Development’s Denial of Social Justice

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Abstract: Resistance to criticism in the field of development has prevented systemic change and has led to a denial of social justice. This has been a function of the language of development; establishment control over forms of critical discourse; selective crises reportage; and normal scientific behaviour. Following Popper (1970), these defences should be lowered so that bold alternative conjectures concerning social injustice can be set against prevailing orthodoxies. The work of Arundhati Roy is used to help make this case, and it is suggested that the search for alternatives needs to extend beyond the architects and agents of the neoliberal paradigm.
“The Spectator newspaper in London assures us that ‘we live in the happiest, healthiest and most peaceful era in human history.’ Billions wonder: who’s ‘we?’ Where does he live? What’s his Christian name?” (Roy, 2004e, p. 4).

Introduction

Until very recently, much more authoritative sources on questions of global poverty and development than The Spectator, such as UNDP’s annual Human Development Report, consistently had been just as up-beat about these matters, speaking of global living standards that had been ‘rising’ and ‘converging for decades’ (UNDP, 2011). Roy’s questions are not invalidated by this. Everyday observation, practical experience and other research evidence have shown that the billions of poor people - who have been there all along in full view - would have had every reason to wonder whose living standards were being referred to. In different words, this point is now conceded in the forthcoming Human Development Report for 2011, which ‘projects a disturbing reversal’ of the trends described in earlier reports (UNDP, 2011). This confirms that the battle against poverty and inequality is not being won and that there is a problem with development assistance that extends beyond the insufficient amounts of money spent on it, the frequently ineffective technocratic and other means that it employs in its attempts to produce improvements in the human condition, and the inefficient ways in which it goes about its business (e.g., Blunt, Turner, and Hertz, 2011; Centre for the Future State, 2010). We also know, however, that debate concerning what the “other” problem or problems of development assistance might be is polarised and that discussions tend to be mutually exclusive, each pole conversing among its own gatherings of the faithful on the basis of underlying ideological positions that are largely incommensurable. Prevailing
orthodoxies concerning the management of society and economy observed by the neoliberals and critical theorists who populate these polar extremes are based on fundamentally opposing ideas of what constitutes social justice\(^1\) and the means for achieving it. These paradigms, like all scientific or quasi-scientific paradigms, are highly resistant to criticism and therefore to fundamental change (Kuhn, 1962, 1970; Lakatos & Musgrave, 1970). In this paper, we examine the forms that such resistance can take and their detrimental effects, the most significant of which are restrictions on the growth of knowledge and denial of social justice.

**The poles defined**

For neoliberals, who accept at face value the current economic and social global dispensation, the “other” problems of development assistance are largely internal to the system, that is, conceptual, methodological, and operational (e.g., Booth, 2011a, 2011b; Wild & Foresti, 2011). The underlying state capitalist system\(^2\) itself and the idea of development are taken for granted and strongly defended. More often than not, challenges to the system evoke “prickly, combative defences” along the lines, “it isn’t perfect, but it’s better than everything else that’s on offer,” (Roy, 2009d, p.1).\(^3\) In relation to both state capitalism and

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\(^1\) Our (left-leaning) view of social justice draws on the work of Chomsky, Rawls, and Sen (for a full account, see Blunt, Turner, & Lindroth, 2011a). The authentic representation of citizens’ views in state decision-making and the fair and just distribution among all citizens of public goods and the removal of social and economic inequalities are fundamental to this position.

\(^2\) Following Chomsky (1997, 1999, 2010), by state capitalism we mean a system of state governance in which the decision making organs of the state are used primarily to serve the interests of major corporations and in which the state and business interests work together to ensure that the lion’s share of national wealth is acquired by small business and political elites and their cronies and political supporters - or “plutonomies” Chomsky (2010, p. 94) - creating circumstances in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. This is what neoliberals call “democracy.” See also Roy (2003a, 2003b).

\(^3\) For example, Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff (2010) have referred to criticisms of the development establishment as “donor-bashing” and “anti-development perspectives”, that is, if you are against the establishment then you are against development. This response is reminiscent of President Bush’s defence against critics of American foreign policy, which cast them as “enemies of freedom”…“They hate our freedoms -- our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other” (Roy, 2001a, p. 1).
development assistance, improvements are therefore considered solely in terms of adjustments to the existing system, to the ways in which problems of social and economic management and development assistance are conceived and the means to be employed in overcoming them. For example, in some of its latest self-examinations, it has been said that development assistance has failed to see that neopatrimonialism remains endemic in many developing countries and that, rather than being treated as a part of the problem, it should be regarded as part of the solution (e.g., Booth, 2011c; Booth & Golooba-Mutebi, 2011; Moore & Unsworth, 2010). Likewise, without contemplating the possibility of underlying structural change, at the global level UNDP (2011) has noted that the world’s problems of poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and dispositions of political power will make ‘it all the harder for the world community to reach agreement on needed global policy changes’.

On the other hand, for critical theorists, who regard extant forms of democracy or state capitalism to be the means by which corporate and other elites of the North, in collusion with similar elites in the South, enrich themselves at the expense of the mass of the people, it is the underlying system or structure that is problematic. According to Roy (2004c, p. 3), this is “New Imperialism”, which “Like Old Imperialism...relies for its success on a network of agents – corrupt local elites who service Empire.” The prevailing ideas of state capitalism and development constitute the conceptual basis of the New Imperialism and of development assistance. As one of the instruments of New Imperialism’s implementation, development assistance is regarded as an integral part of this exploitative system. Accordingly, in this view, while functionalist modifications of development assistance - of concept, method, and operations – that do not question the validity of the underlying system might yield localised

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4 UNDP is committed to extant forms of ‘democratic governance’ or state capitalism.
benefits, they stand to exacerbate and maintain injustice rather than to prevent or ameliorate it in any general sense.

We declare at the outset that we are sympathetic to the view that regards the current global order as one that denies - and is designed to deny – social justice to the mass of the people or “the great beast that must be tamed” (Alexander Hamilton quoted in Chomsky, 1999; also, see Blunt, Turner, & Lindroth, 2011a). But we acknowledge that the manner in which these views have tended to be expressed has not always been helpful to the causes that they have sought to promote. Clearly, if an effect of what you have to say is to make those who disagree with you feel that you dismiss them as wrong-headed and obtuse and beyond redemption, or as being apologists for exploitation and injustice, then the likelihood of your being heard at all is almost certain to be reduced to zero. For fear that “the argument will be lost in the welter of bruised (ideological) pride” (Roy, 2002b, p. 1), we have therefore tried in this article to chart a course between being too conformist and formulaic for the left’s taste and being too iconoclastic or outspoken for the right. We assume that there are degrees of adherence to the state capitalist status quo, and therefore varying levels of openness to debate concerning its validity, that is, that there are those who, while still part of the establishment, are prepared to consider the world “in terms other than those that the establishment has set out” (Roy, 2002c, p. 1), thereby making migration from right to left between the two poles possible (e.g., see the debate in McCourt & Gulrajani, 2010). To a degree, our own professional case histories confirm such a possibility.
The argument in outline

Our argument, which has six facets, is that the poor performance of development assistance has a great deal to do with a general resistance to criticism that is not solely attributable to blind faith in the underlying state capitalist system. This resistance is strengthened by the normal scientific behaviour of development researchers and practitioners within the ruling neoliberal paradigm (Kuhn, 1962, 1970) and results in a denial of social justice. We begin, first, by demonstrating how the language or rhetoric of development assistance has created a reassuring intellectual fog that acts as an effective barrier to criticism and the growth of knowledge. This is a consequence of the unselfconscious everyday use of muddled and meaningless terms, which have become the vocabulary of development assistance. Second, we propose that part of this vocabulary is used more deliberately – as an offensive weapon, to stave off criticism and to protect and proselytise the status quo by presenting state capitalism and development assistance in a misleadingly favourable light. Third, we argue that establishment control over the forms of presentation that criticism is allowed to take, and its outlets, can lead to the disqualification of criticism that is considered to be too radical or pointed or provocative. Fourth, we suggest that the selective reporting of crises and social injustice by the media reflects the combined interests of corporate elites working hand-in-hand with the state in rich and poor countries, which has the effect of denying social justice both to the subjects of its attentions and to the many millions of equally deserving cases that are overlooked. The extent to which the targets of development assistance are subject to the same influences also constitutes a denial of social justice. Fifth, we attribute similar properties of resistance and selective attention to the sociology of development practitioner and researcher behaviour, and propose that the language and
sociology of state capitalism and development are mutually reinforcing in their resistance to criticism and their denial of social justice. Sixth, we use the work of Arundhati Roy both to help make our case concerning the use of language and the media as means of resistance and to illustrate the types of arguments concerning social injustice that are denied as a result of such resistance. That is to say, we try to show that resistance to criticisms of fundamental aspects of state capitalism, the idea of development, and development assistance, such as those proposed by Roy (and others like Chomsky), inhibits the growth of knowledge and, whether deliberate or not, can result in a denial of social justice. Our contribution is to demonstrate and explain some of the ways in which this has happened and to expose some of Roy’s arguments concerning the social injustices of development and her searching questions concerning the underlying system of state capitalism in an intellectual forum where they are not usually found.5

Why Arundhati Roy?

We have chosen to establish our case by reference to examples of the work of Arundhati Roy because she is one of the most incisive and articulate contemporary critics of the current global dispensation and its effects on the poor of the South, and because we felt that her voice deserved a greater hearing in the development literature than it has so far enjoyed. In demonstrating and explaining the resistance of the ruling neoliberal paradigm to criticism, we show that the arguments that Roy has presented and the questions she has raised in relation to a selection of development topics are compellingly plausible and for the reasons given below deserve to be set against conventional views of the matters of social justice that they address.

5 Our search of three mainstream journals - this journal, the Social Justice Research and Public Administration and Development - turned up a total of two citations of Roy’s work, both in Public Administration and Development, namely, Sims (2001) and one of our own recently-published pieces (Blunt, Turner and Lindroth, 2011b).
While this particular case has not been made before in relation to the field of development, the unwillingness of the related field of international relations to take seriously – or to consider at all - the arguments of Roy (and of Chomsky) concerning the USA’s involvement in the war in Iraq has been criticised by the leading social theorist Judith Butler (2006). She has argued that “contemporary strictures on public discourse” mean that much sound criticism “cannot be heard...it is dismissed as contradictory or disingenuous” and that rejection is frequently based on *ad hominem* remarks. The fact, for example, that Roy is sometimes trivialised as a “diva” or “cult figure” is a device used to deflect attention away from the power of her arguments, which enables her to be ignored, “rather than listened to as a political critic with a wide moral compass” (Butler, 2006, p. 15). Going further, Butler has described the New York Time’s depiction of Roy’s critiques of US imperialism as “anti-US” as being “tantamount to the suppression of dissent, and the nationalist refusal to consider the merits of criticisms developed from other parts of the globe,” or ethnocentrism. She has condemned this “treatment” or dismissal of Roy’s work as “unfair” (Butler, 2006, p. 15). Likewise, Slater (2006, p. 1372) has commented on the neglect of Roy’s depiction of the nature and meaning of “loss” to “cultures” and ‘peoples’ of the South.

Roy is unusually well-qualified to comment on questions of social justice – primarily because, as we shall show, of the force and clarity of her arguments, but also because she is a citizen of India, which has the largest numbers of chronically poor and dispossessed people of any nation on earth and in many ways can therefore be said to have borne the brunt of global economic and social design;\(^6\) because, by virtue of her citizenship and the current disposition of global power, she qualifies as a “subject of the American Empire” (Roy, 2006).

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\(^6\) After more than half a century as the world’s largest “democracy,” more than 800 million Indians struggle to survive on less than 20 rupees (or 50 American cents) a day (Roy & Barsamian, 2011, p. 6; Mundkur, 2011).
2003b, p. 1), which has afforded her a bottom-up perspective on different aspects of
development assistance and a front-row seat at the workings of state capitalism in a subject
nation; because she has been deeply involved practically and intellectually in the struggles
for equality and justice by dispossessed, displaced, and marginalised communities in India
for at least the last 15 years - including, in 2010, several weeks spent on foot with the
resistance movement of the Naxalite peoples in the forests of West Bengal (Roy, 2010a), so
that even by conventional academic standards she can be said to have served her time in the
field; because she possesses an unusual combination of high intellect, genuine concern for
the impoverished and dispossessed in her own country (and, generally, for the peoples and
other animals of the earth and for the welfare of the planet), and unusually piercing insight,
making vulnerable to her attentions all of those for whom posing and deceit pass for fair
dealing; because she was not educated in any of the main development disciplines (she
studied architecture at university) and therefore came to the subject of social justice
unencumbered by the usual intellectual or ideological baggage, that is, with an intelligence
uncluttered by dogma and some of the pettier foibles and pretensions of academe; and last,
but by no means least, because she possesses such brilliance of expression in the English
language, which gives to her commentary an edge and penetration and a vividness and clarity
that its subject matter so richly deserves yet so rarely receives. Her challenge of the status
quo and of establishment thinking invariably is cast in propositions that are bold and
provocative, and in this sense can be said to have a distinct Popperian character (Popper,
1959, 1963). We have sought to retain this important quality in our discussion of her work.

Much as Noam Chomsky has done, most of her attention has been directed at social
injustice and the effects of state capitalism and New Imperialism, in Roy’s case particularly
in India. This has led her inevitably to criticism of the USA and what she has called “imperial democracy” (Roy, 2003c). As indicated earlier, evidence for the view that state capitalism has failed to reduce poverty and inequality in rich and poor countries alike is not difficult to find and there is widespread and growing popular recognition of this (e.g., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011; Kelly, 2009; Mantsios, 2006), including evidence of discontent in establishment media like the New York Times (e.g., Angier, 2011; Krugman, 2011a, 2011b). Less widely considered and known, however, are the possible structural failings responsible for this state of affairs, and arguments concerning the ways in which these failings are kept hidden from view – by, for example, the misleading use of language or an “intellectual fog that is helpful to the concealment of real intentions and differences between development actors” (Blunt, Turner, & Hertz, 2011, p. 181); by insisting that critical discourse is only allowable under strictly defined conditions or through “proper channels” (Roy, 2009d); and by the diversionary and other effects of “crises reportage” by state- and corporate-controlled media (Roy, 2003b; 2008b). These are active political means of defence, which we suggest are reinforced by the naturally-occurring strictures and inhibitions of the sociology of development practice and research, or “normal science” (Kuhn, 1962). It is this grip on the field that needs to be prised loose – so that the light of alternative underlying social and economic structural possibilities can filter through the chinks.

Language, ‘Proper Channels’, and Reportage

To begin with, we propose that the misuse of language and resistance to criticism in development follows a tradition that is well-established in the related field of international relations (Butler, 2006).
The language of international relations

“To reclaim these stolen words requires explanations that are too tedious for a world with a short attention span, and too expensive in an era when free speech has become unaffordable for the poor. This language heist may prove to be the keystone of our undoing,” (Roy, 2009b, p. 4).

It is now universally understood that hypocrisy is the lingua franca of international relations. More than ten years ago, Roy (1998, p. 9) asked, “how much more exposed can (Western hypocrisy) be? Which decent human being on earth harbours any illusions about it?” For example, who these days could doubt the hypocrisy of American claims to being the freest and most peace-loving nation on earth – according to President Bush Jr. “A nation built on fundamental values that reject hate, reject violence, reject murderers, and reject evil” and that “will not tire,” (Roy, 2001b, p. 2)? While they may not be aware of all of the details, people know that the USA is a nation founded on the genocide of its own indigenous peoples; the enslavement of hundreds of thousands of Africans; after the abolition of slavery, on decades of institutionalised racial discrimination; and on the use of weapons of mass destruction (the only nation ever to have used the atomic bomb – “a weapon of peace”) (Roy, 2003d, p. 7). They know that in the last sixty years the USA has waged numerous wars, culminating during the last ten years in the bombing and invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. People know that this same country (the USA) and its “natural allies” will not hesitate to use and justify sanctions that result, as in the case of Iraq, in the estimated deaths of half a million children (Roy, 2003b). People understand that when the mistreatment of American soldiers captured in Iraq is said by George Bush Jr. to violate the Geneva convention and to

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7 Since the Second World War, apart from Iraq and Afghanistan, countries attacked by the USA include Korea, Guatemala, Cuba, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Grenada, Libya, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Somalia, Sudan, and Yugoslavia. This list does not include “covert operations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the coups it has engineered, and the dictators it has armed and supported,” (Roy, 2003d, p. 7).
expose “the evil at the heart of the (Iraqi) regime” that this is the same country that with a sense of moral righteousness displayed on TV “hundreds of prisoners being held by the US government in Guantanamo Bay, kneeling on the ground with their hands tied behind their backs, blinded with opaque goggles and with ear phones clamped on their ears, to ensure complete visual and aural deprivation,” (Roy, 2003e, p. 3). They understand that when America and Britain and France and Italy applauded the blossoming of freedom movements in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 that these were the same countries that supported and supplied weapons to the dictators that have been replaced and are the ones that are now first in line to sign business contracts with the new governments that have been formed.

How in these circumstances can terms like “free speech” or “free world” have anything really to do with freedom, when those who proclaim them the loudest demonstrate that what they really mean is the freedom to do as they please? The freedom to “finance and sponsor despots and dictators” when it suits their purposes; “the freedom to topple democratically elected governments”; “the freedom to amass and use weapons of mass destruction...” The freedom to go to war against any government they disagree with or any government that has something that they want (Roy, 2003d). Does it mean the freedom to imprison a high proportion of your own citizens so that the world’s “freest” country – the USA – has the highest numbers of prisoners in the world? What does the word freedom mean to young African American men, “28% of whom will spend some part of their adult lives in jail,” (Roy, 2003c, p. 8) and a disproportionate number of whom will be sent off to war? (African Americans constitute 29% of the US army, as cited in Roy, 2003c). “And, most terrible of
all," does it mean “the freedom to commit these crimes against humanity in the name of ‘justice’, in the name of ‘righteousness,’ in the name of ‘freedom’?” (Roy, 2003d, p. 8).

Although it has not done much to impede the march of the New Imperialism, the spell of the language of international relations seems to have been broken beyond repair. The same cannot yet be said, however, for the idea of development, and development assistance, perhaps because at least some of the contradictions between rhetoric and reality in this field are less evident to the naked eye and because the language used is more opaque and impenetrable. The dropping of bombs and the invasion of countries clearly threaten peace-loving pretentions. Whereas building thousands of dams, cutting down forests, and privatising national assets in the name of progress are less obviously at odds with assertions of altruistic development. Language is essential to the muddying of these waters.

The language of development assistance.

Accordingly, perceptions concerning the legitimacy of development assistance, particularly its appeal to the consciences of those who pay its bills and its reception among the subjects of its attentions, continue to rely greatly on its choice of words. “Empowerment” and “voice” are promised for the “disadvantaged” and “disenfranchised.” “Sustainable human development,” “poverty elimination,” and “inclusion” are held out as prospects for the “poor” and the “marginalised.” “Political democracy,” “free trade,” “good governance,” “openness and transparency,” “institution building,” and “environmental protection” are promoted as means for national development. Such terms are the rhetorical stock-in-trade of development practitioners – usually expressed in a tone that is upbeat and optimistic, and one that implies openness to reason and eagerness to listen and to learn. It is a language that
asserts proprietal interest in the field, possession of more or less complete and unfailing technical knowhow concerning it and, perhaps above all, moral authority, altruism, and good will (Blunt et al., 2011). “Barely any development actor could take serious issue with the way the objectives of development are currently framed.” (Cornwall and Brock, 2005, p. 1043).

Why is it then, we ask, that an industry that sees and portrays itself in these pragmatic, no-nonsense, open, and altruistic ways should appear to be so averse to certain forms of criticism? The question is made more pointed by the fact that conventional thinking in the field of development studies (that is, among researchers as distinct from practitioners) would be likely to accept in principle the validity of the Popperian falsificationist criterion as fundamental to the growth of knowledge. In this view the ultimate test of the worth of a theory is its susceptibility and openness to test and the extent to which it is able to withstand repeated attempts to falsify or overthrow it. For Popper, first and foremost, scientists should be critical-rationalists, constantly on the look-out for alternative conjectures or explanations and falsifying evidence, as it is only through the repeated renewal and refinement of theory that our understanding of the world can progress. Fundamentally, the growth of knowledge is an enterprise that depends on bold conjectures and refutation, that is, on radical criticism. Scientists should therefore want to confront criticism of the views or theories they hold head-on, as the ultimate scientific show of strength (Popper, 1959, 1963).

It is our contention that the language of development assistance works against this inclination by lulling development practitioners and researchers into a state of moral and intellectual complacency (or, in some cases, smugness?) - that the right things are being done in the right spirit and in more or less the right ways and that major changes are therefore unnecessary and that, most importantly, there is in any case an absence of viable alternatives.
The effects of such language are palliative, salving of consciences, denying of criticism. They help to ensure that the underlying ideological support structure remains intact.

*The language of “democracy” promotion and defence*

“When language has been butchered and bled of meaning, how do we understand ‘public power?’ When freedom means occupation, when democracy means neoliberal capitalism, when reform means repression...why, then, ‘public power’ could mean whatever you want it to mean,” (Roy, 2004e, p. 1).

Roy (2009b) has taken this argument a step further by suggesting that language is also used to proselytise and defend basic tenets of the underlying system of state capitalism so that it becomes the default means by which the virtuous objectives of development assistance referred to above are achieved – meaning that not only are the right things being said to be done in the right spirit, but they are also to be done in what should become certain taken-for-granted ways.

“This, words like ‘progress’ and ‘development’ have become interchangeable with economic ‘reforms,’ ‘deregulation,’ and ‘privatisation.’ ‘Freedom’ has come to mean ‘choice.’ It has less to do with the human spirit than with different brands of deodorant. ‘Market’ no longer means a place where you go to buy provisions. The ‘market’ is a de-territorialised space where faceless corporations do business, including buying and selling ‘futures.’ This theft of language, this technique of usurping words and deploying them like weapons, of using them to mask intent and to mean exactly the opposite of what they have traditionally meant, has been one of the most brilliant strategic victories of the tsars of the new dispensation” (Roy, 2009b, p. 4).

This use of language as a conscious instrument of state capitalism and Empire enables the establishment “to marginalise detractors” and “to deprive them of a language in which to

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8According to its own admission, development ideology in the rich countries of the West is committed to reproducing western-style democracy: “(democracy) is not just desirable but the solution to most governance problems in all types of country. This idea is officially enshrined in the foreign policy of several European countries and the US where development assistance is treated as an arm of foreign policy. In the UK, foreign policy is committed to democracy promotion,” (Booth, 2011a: 11).
voice their critique and (to) dismiss them as being ‘anti-progress,’ ‘anti-development,’ ‘anti-reform’ and of course ‘anti-national’” (Roy, 2009b, p. 4). It enables “talk about saving a river or protecting a forest” to be dismissed as anti all these good, progressive, developmental things. For the displaced and dispossessed whose land has been submerged by dam reservoirs or who have been evicted from their homes as a result of other “development” projects, neoliberals say “do you have an alternative development model?” And to those who believe that governments should provide all citizens with basic education, health care, and social security, they say “you’re against the market,” implying that you are intellectually diminished by your failure to be for it (Roy, 2009b, p. 4).

This corrupted language is used to create a “counterfeit universe” in which systemic failings are “converted into temporary lapses, attributable to flawed individuals” (Roy, 2008a, p. 10) rather than the underlying system. In this universe, the poor can choose to be rich. If they do not, it is because they fail to take advantage of the opportunities that surround them, because they are misguided, “choosing pessimism over optimism, hesitation over confidence, want over hope. In other words, they are choosing to be poor. It is their fault. They are weak.” (Roy, 2008a, p. 10). In this way, the victim becomes the (self-inflicting) perpetrator. This counterfeit universe is defended most vigorously by “those at the top of the food chain, those who have no reason to want to alter the status quo. Their job is to patrol the border, diffuse the rage, delegitimize anger, and broker a ceasefire,” (Roy, 2008a, p. 8).

To such ends, versions of reality created by those in power, those who control the language of the mass media, extend to even seemingly neutral ideas, like what constitutes the nation. The definition is appropriated and becomes a weapon in their hands that is used to define reality in terms that suit their purposes. Global elites – of which elites in developing
countries are an indispensable part - collude in this. In these respects, it is difficult to tell apart neopatrimonialism and state capitalism. They are Siamese twins (Blunt et al., 2011b).

Of her own country, Roy (Roy & Barsamian, 2011, p. 3) has said that “I don’t know any longer what you mean when you say India this or India that...Constantly people will say to me, ‘Oh you are very unpopular in India,’ because the elite and the establishment appropriates the definition of India. They are India.” The “same deadly sleight of hand” can be found in the mega-works of development, like dam construction. It defines “who counts as Project Affected” and who is eligible for the “fruits of development” - so that “landless fisher people, boat people, sand quarriers, daily wage workers and those who are considered ‘encroachers’ do not qualify as project-affected and are done away with,” (Roy, 2004d, p. 6).

How we might ask has this language enfranchised or helped the hundreds of millions of poor people that it purports to serve? Even with good intentions, how can you explain the nature of modern warfare and its diabolical consequences or the intricate workings of so-called development, and its effects, to a man who cannot write his own name? How can he participate or protest if he cannot understand, if he is deliberately misled, if despite the glowing rhetoric he is treated as if he did not count? “Or has his language itself become obsolete? Is he trapped in a time capsule, watching the world pass him by, unable to understand or communicate with it...Does he not matter at all, this man...Shall we release him from his capsule only during elections, and once he has voted, shake him by the hand, flatter him..., and send him right back in?” (Roy, 1998, p. 14). The answer is that poor people have indeed been disenfranchised and have not been helped, and we are talking here of course not of a minority but of many, many millions of people. People who in India, for example, constitute the vast majority of its citizens. In a real democracy, the air, the land, the rivers,
the forests, the “bauxite in the mountains” (Roy, 2009c) are theirs too, and “they have the right to make an informed decision about (their) fate.” As Roy (1998, p. 14) has said, “the real horror of India” (and of many other similar places) may be that there is no way of doing this, no language to do it in because “The orbits of the powerful and the powerless (are) spinning further and further apart from each other, never intersecting, sharing nothing. Not a language. Not even a country.” (brackets added).

To survive in this climate of Orwellian “double think” and double talk, to have any chance of achieving social justice, you have to understand what is really being said, what is being peddled. “You have to teach yourself to unscramble the vernacular,” (Roy, 2000b, p. 8) to constantly probe beneath the surface layer of rhetoric. Is democracy really democratic? Does “public power” have anything to do with giving real power to the people? Do elections provide this, do they provide real choice? Is the job of at least some NGOs to “defuse political anger and to maintain the status quo” (Roy, 2004f, p. 2) and to mop-up “the devastation caused by neoliberalism” (Roy, 2004g, p. 2)? What good does the right to information do, “if there is no redress for our grievances?” (Roy, 2009a, p. 11). When the rivers have been dammed and run dry, the forests cut down, and the fish taken from the sea, how do you replace them, how do you “repair the torn fabric of an ancient, agrarian community, which depends on its lands and rivers and forests for its sustenance” (Roy, 2000a, p. 10)? Is globalisation really “about the ‘eradication of world poverty,’ or is it a mutant variety of colonialism, remote controlled and digitally operated?” (Roy, 2002a, p. 2). Is it the case that real power resides with the bankers, the CEOs who are “not vulnerable to the vote (and in any case fund all sides)” (Roy, 2004e, p. 3). Is it the case that once the poor have cast their votes, “they are expected to bugger off home – policy will be decided without
them”? And finally, is it the case that the “spurious, evolving language of electoral democracy” (Roy, 2004e) that we have described has been developed and inflicted deliberately and has been designed to be here to stay?

*Only through “proper channels” and “reckless at slow speed”*

“We know of course there is really no such thing as the ‘voiceless’. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard” (Roy, 2004f, p. 1).

In Kumar (2011, p. 7), Roy has suggested that much of the criticism directed at her own work – for example, that it is “shrill” or “excessive’ or “polemical” – has to do more with her “transgressions” of substance and politics and the urgency that she attaches to the need for change. She has accused her critics of disliking the fact that she does not behave like a supplicant or a victim and that, unlike the “privileged classes,” her criticism of the state is not excessively polite and formalised, it is not “clerky and calculating” or “reckless at slow speed.” She has described her writing as not being “a plea for aid or compassion towards the poor...or for more NGOs or charities or foundations in which the rich can massage their egos and salve their consciences with their surplus money. The critique is structural.”

Like Roy and Butler (2006), we propose that the use of form, or “only through proper channels,” as a basis for objection is designed to distract attention away from the substance of what social critics like Roy have to say, the validity of much of which is less easily denied. It is a technique that is used to “mask a larger (and inconvenient) truth”. The insistence on “proper channels” can be a form of repression, where what is being said is forced to become subservient to how it is said. Should we allow ourselves to be “railroaded into offering prosaic, factual precision when maybe what we need is a feral howl?” (Roy, 2009d)?
“Crises reportage”

Nowadays, nearly everybody who reads a newspaper or watches the news on TV knows that in many countries there is a cosy relationship between the institutions of the state, major corporations and the media. In Italy – admittedly an extreme example – Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi holds a controlling interest in TV channels that account for about 90% of viewership (Roy, 2003d). The news and entertainment industries in the USA, UK and Australia are also for the most part controlled by a few major corporations – in the USA, AOL-Time Warner, Disney, Viacom, and News Corporation (Roy, 2003c, p. 8). Even those, like Al Jazeera, that seemed to promise to be different have turned out to be more like the rest than not (Kirkpatrick, 2011). And recently we have all witnessed the (corroborating) imbroglio involving the media (News Corporation) and central institutions of the state (the police force and parliament) in what many in the establishment might have considered to be an unlikely place, the UK. The general idea of what happens as a result of this - the “manufacture of consent” that was revealed so persuasively some time ago by Chomsky (Chomsky and Herman, 1988) - has become common knowledge. In some general sense, perhaps, we have come to understand that, in a “free” market, free speech has become a commodity that is available to only those who can afford it. “And naturally, those who can afford it use free speech to manufacture the kind of product, confect the kind of public opinion, that best suits their purposes.” (Roy, 2003d, p. 2). We are probably less aware, however, of the different ways in which this can be done.

The use of the media to shape public opinion is as much a function of what is not said or what is left out as it is a function of plain misreporting or distortion. There are many
conspicuous examples of the latter, one of the most infamous of which was the Western media’s complicity in creating the conditions of fear and paranoia - in the USA in particular, but also in other western countries - that ushered in the doctrine of “pre-emptive strike.” An enfeebled Iraq became the first victim of this, and many tens of thousands of people lost their lives as a result (Roy, 2003c). We need not dwell on such examples. By definition, however, we know much less about the real atrocities and the everyday suffering experienced by millions of poor people that goes unreported. It is in all of these respects that the media have become instruments for the denial of social justice.

Here are just a few unreported examples. How widely known, for example, is it that about “80,000 people have been killed in Kashmir since 1989, most of them Muslim, most of them by Indian Security Forces” (Roy, 2004a, p. 3), that is, about 6,000 per year on average or roughly twice as many per year as were killed on 9/11? How much global mourning has there been for these casualties? How many people outside of India know that in 2003 in excess of 2,000 Muslims were killed in Gujarat and that many women were raped and many children were burned alive and that 150,000 people were driven from their homes? Or that no one was punished for these crimes and the Government that oversaw them was re-elected (Roy, 2004a)? How many people inside or outside of India know that in the past 55 years, big dam development projects alone have displaced between 33 million and 55 million people in India – that is, twice to three times the population of Australia? We cannot help but wonder whether the silence in the Western media would have been so complete had they been non-indigenous Americans or non-indigenous Australians? These people are not part of a planned and orderly relocation. They are not just moving house: “Those who are displaced and dispossessed (are) sentenced to a lifetime of starvation and deprivation...They have no
recourse to justice.” (Roy, 2004a, p. 3). These are just a few examples from one country. We could give many others from many other poor countries.

What is it, we may ask, that explains the media’s selective attention? Why does it choose some catastrophes or injustices but not others? Why is it that in countries that brandish their values of “democracy” and of empathy and of compassion so aggressively there is such selective attention? Why all of this “kind of breathless reporting about the move for democracy in Egypt...” but nothing about Kashmir? In other words, “Why will the international, Western media, in particular, pick up one and switch the lights off on the other?” (Roy & Barsamian, 2011, p. 2). The most plausible and obvious explanation is that Egypt is important to the West because of its traditional role as a pro-Western and pro-US moderating influence in the region and its US-induced tolerance of Israel. It simply cannot be ignored. Kashmir on the other hand is overwhelmed by the surrounding politics of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Neither is Kashmir “something that the international world – the world of corporations, the world of markets, the world of even strategic geopolitics – sees as something that is going to change the status quo” (Roy & Barsamian, 2011, p. 2). For different reasons, the West cannot afford to alienate either Pakistan or India over the tricky question of Kashmir, so best not to mention it. Development is a willing partner or hostage to this selective attention and social justice is its main casualty.

What are the effects of crises reportage? As we have just implied, one of the main effects is to direct attention to social injustice only where it is convenient for the powerful nations of the West to do so. Other, just as or more, deserving cases are denied this attention. But crises reportage has other effects. These arise from the fact that growing catastrophe fatigue and short attention spans among consumers make it necessary for the media to have “high crisis
turnover” (Roy, 2004b). This also suits the interests of the new imperial powers who “hunker down and wait (until) the crisis has been consumed by the media, picked to the bone, (so that) its carcass gradually slips off the best seller charts” (Roy, 2004c). In this way, whole countries quickly become old news. “They cease to exist. And the darkness becomes deeper than before the light was shone on them”. This peripatetic, selective crisis reporting “isolates the crisis, unmoors it from the particularities of the history, the geography, and the culture that produced it” (Roy, 2004b, p. 12). Another effect of such reporting is that it has made the “(dark) people of those (dark) countries seem like pathological victims. Another malnourished Indian, another starving Ethiopian, another Afghan refugee camp, another maimed Sudanese...in need of the white man’s help. They unwittingly reinforce racist stereotypes and re-affirm the achievements, comforts, and the compassion (the tough love) of Western civilisation,” (Roy, 2004e, p.8). Crises reportage therefore deepens social injustice not only by its selective attention, but also - where it does report - by the shallowness and bias of such reporting that has the effect, among others, of reinforcing racial and other prejudices regarding social injustice and the prevailing global order. We submit that the direction of much development assistance is built on the same logic and has the same effects.

The one bright spot in this otherwise bleak landscape is that the huge amount of resources devoted by the establishment to this enterprise suggests a real fear that public opinion could turn against it, “a persistent and valid worry that if people were to discover (and fully comprehend) the real nature of the things that are done in their name, they might act upon that knowledge,” (Roy, 2003d, p. 3).
“Normal Science” and “Puzzle-solving”

The plausibility of our argument concerning development’s resistance to criticism and its denial of social justice is strengthened by the normal scientific behaviour of development practitioners and researchers. Following Kuhn (1962, 1970), we know that scientists are content to – and, in Kuhn’s view, should - work within a ruling paradigm or ideology, not questioning its dictates until some (usually external) event or series of events cause the ruling paradigm to be overthrown, leading to a collective and lemming-like crisis of confidence in the orthodoxy and a profound shift in thinking away from it.

We have suggested elsewhere that the work of “normal” development practitioners (Blunt, 1997) and development assistance (Blunt et al., 2011) are similarly constrained - by dominant paradigms or ideologies that are unlikely to be shaken-off without ‘revolutionary' collective changes of mind taking place. Until this happens, many scientists and development practitioners engage exclusively in what Kuhn (1970) has referred to as “puzzle-solving” activities. These are designed to confirm the prevailing theory in an inductive way – seeking out and piling one confirming instance upon another, and studiously ignoring contradictory evidence and argument.\footnote{This is naive inductivism (Russell, 1912).} As is well known, however, inductivism and Kuhn's normative view of the sociology of science have both been the subject of telling criticism on logical grounds and on the basis of falsifying examples from the history of science. Karl Popper in particular has shown that normal science is bad for the progress of science because it encourages in scientists acquiescence to prevailing theories, rather than continuous challenge and criticism of them – which, as we have said, leads to the more rapid and well-founded growth of scientific knowledge (e.g., Popper, 1970; Chalmers, 1976). The same argument would apply to the “normal” behaviour of development researchers and practitioners. That is to say,
resistance to fundamental criticism of the idea of development and of its implementation is also a function of normal scientific behaviour within the ruling neoliberal paradigm. The resistance inherent in the conscious and unconscious use of the everyday language of development, the control of form and channels of expression, and selective crises reportage is reinforced by this.

**Conclusion**

Drawing largely on the work of Arundhati Roy, we have argued that language, control over forms and channels of expression and of the mass media, together with normal scientific behaviour among its researchers and practitioners have combined to form an effective barrier to criticism of fundamental aspects of the prevailing orthodoxy of development, its basis in state capitalism, and its means of implementation, development assistance. This has happened and continues to happen despite the fact that the instrument of development, development assistance, presents itself generally in open and altruistic terms and as a “learning institution,” one that is preoccupied with “lessons learnt” and is open to argument and to change. And it has happened despite the fact that development researchers would see and perhaps portray themselves as having similar inclinations, because they are likely to subscribe in principle to Popperian falsificationist ideals concerning the growth of knowledge. The promise of receptiveness to criticism that these conditions create is misleading however. It is countered and overwhelmed by a combination of taken-for-granted everyday language – “the background drone of conventional development discourse or the normal scientific hum of the ruling paradigm” (Blunt et al., 2011, p. 184) – and the other factors mentioned above. We have argued that such resistance is detrimental to the growth of knowledge and we have demonstrated how this can lead to a denial of social justice.
In Roy’s (2003b, p. 4) terms, these are the defences against the “collapse” of “the corporate revolution.” They are some of the main bulwarks holding back the criticism that could help to bring about a serious examination of “what they are selling: their ideas, their version of history ...their notion of inevitability.” (Roy, 2003b, p. 4). For the reasons we have given, it follows that these defences should be lowered so that prevailing orthodoxies can be tested against bold and provocative alternative conjectures, like those of Roy, concerning the extent and disposition of global injustice, however such conjectures might be expressed.

Having said that, the scale, depth, and urgency of global poverty, deprivation and social injustice demand for their solution ideas and commitment that seem unlikely to be found solely among the architects and agents of the current global dispensation. The “imagination” that got us into this mess in the first place seems unlikely to want or to be able to get us out of it. “Leaving it (entirely) to the experts” is likely simply to produce more of the same (Roy, 2002a). Rather, alternatives should be sought more widely, including “from the places and the people who have resisted the hegemonic impulse of capitalism and imperialism instead of being co-opted by it” and who are likely to have quite different ideas about “what constitutes happiness and fulfilment.” (Roy, 2010b, p. 23).

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References


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