatives to development’ by the potentiality of alternative paradigms. Where postcolonial approaches can analyse the agendas within discourses and recognise the existence of those that had been made marginal, post-development’s up take of *Pluriversal Politics* (Escobar, 2011) seeks to further outline and expand the search for those alternative ontologies. I have also analysed the existence of one those ‘other worlds’ in an instance they clash into each other. In this contradiction, Vu Trong reflects on Vietnamese colonial modernity as an attempt to mine traditional values to domesticate the radical changes and anxiety modernity had bought. Hence, in the face of singular and linear concepts of Modernisation, Vietnam provides a stark example of the plurality of ontologies. These debates were not novel, and it has been widely acknowledged that multiple ontologies exist. However, the rebuttal that post-development did in fact prescribe an action and its connection across non-modern and pluriversal literature is one that had been previously underacknowledged, despite Escobar’s recurrent reminders: “We cannot resolve the problems of one era using the same mental frame that created them” (Einstein in Escobar, 2020:5-6).

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[1] On 'post-development' or 'postdevelopment', the former is used due to the consensus within the postcolonial field that (without a hyphen) signifies it's persisting impact. While post-developmentalists indeed argue developments continuance across time and spaces, this dissertation will be defending they are arguing for a period chronologically after 'development'.

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[2] Used hereon in reference to economic development strategies of the Global North to be implemented in countries of the Global South. As well as its ascribed ideology that Dirlik (2014:30-31) notes fetishes 'development' and attributed to it the power of a natural force, which resisting can only "risk being condemned to stagnation and poverty".

[3] The terms Global North and Global South are used not to further a dichotomy, but in reference to global interconnectedness. "The Global South captures the spirit of Third World engagements" (Grovo, 2011:176). Thus, it incorporates not only spaces that used to be referred to as the Third World, but also "spaces in the North that are characterised by exploitation" and vice versa (Sajed, 2020).

[4] These places of decision almost exclusively based in the Global North.

[5] Even the World Bank, whilst not giving voices to the poor on what their perceptions of development are, produced *The Voices of the Poor* (Narayan, et al. 1999).