# 1

# Introduction

### *Development, Management, and Civil Society from a Critical Perspective*

This is a book about development, management, and civil society, three terms not often used together. Bringing these terms into explicit dialog, within a project of critique, alerts us to their contradictory effects and encourages better recognition of the ways notions of management, development, and civil society interact. This introductory chapter outlines this argument in two parts, as interlinkage and as critique. First, I explain how development, management, and civil society are interlinked themes, and illustrate the theoretical value in exploring their interconnections through two examples. The contemporary example offered here is a growing backlash against non-governmental organizations (NGOs). I ask if such backlash can be considered to be critical. Therefore, second, I define a project of critique and the particular light it sheds on the interconnections of development, management, and civil society.

### Specters of development, management, and civil society

The noted, in many ways admirable, Indian writer Arundhati Roy (2012) published an essay in the spring of 2012 called "Capitalism: A Ghost Story." Outraged by the increased income inequality in India and worldwide, the development policies that privilege wealthy upper classes and disadvantage the poor, and the self-serving agendas of corporate philanthropy, Roy's essay weaves loose threads across a range of topics that point to the contemporary capitalist moment in India; they include Mukesh Ambani's high-rise mansion in Mumbai, political corruption, sale of mineral-rich tribal land to corporations, repression by state-funded paramilitary in central India, consolidation of corporate media and attendant-biased coverage, industrial corridors and people displaced by them, and the Kalpasar Dam which is to enclose a coastal gulf to retain river water.

Roy grounds her wide-ranging examples in a particular aspect of contemporary capitalism—philanthropy. Corporate philanthropy is accused here of many sins: white-washing corporate crimes through targeted funding of arts festivals; funding pressure-groups and lobbies to promote capitalist values

(and the United States of America's [US] hegemony); shaping past and current patterns of global governance through the Bretton Woods agreement, the United Nations (UN), and the Trilateral Commission (now "a penta-lateral commission, because it includes members from China and India") (Roy, 2012: 13); making microcredit a suitable development policy despite its serious flaws; influential awards that "become a gentle arbiter of what kind of activism is 'acceptable' and what is not" (Roy, 2012: 13); and creating an industry of human rights for "an atrocity-based analysis in which the larger picture can be blocked out" (Roy, 2012: 20).

Corporate philanthropy's sins are manifested through NGOs.

> Armed with their billions, these NGOs have waded into the world, turning potential revolutionaries into salaried activists, funding artists, intellectuals and filmmakers, gently luring them away from radical confrontation, ushering them in the direction of multi-culturalism, gender, community development—the discourse couched in the language of identity politics and human rights. (Roy, 2012: 20)

Whether feminist causes, African-American civil rights, South African resistance to apartheid, or dalit mobilization, NGOs domesticate the problem, rendering it amenable to market-friendly policies, weakening any attention on inequality and long-standing causes of poverty. "The privatization of everything has also meant the NGO-isation of everything" (Roy, 2012: 19).

Roy then places responsibility for the terrible developmental consequences she identifies on NGOs and the philanthropists funding them: "Global finance's way of buying into resistance movements, literally like shareholders buy shares in companies, and then try to control them from within" (Roy, 2012: 19). She decries a shift toward policies that privilege private interests over the public. For, by NGO-ization, Roy seems to mean groups funded by private capital, claiming to represent the public, yet unaccountable to it. She does not define this term, however, as we will see shortly.

There is much to admire in Roy's essay—her outrage at the state of poverty, dispossession, and state-sponsored violence in India and globally is genuine and reasonable. If the essay seems hopelessly discursive, her argument at times muddled, that does not vitiate the larger point being made. (For instance, it is certainly true that the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations play an influential role in development policies that undergird a market-liberal model of global governance; see Chapter 3 of this book.) And she does recognize that NGOs can also achieve beneficial developmental outcomes, "Some do remarkable, radical work and it would be a travesty to tar all NGOs with the same brush" (Roy, 2012: 19).

I wish to consider Roy's essay less for its merits but as a symptom of a current tendency in intellectual politics. Though the essay discusses many aspects representative of capitalism, it neglects the possibility that notions of development, management, and civil society are entwined in this contemporary moment. Yet the essay's concern with corporate power gestures to market-friendly alliances that have transformed the project of development. Though unacknowledged, management ideas influenced such corporate power. For one thing, the corporations she describes obviously employ managers—it is reasonable to expect a majority of them trained at business schools. It is these managers who are ultimately responsible for seizing public land for mining, colluding with state authorities in rights violations, and pursuing corporate branding through alliances with NGOs. For another, it is the ideas and practices of business management that enable and sustain the fragmented issue-based approaches of NGOs—the fragmentation that vitiates the potential for organized resistance: "Everything has become a 'subject', a separate, professionalised, special-interest issue. Community development, leadership development, human rights, health, education, reproductive rights, AIDS, orphans with AIDS—have all been hermetically sealed into their own silos with their own elaborate and precise funding brief" (Roy, 2012: 22). This "strange anodyne language" is shaped by an attention to what can be measured (and so managed), through the techniques available from corporations, a "technocratic obsession with gathering data ... 'numerical targets', 'scorecards of progress'" (Roy, 2012: 18).

Roy's essay turns on the untapped potential of global politics for resisting these excesses, in a realm commonly understood as apart from the market and the state, that is, of civil society. In her telling, this solidarity can arrest the terrible trends she documents, extinguish this capitalism, and make it a ghost story. Otherwise, we will have to keep pulling poverty away from its material referents and causes, making it a perverse

> identity problem. As though the poor have not been created by injustice but are a lost tribe who just happen to exist, and can be rescued in the short term by a system of grievance redressal (administered by NGOs on an individual, person to person basis), and whose long-term resurrection will come from Good Governance. (Roy, 2012: 22)

But in making such a call for global resistance, Roy casts an implicit binary on the social world, placing it in stark, separate realms of solidarity and privacy. This binary was already apparent in a prior essay, published nearly a decade earlier, when the US invaded Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein. In that essay, Roy (2003) celebrated civil society, arguing that it was the crucial hope for

arresting the drift of US militarism: "The fact is that the only institution in the world today that is more powerful than the American government, is American civil society" (Roy, 2003: 7). Civil society could shape politics toward peace and nonviolence. It was the only credible hope of removing oppressive dictatorships, since "other than strengthening the hand of civil society (instead of weakening it as has been done in the case of Iraq), there is no easy, pristine way of dealing with them" (Roy, 2003: 7).

Like other influential commentators, including Naomi Klein and George Monbiot, she offers a "critical perspective" in the broad sense of this phrase, expressing a deeply felt discomfort with the material and subjective conditions of this world, an interest in establishing the cause for such state of affairs, and persuading us to act on that basis. Roy's explanation for the current parlous state of the world is the dominance of corporate interests on state and civil society, with a distinction made between social groupings antipathetic to politics, and those capable of generating solidarity and resistance. In her use, NGOs and civil society are implicitly normative terms (NGOs = bad consequences; civil society = good consequences). "NGO-ized" laments the shift from solidaristic civil society toward privatized market interest. Normative representations such as these are not uncommon, and as we will shortly see, discussions of NGOs and their role in international development often paint them in positive or negative colors. By doing so, they also gesture toward fraught questions of justice, inequality, rights, and, more emotionally, hopes and expectations. In a crucial sense, distinguishing NGOs is closely tied up with the expectations of development held of them, expectations that hinge on that word "critical." However satisfying and reassuring such normative representations are, they do not consider the ideas, concepts, and practices that actually sustain what they critique. For this reason, Roy's essay is indicative of a tendency in contemporary intellectual politics to criticize capitalism without engaging sufficiently with the ideas, concepts, practices, and institutions that enable and sustain its current manifestations. An alternative approach towards a critical perspective would treat these distinctions as analytical problems shaped by historical circumstance. What histories do the phrases civil society and NGOs conjure? What do such histories say about development and management?

## This book's focus

This book studies development, management, and civil society from a critical perspective, by tracking the common understanding of these three terms across historical stages of global capitalism. The perspective taken up here is

historically sensitive; concepts of development and of management are tracked across historical periods, their affinities described, to explore their significance in shaping the roles available for civil society in arenas of development.

International development and management are hardly synonymous terms. Management conjures corporate organizations, business suits, achieving results in hierarchically ordered spaces. International development evokes other images; families confronting disasters, malnourished children, improving the lives of those in want and in need. Historically, the latter term was understood as concerned with ends of human striving and well-being: poverty reduction, gender equality, disaster response, income generation, climate change, family and infant nutrition, and other goals. Conversely, the former term was understood to be concerned with means, attaining results, ensuring employee work, and establishing work structures. Obviously, these are stereotypes. But even on these terms, both connote expertise associated with occupational groups.[1] Professional managers study business administration and work in corporations. Development professionals, in contrast, enjoy a wider variety of postgraduate choices, typically in the social sciences, and work in organizations associated with goals of welfare, relief, security, and advocacy. If both connote expertise, why are they so rarely linked together? Why are management and development usually studied apart from each other?

### *Reciprocal disinterest: management and development*

Historically few scholars of development studies showed interest in organizations and their functioning, or in management theories that explained such functioning. Postwar scholarship did consider the social and political contexts of development administration and emphasized the need for improved implementation capabilities (Riggs, 1964; Haque, 2010). However, even when in the occasional instance the words link in a phrase, managing development, the phrase is understood to mean coordinating and measuring development outcomes (Staudt, 1991), with less attention placed on what concepts animate organized action. However, more recently, there has been a conscious effort to apply management concepts to settings of international development, such as Lewis et al.'s (2003) study of organizational culture in World Bank–funded projects, Thomas' (1996) processual account of development management, Lewis' (2014) conceptualization of NGO management and Gulrajani's (2010) distinction of radical and reformist approaches. The trend now toward more interdisciplinary research on organizational procedures, strategies, work relationships, structures, leadership styles, or recruitment and career growth, also demands a historical understanding of these terms.

The disinterest was heartily reciprocated by early management academics. In an essay remarkable for its prescience, the American scholar Dwight Waldo (2006 [1964]) observed that American management scholars were disinterested in comparisons, instead eager to export their parochial ideas as a rigid template for the rest of the world. "Generally speaking, those teaching Business Administration and those doing research on business organizations have not been and are not now interested in conscious, careful comparative study" (Waldo, 2006 [1964]: 151). True then, true now. Even today, few management theorists consider larger questions of development, their scholarship remaining firmly attentive to private organizations engaged with the market, taking boundaries of domestic and international, societies and economies, mostly for granted. Organizational research on NGOs, aid agencies, government-run programs, or combinations thereof remains modest (though see Dar and Cooke, 2008; Dar, 2018; Contu and Girei, 2014; Girei, 2016; Chowdhury 2017). An exception to this trend was the "Bottom of the Pyramid" approach initiated by a prominent business school professor (Prahalad, 2004), which is discussed in Chapter 7 of this book. Otherwise, MOS and development studies still remain apart from each other, disciplinarily bound to different areas of attention. And yet, despite this lack of sustained theoretical engagement, strangely enough, implicitly and explicitly, practitioners take it as a given that international development organizations require good management practices to succeed. One reminder of this importance is the continuing resonance of "Development Management" still evoked to denote either the potential of management practices to generate development outcomes (Thomas, 1996), to access donor funds and use specialized assessment and facilitation tools, or simultaneously rationalized administration and enhanced policy implementation (McCourt and Gulrajani, 2010).

### Reciprocal misunderstanding: development and civil society

If development and management studies appear disinterested in each other, the same cannot be said of the interaction of development studies with notions of civil society. Since the 1980s discussions of civil society have become commonplace, with well-established clusters of research on NGOs. Here the challenge has been a different one, of a reciprocal misunderstanding. These research streams have tended to understand civil society and NGOs as synonymous terms, leaving unexplored a basic question: What precisely *is* an NGO? To the extent NGOs are considered efficient in delivering public services previously controlled by the state, for example, it is helpful to know what are the particular work patterns, control mechanisms, and governance of these organizations. What is it about

these work patterns that is synonymous with notions of civil society? If instead we were to argue that NGOs are adept at ensuring democratic grassroots processes of implementing development programs, again it is essential to know how these organizations design their work and assess their own performance measures, especially in terms of engagement with clients. As one seasoned observer has argued, "the approach of the civil-society-building industry that has proliferated since 1989 - with some exceptions—resembles a crude attempt to manipulate associational life in line with Western specifically North American liberal-democratic templates" (Edwards, 2004: 103–104).

There is an elementary misunderstanding in somehow equating the realm of civil society with the actions of a group of civil society actors named as NGOs. From the 1980s onward development theorists started to recognize the value of non-state engagement. Often this took the form of identifying non-state actors and documenting (at times advocating) their roles in development policy. Concomitant with criticism of state-led development initiatives was an emphasis on voluntary actions and voluntary actors. But to what extent was this representative of civil society? Were there other realms of civil society besides the preponderance of organized non-state actors? On the one hand civil society was itself misunderstood as somehow equivalent to non-state actors and, on the other hand, these non-state actors were themselves misunderstood as a unitary actor defined as a recognizable type, named the NGO. These category errors have led to a paradox. Yes, there has been a rapid growth of non-state actors in development, and calls for enhanced management knowledge relevant to these actors as well as more accessible management skills for their employees. Yet, despite such growth, there remains a chasm of expectations, cynicism, and suspicion of the intentions and capabilities of these actors. More on this in the section that follows.

The rest of this introduction makes two arguments. I explain how management and development offer conceptual rewards in terms of understanding civil society when considered together; and I show that a historical approach in understanding these three sets of terms is essential for contemporary critical assessments of them.

## Twinning development and management

This book's chapters present a periodized affinity of management and development, "twinning" them. Twinning does not indicate strong, closely held similarities as much as partial and incomplete affinities, shaped by similar interests and circumstances, in that moment. To show how management is twinned with development is to indicate similarities in the same way, say, as twinning the town of Delft, the Netherlands, with Arita, Japan—two quite different places that did

share traditions of producing and trading porcelain pottery during the latter part of the 17th century. Rather than assert that these are two very different fields of knowledge, or argue the converse, that they share more themes than respective votaries care to acknowledge, this book shows periodized theoretical emphases that historically defined each domain at moments of affinity.

What generated these periodized affinities? Over the past two centuries, concepts and terms of development and management became wedded to epistemic domains, fields of knowledge that asserted a role for trained, certified expertise, and offered models for professional identity on that basis. The interest of theorists in both fields was to assert a professional identity. This led to exclusive claims of expertise. Such claims were made in historical circumstances shared by both domains, contributing to the affinities presented here. Underlying the turn to professional assertion was the historical trajectory of capitalism, which, as we will shortly see, enabled the expansion of organized capital while generating contradictions that required new ways of extracting value. Being attentive to the theoretical shifts in these two domains, while sensitive to this historical trajectory is crucial, I maintain, for asserting a critical perspective.

In fact managers in international development organizations regularly twin development and management concepts in daily practice. Similarly business managers engage with questions of development regularly, in terms of local employment, ecological costs, ethical trade, and CSR. However, theoretically speaking, consider how the picture offered by each domain changes when twinned with the other, and particularly in terms of civil society. This can be illustrated through a well-known novella that is a parable of colonial development, but also a reminder of the dangers of unreflective management practice.

### Kurtz, a manager of development

Through the latter 19th century, the Belgian Kingdom controlled the Congo Free State in Africa, and traded its ivory, timber, and rubber. The profitable trade was accompanied by lofty claims of elevating people's lives. King Leopold declared that his intention in controlling the region was to educate and protect the Congolese. In reality, his officers supervised a ruthless trade that extracted regional resources, under brutal labor conditions. Africans worked in conditions of impoverishment and starvation, exhausted, terrified of penalties that included amputating offenders' hands for petty theft. Joseph Conrad's (2008 [1899]) celebrated novella, *Heart of Darkness,* is a fictionalized account of the colonial agents who executed these goals, including the Belgian multinational trading company, Société Anonyme Belge pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo, that employed Conrad as a captain, from June to December 1890.

Conrad wrote at a time "of aggressive imperial expansionism and global trade in commodities" (Mishra, 2015: 90) and *Heart of Darkness* shows the resource development policies followed at the time. The protagonist, Marlow, is sent upriver to rescue a commercial agent, Kurtz, who has fallen seriously ill. Marlow's employer, the Société, collects and sells ivory, with procedures to train, track performance, discipline, and reward employees for such a purpose. It is an organization, with well-defined ends and means, and deserves attention not solely from a perspective of development, or management, but in fact both, together. The resource trade that is the novel's background, requires managers, through systems of discipline and rewards (authority patterns, incentives, and job expectations), to better exploit these resources.

## Office politics

Marlow overhears two employees of the Société at the upriver station. "The high stillness [of the forest] confronted these two figures with its ominous patience, waiting for the passing away of a fantastic invasion" (Conrad, 1988 [1902]: 57). They speak of Kurtz with malice. This dashing commercial agent has been very successful through unorthodox means of ivory harvesting—appointing himself a local God, beheading offenders, and acquiring a tribal mistress. More than brutal excess, what really troubles these two employees is the threat to their careers. Kurtz's successful performance indicates good prospects. Promotion is certain. Since Kurtz has fallen seriously ill, the two conspire to delay the boat leaving to collect him, to ensure he does not return. Despite the effulgent vegetation, the forlorn sight of a mired vessel next to where they converse, what we are overhearing is a prosaic (though sinister) office conversation between two managers. (One of the two is, in fact, designated a manager.)

Conrad's fictional Kurtz was based on several real-life models—"*all* of the white officers in charge of Leopold's empire were in essence Kurtzes" (Brantlinger, 1985: 376, original emphasis). One such was Arthur Hodister, who served with great success as a commercial agent, well known for assiduous pursuit of profit, commitment to staff, and ruthlessness toward Africans employed (Sherry, 1971: 105–113). Contemporary reports shed light on the manner in which Hodister's actions were interpreted by work colleagues. "Si Hodister, à certains moments, n'a pu mieux satisfaire aux besoins de ses agents, c'est réellement, je le répète, qu'il y a été forcé par les circonstances" ["If Hodister at times could not better satisfy the needs of his agents, it was really, and I repeat it, that he was forced by circumstances"] (Doré 1892, quoted in Sherry, 1971: 116; my translation). Colleagues excused Hodister's excesses, "forced by circumstances," seeing them as an adaptation to the demands made. Conflicts in accomplishing goals meant

that the means used had to bend toward ends. So what if Hodister mistreated some African and Arab employees, how else would he meet his ivory targets, and the Societé its profit targets?

Hodister and Kurtz shared the career trajectory of commercial agents on their way to greater things. But their commitment to the organization, which ensured their rise up the corporate ladder, so to speak, also ensured their death. They were casualties of office politics: Hodister from territorial rivalry with Arab-affiliated African merchants, Kurtz from the machinations already described. Hodister's life shared with Kurtz the pattern of "a man of virtue and pretensions and particularly of courage who fails partly betrayed by lesser men, partly by his own aspirations" (Sherry, 1971: 118). Yet it was a betrayal not of lesser men as much as of the demands made by a particular organizational context. The very working of office life undermined their ability to achieve goals, or at least, to survive the effort of doing so.

Greed for ivory and timber, harsh punishment, disgusting work conditions, negligible nourishment, and the frank delight with which Europeans behave as a superior race to those they exploit are observed by Conrad as symptoms of the sickening nature of the colonial project, the hypocrisy of its pious pretensions. Organizational and personal ends are deeply corrupted by the choice of means that work African labor to death. Yet this enterprise of colonial resource development relies on a secret sharer, the arrangements through which people are coordinated to achieve these goals. Ultimately what animates Conrad's anguish and rage is not only the acquisition of resources and their conversion into financial capital through global trade but also the manner in which it is organized, the ways labor is appropriated for a profitable purpose. "Conrad's voyages are undertaken invariably in the service of one or another mode of surplus accumulation" (Mishra, 2015: 90).

*Daily work*

While it is rare to discuss *Heart of Darkness* in terms of an interplay of development and management, Conrad did have some insight into senior managerial decision-making. His close friend, Fountaine Weare Hope, was a company director, and it was on his yawl *Nellie* that they watched the Thames at sunset, recalled in the novella's well-known first lines. Conrad's fiction shows an empathy for managers, mostly European, and their damning damnable development-related work, coordinating activities, responding to demands from above, ensuring compliance from those below, work  that typically entailed extracting and trading natural resources from colonies. The empathy is usually directed toward those enforcing daily work, less those confronting its conditions. His characters are in the thick