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# **Capturing the political? The role of political analysis in the multi-disciplining of development studies**

**GPRG-WPS-006**

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Website: <http://www.gprg.org/>

The support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is gratefully acknowledged. The work was part of the programme of the ESRC Global Poverty Research Group.

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**Sam Hickey<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract**

*This article analyses the recent resurgence of political analysis within international development. It argues that although new conceptual approaches have brought valuable insights concerning the links between popular agency, institutional politics and development possibilities, several problems remain. These include a tendency either to overlook or to under-theorise some important linkages between politics and development; a general reluctance to engage critically with the notion of development itself or to disaggregate key concepts such as 'poverty'; a reluctance to adopt insights from political economy perspectives, and a problematic tendency towards quantifying political phenomena. Overall, the contribution of political analysis to a genuinely multidisciplinary development studies turns on its capacity to reveal how 'the political' as well as 'politics' links to development, a task achieved most successfully in approaches that weave historical and political sociology perspectives into political analysis, and engage with critical theory.*

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank members of the GPRG research group for their comments and advice regarding an earlier version of this paper, particularly John Toye. The critical advice of an anonymous reviewer proved to be particularly helpful in re-shaping the article. The support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is gratefully acknowledged. The work was part of the programme of the ESRC Global Poverty Research Group.

## **1. Introduction**

‘...it has become commonplace to accept that “politics matters” for the successful pursuit of pro-poor policies. But what kind of political analysis is needed to fill out the gaps in understanding?’ (Whitehead and Gray-Molina 2003: 33).

The recent surge of political analysis within development studies forms an important dimension of current debates concerning the need for a more multidisciplinary approach to poverty analysis. This renewed interest has been broad, focusing on the various ways in which political processes, actors, institutions, events, ideologies and struggles inform the reproduction and reduction of poverty (Harriss 2000, Hossain and Moore 2001, Webster and Engberg-Pedersen 2002, Houtzager and Moore 2003). Heralding its onset, Toyé (1999) initially argued that political science should become the pre-eminent discipline within development studies. Although there has since been little sign of this happening, the resurgence of political analysis has been notable and, as yet, subject to little critical reflection. This article starts by briefly locating the new politics and development turn in relation to broader shifts in development theory and policy. It then analyses the ways and extent to which a selection of the key conceptual approaches to political analysis – namely political capital, political capabilities, the polity approach and political space – contribute towards the multi-disciplining of development studies. This is followed by a composite analysis of these approaches, drawing together common themes, problems and comparative issues, before the conclusion returns to the issue of how political analysis can best contribute towards a more multi-disciplinary form of development studies.

## **2. Politics and the multi-disciplining of development**

The dominant paradigms and theoretical frameworks within development studies have tended not to accord ‘politics’ a primary role.<sup>2</sup> As argued by Petiteville (1998), it is notable that each of the dominant approaches to post-war development theory tended to forward a ‘mythical’ view of the state – ‘the developer state’ (modernisation), the ‘puppet state’ (dependency) and ‘the minimalist state’ (neoliberal theory) – none of which are grounded in political theory. The ‘political development’

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<sup>2</sup> See Goldsworthy (1989: fn2) for further critiques of the absence of politics from most development theory. As Tornquist (1999) offers an authoritative account concerning the trajectory of political analysis within development studies, this section will only briefly review the key moments.

dimension of modernisation theory was highly problematic, particularly in its tendency to view political systems and processes as somehow autonomous from the rest of society (Martinussen 1997: 168, also Cammack 1997). Within the structuralist accounts that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s, both dependency and world systems theory exaggerated the extent to which political institutions and processes within developing countries were subordinated to external economic relations. Over the 1980s and much of the 1990s, the state declined as a key focus within development theory and policy, under threat from globalisation and overlooked in favour of market-led and then civil society-focused debates (e.g. Schuurman 2000). With much of political science still tied to the state as its primary focus for analysis, the perceived relevance of its insights for development studies swiftly declined.

By the time that the state re-emerged as a more central focus within development policy in the late 1990s (e.g. World Bank 1997), it was primarily as a decentralised, slimmed-down, managerial institution charged with securing 'good governance'. Although some observers credited the good governance agenda with effectively putting 'politics back in the development paradigm' (Santiso 2001: 167), experiences to date challenge these claims. This agenda has tended to prioritise the technical over the political, focusing on state efficiency, rather than issues of 'state reform' or 'social and political change' (de Alcantara 1998: 107). Rather than extending understandings of how politics relate to poverty reduction, this aspect of political conditionality has been concerned with a different type of 'disciplining' to the 'multi-disciplining' of development discussed in this Special Issue, having more to do with correction and control (Williams 1996, Abrahamsen 2000).

The other approach initially credited with 'bringing politics back in', this time at the level of popular agency, has been the social capital and civil society paradigm. Here, organised citizens are framed as watchdogs on the errant state and as providing the links between democracy and development (e.g. Putnam 1993). Again, both concepts have been beset by charges that they fail to capture the politics of democratisation processes and collective action (e.g. Putzel 1997, Howell and Pearce 2001). For some, (e.g. Houtzager 2003, also Harriss et al 2004), the 'radical polycentrism' of the civil society paradigm has deepened the problem of 'democratic fragmentation', thus hindering progressive politics in the face of growing corporate monopolisation in the economic sphere. A particular problem concerns the exclusion of more political actors such as political parties, which 'remain among the weakest components of the democratisation process, and the least assisted from abroad'

(Santiso 2001: 163). Again, such concepts are charged with the further 'depoliticisation' of development studies (Harriss 2001), an insult compounded for some by the injurious sense that the rise of social capital has (once more) involved a disciplining of a different kind to that sought here, namely the continued colonisation of development studies by economics (Fine 1999).

The problems concerning attempts to bring politics into development studies are closely related to the disciplines underlying political economy and ideological norms. For example, its normative, policy-focussed character has led 'development' itself to be critiqued as an essentially depoliticising project (e.g. Ferguson 1994), whereby the historical and contextual features of 'developing' countries are air-brushed from view in order to provide a blank canvas onto which western-devised solutions can be painted, and in which the political can only be included insofar as it can be managed and controlled. More recently, the tendency to adopt a narrow understanding of politics reflect the broader ways in which 'third way' approaches to politics within the current neo-liberal hegemony (Porter and Craig 2003), tend to mobilise 'a view of politics which has evacuated the dimension of antagonism', and lacks any perspective concerning the power relations that structure societies (Mouffe 2000: 14).

Historically, political science has been 'heavily complicit in (this) modernising project' (Young 2003:1), with the political development approach revealing a tendency within the discipline 'dedicated to promoting the superior values of liberal pluralistic values' (Almond 1990: 18). This complicity between political science and the mainstream of donor-led development also appears to inform the wave of new approaches to politics and development discussed here. For example, two of the approaches discussed here emerged from papers that were originally commissioned by the UK Department for International Development, and used as background papers for the World Bank's (2000) landmark World Development Report 2000/1. However, pessimistic conclusions do not necessarily follow from this juxtaposition. Despite the critical dismissal of good governance and social capital, these moves appear to have opened up spaces within international development for discussions of power and politics that have not been closed down.<sup>3</sup> Some donors have been at the forefront of seeking improved approaches, with some evidence that their thinking has started to move beyond the technocratic and towards an understanding of the underlying

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<sup>3</sup> Moore (2003) forwards this argument at the general level, while the work of Corbridge et al (2005) and Bebbington et al (2004) make the case with reference to the good governance and social capital agendas respectively.

political forms and processes associated with longer-term processes of development (e.g. DFID 2003).

A useful way of capturing the required shift within politics and development, away from the technocratic and towards a more politicised view, is to draw on Chantal Mouffe's (1993) distinction between 'politics' and 'the political'. Here, *politics* refers to 'the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a sense of social order and organization', while *the political* constitutes 'the antagonistic dimension that is inherent in human societies and which is located within the struggles of diverse social groups for power and resources' (Mouffe, 1995, cited in Corbridge et al 2005: 257). As such, a benchmark for the new politics and development turn is the extent to which its conceptual approaches offer insights into how the political as well as politics shapes development.

### **3. New frames of analysis within the politics and development turn**

A window onto the politics and development turn, albeit a partial one, is offered by the series of conceptual approaches that have merged therein, and which claim to offer particular insights into the links between politics and development. These can be divided between those that look explicitly at issues of popular agency – such as *political capital* and *political capabilities* – and those that also seek to examine the broader institutional context within which agency operates – the *polity* and *political space* approaches.<sup>4</sup> The application of these new approaches to date has so far been limited, leaving any judgements necessarily limited in scope and finality. As such, the focus here is to critically assess their underlying as well as realised potential to 'bring politics back in' to development studies, based on an analysis of their underlying ontological, theoretical and methodological characteristics.

#### *Political capital*

The concept of political capital has become increasingly conceptualised in development studies as an extra dimension within the 'Livelihoods Framework' (e.g. Carney 1999), and defined as being 'based on access to decision-making' in the political process (Rakodi 1999: 318). Despite limited applications, it is accorded a high degree of explanatory power, such that political capital 'is one of the key capital assets on which people draw to build their livelihoods' (Baumann 2000: 6), and acts

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<sup>4</sup> For reasons of space, other conceptual approaches that have also been associated with the repoliticisation of development studies, such as citizenship (e.g. Gaventa 2002, Hickey and Mohan 2005), are not covered directly.

'as a gatekeeper asset, permitting or preventing the accumulation of other assets upon which successful poverty-reducing growth depends' (Booth et al 1998: 79, quoted in Rakodi 1999: 318). In a bid to overcome the 'localism' that has limited other approaches to popular agency in development studies (Mohan and Stokke 2000), political capital is linked directly to policy influence, such that it 'consists of the resources which an actor...can dispose of and use to influence policy formation processes and realise outcomes which are in an actor's perceived interest' (Birner and Wittner 2000: 6), with resources including political literacy, ideological resources, and civil and political rights.<sup>5</sup>

As yet, the concept of political capital lacks the historical elaboration that has been afforded social capital – in either a conceptual (Farr 2004) or institutional (Bebbington et al 2004) sense – and also the same semblance of analytical nuance with regards the different forms it might take (e.g. bridging, bonding). However, it is possible to discern two distinct approaches to its conceptualisation. The first (and predominant) approach draws on resource mobilisation theory (Birner and Wittner 2000), and concerns itself with the construction of political capital from different resources and its instrumental usage towards particular ends (developmental or otherwise). The second approach draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and is more concerned with how power itself is constituted, and how agency is constrained and enabled vis-à-vis relations of power. These different approaches tend to produce different types of insights into the links between politics and development, and will be critically compared here.

The main focus within the first approach has been to examine the links between political capital and other capital assets (e.g. social, human, financial). One study of environmental struggles revealed how pro-poor organisations transformed their social capital (e.g. organisational density) into political capital through sustained and opportunistic campaigns (e.g. of electoral leverage, disruptive rallies and alliance-making), in ways that secured favourable policy outcomes (Birner and Wittner 2000). Similarly, Booth and Richard (1998: 782) argue that in order for associational activism in Central America to have political significance, it needs to go beyond social capital and 'foster attitudes and behaviors that actually influence regimes in some

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<sup>5</sup> Some studies have also suggested that the notion of political capital might be integrated into the livelihoods framework in order to help plan strategic entry points into policy processes (e.g. Hickey 2005a), thus 'moving the framework from analysis to action' (Baumann and Sinha 2001: 1).

way'. They found that high levels of social capital (e.g. communal-level activism) associated with lower levels of democracy, while formal group activism (e.g. unions) and higher levels of political capital (political participation and a commitment to democratic norms) were closely associated with higher levels of democracy.<sup>6</sup> A further quantitative study in Kenya 'proved' that district-level political capital shaped the distribution of public goods, whereby districts lacking representatives at the higher levels of government recorded relatively low human development indicators (Weinreb 2001: 453-3).<sup>7</sup> For some, political capital can form the key principle of differentiation in contexts where most forms of accumulation are controlled (Earle 1999: 180), as in China where membership of a political party (a proxy for political capital) has been strongly associated with significantly higher levels of income (Liu 2003), and also privileged access to public policy reforms (Raymo and Lie 2000). Finally, Baumann (2000) revealed how local government officials in India use their political capital to capture the financial benefits of anti-poverty programmes, and also secures their transfers to higher posts in the bureaucracy, thus further enhancing their political capital.

Overall, there is some validity in claims that political capital has extended livelihoods analysis in useful ways, particularly in terms of separating the social and the political, so as to better examine the links. However, the final study cited above – by Baumann – is instructive concerning any 'added value' that the notion brings to understanding the links between politics and development, given that these findings simply re-enforce the now familiar growing literature on elite capture within decentralisation reforms (e.g. Crook and Sverrisson 2001, Francis and James 2003). Moreover, the assets-based understanding of politics tends to reduce the political an instrumental form, and offer a standard 'rational actor' reading of politics of the type much critiqued by recent observers (e.g. Moore 2003). It is not clear that popular political agency can be reduced to into such atomised forms of manoeuvring (Bryceson and Bank 2001), devoid of any sense of the cultural importance invested in such struggles. The problems of this approach are revealed most fully when operationalised in quantitative research. As with the quantitative turn in social capital research (e.g. Narayan and Cassidy 2001), the disciplining of the political through methodological individualism into a form that can be surveyed by the dominant

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<sup>6</sup> Similar results were found in South Africa (Orkin 1995).

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that this quantitative study employed a particularly unsophisticated understanding of ethnicity and patron-client politics, to the extent that its categorisations and conclusions cannot bear much explanatory weight.

discipline within development studies tends towards an essentially apolitical understanding of how agency operates, particularly vis-à-vis relations of power. So, despite claims that political capital helps to explain the power relations involving poor people (Baumann 2000: 6; Rakodi 1999: 318), the resource mobilisation approach tends to elide such issues.

It is here that Bourdieu's (1990) approach to 'capital' might contribute, drawing on his theory of how social and political practices 'are constituted by and constitute their dispositions (habitus), the capital they possess and the fields within which they operate' (Stokke 2002: 5).<sup>8</sup> Here, 'capital' is seen as a relational concept that invokes the Marxian tradition (Dyke 1999: 194), with 'political capital' viewed as 'a special form of political power and resources' (Xiaoju 2004: 6). This approach seeks to explain the ways in which such actors have influence in relation to the broader field of power relations (involving class, gender and other differences) in which they operate (e.g. Xiaoju 2004). Here, the success of collective actors in achieving their ends tends to be shaped by 'the constellation of forces within the political field, the volume and composition of social capital, and the possession of symbolic capital' (Stokke 2002: 21). For Harriss et al (2004), this approach re-politicises debates over local democratic politics in developing countries, and 'highlights the critical role of political parties' – the primary form that has 'accumulated a symbolic capital of recognition and loyalties and which has given itself for and through political struggle' (Bourdieu 1991: 194-5, quoted in Stokke 2002:13) – and also trade unions (Beckman 2004).

Although welcome, this move towards a closer understanding of power may prove insufficient in terms of securing a future for political capital within development studies. In the first place, it is not clear that Bourdieu's theory of practice, which he used primarily to explain the relationship of individuals to power-holders (Dyke 1999: 194), can be so readily applied to studies of collective action. Second, the level of (often justified) antipathy towards social capital within significant quarters of development studies suggests that any closely related concept probably will stir more controversy than it is (analytically) worth.

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<sup>8</sup> Here, 'habitus' (the dispositions that establish classificatory principles and organising principles of action that in turn generate practice) and the 'field' (a relational space of positions, occupied by actors, and the relations of power obtaining between those positions; political fields are characterised by a competition for the legitimate right to speak on behalf of others).

### *Political capabilities*

Political capabilities have been broadly defined 'as the institutional and organizational resources as well as collective ideas available for effective political action' (Whitehead and Gray-Molina 2003: 32). Here, political capabilities constitute 'a set of navigational skills needed to move through political space, and the tools to re-shape this space where this is possible' (Williams 2004: 95), and might be said to include 'personal political capabilities, self-confidence, capacity for community organisation, recognition of dignity, and collective ideas' (Moore and Putzel 1999: 13). Again, this approach marks a conscious attempt to bring politics into development studies, with Williams (2004) claiming it offers a means of 're-politicising' the theory and practice of participation in development and governance. More ambitiously, Moore (2003: 276) argues that it offers a 'superior' way of thinking about strategies for promoting political inclusiveness compared to 'empowerment', in that it draws attention to:

'...the longer term; the process of political learning; the ways in which ideas, identities and collective self-awareness that constitute valuable political resources in one context can be reframed to suit other contexts; and the importance of the intersection between the three arenas driving pro-poor policy-making – the institutional characteristics of the state; the organisational resources of the poor and the content of pro-poor policy-making itself'.

Drawing on the work of Amartya Sen, political capabilities arguably represents a logical and necessary extension of this approach, with critics noting that Sen's analysis 'would benefit from a theoretical grounding that explains the process through which the empowerment of disadvantaged groups occurs, and the social changes involved' (Hill 2003: 124). With its focus on collective action in securing long-term pro-poor change, rather than the strategising of individual entrepreneurs, the political capabilities approach to agency attempts to go beyond the individualism that pervades both the political capital approach and Sen's work (Gore 1997), and which blinds much liberal thinking to the constitutive role of antagonism and power (the political) in social life (Mouffe 1993). This move also undermines that pervasive and apolitical focus on the 'community' in development studies, and promises to open up development studies more fully to the rich literature on social movements and collective action.

The limited applications of political capabilities approach to date have been divided between quantitative and qualitative studies of what Amartya Sen has termed the 'evaluative' and 'agency' aspects of the capability approach. Here, the quantitative/evaluative approach aims to measure valued aspects of people's lives and assess progress along these dimensions (UNDP 2002), while the qualitative/agency approach (Whitehead and Gray-Molina 2003, Williams 2004), is concerned with 'what human beings can do to achieve such improvements, particularly through policy and political changes' (Fukuda-Parr 2003: 303). According to Whitehead and Gray-Molina (2003), pro-poor change within political systems needs to be analysed in relation to broader struggles between different social forces over resources and ideologies over time. For example, the inclusion of local peasant organisations in processes of governance since Bolivia's 1994 Law of Popular Participation in Bolivia (LPP) is related back to an earlier episode of broadly pro-poor policy-making, whereby the 1950s programme of agrarian reform led to the formation of peasant's organisations, that were able to take advantage of (and be further empowered through) later policy openings. Although the reading of the LPP offered by Whitehead and Gray-Molina is problematic in some important respects,<sup>9</sup> the emphasis on the political roots of collective action offers a more persuasive explanation than the more voluntaristic approach offered by social capital theory (Putzel 1997), and reveals the key role of government policy in casting the poor (or certain groups thereof) as legitimate citizens. The notion that collective memories of political action can inspire contemporary forms have also been evidenced during processes of democratisation in Africa over the past fifteen years, whereby the same associational forms – particularly hometown development associations – that emerged in the democratic openings of the late colonial era re-appeared (Geschiere and Gugler 1998).

The operationalisation of political capabilities through quantitative attitudinal surveys has arguably revealed fewer close insights into the politics of poverty reduction (UNDP 2002). Here, political capabilities have been conceived as: social capital; a commitment to the country; relative institutional trust; openness toward and commitment to change; and a willingness to deliberate. Co-relations revealed that a lack of commitment to the country rated most highly among the most advantaged socio-economic group, whereas the most disadvantaged classes see their fate as

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<sup>9</sup> For example, this study notably fails to recognise the extent to which this law empowered certain sections of the poor and marginal, while excluding women's groups who lack of rights to land (Jeppesen 2002).

tied to that of the country and believe in it for this reason. However, the cross-sectional nature of the data makes it impossible to go beyond correlates to more causal explanations, or to regain the historical insights that underpin the political capability approach (panel data on political capabilities may help here). As argued by Williams (2004: 95), understanding political capabilities should focus on 'what knowledges and performances are required to (re-) negotiate political space', rather than quantifying levels or producing institutional mappings of political capability.

However, although political capabilities has significantly more mileage than political capital as a concept – and also offers an important supplement to the growing rights-based approach in development (Nussbaum 2003: 36-40) – several problems are also apparent, some of which may be contingent on its relative newness as a concept, some which appear to be more intrinsic. With regards the former, the focus on political capabilities as emerging solely through the interactions of poor people with pro-poor policy-making needs to be extended to explore broader possibilities, including the possibility that repressive and anti-poor policies and might also help generate political capabilities through organised forms of resistance. More broadly, Moore (2003: 275) notes that the approach remains abstract and that 'those wishing to employ it for more analytic purposes need to find more operational definitions'. Although further reflection and empirical application may help here, the problem of vagueness is one that pervades the capability approach more generally (Pressman and Summerfield 2002: 431), and may not be easily resolved. Further problems also seem to be more intrinsic. First, there is a danger of over-emphasising the power of popular agency here, reflecting the wider failure to take power relations seriously within the capability approach (Hill 2003), although efforts to invoke Foucault as a means of reading the ways in which power works in participatory encounters may offer a way forward here (Williams 2004: 103). The second, and arguably greater constraint, concerns explicit efforts by proponents of political capabilities to restrict its usage, such that 'the analysis of political capabilities assumes national and sub-national politics in new democracies with reasonably stable boundaries and relatively coherent systems of public policy-making and implementation' (Whitehead and Gray-Molina 2003: 34). This methodological barrier effectively rules out large numbers of developing countries from analysis, a curious approach given the supposed relevance to issues of poverty reduction, and one that appears to re-assert the narrow concern of political development with 'political order' (Huntington 1968).

This stance is clearly inconsistent with the overall capability approach. Although Sen holds that a deepening of democracy will benefit the poor, he does not suggest that capability analysis is somehow of less relevance to countries lacking deep levels of democratisation – indeed, increased political capabilities would arguably contribute to this process. More generally, this would seem to be a peculiar approach to take for the comparative and international field of development studies. With particular reference to understanding politics in Africa, there is little evidence that unique forms of political analysis are required, and quite a lot to the contrary, as suggested by Bayart's (1993) call that 'exoticism be damned'. Mamdani (1996) has shown how the apparently 'eurocentric' notion of 'citizenship' can be used to offer a penetrative analysis of African politics, with his findings in turn used to analyse politics in Mexico (Perez-Bustillo 2001). This reflects not only the fact that citizenship, or membership of a *political community*, is grounded in that most primary of political concepts (Chabal 1992), but reveals an unnecessarily limited and limiting approach to comparative politics within political capability research.

#### *Polity approach*

Emerging from the same collaborative research effort as the political capabilities approach, the polity approach to political analysis has been described as '...a powerful analytical tool to help (development theorists and practitioners) think through how they might, directly or indirectly, help achieve the empowerment of the poor' (Moore 2003: 276). This move away from a direct focus on agency and towards the institutional characteristics of the state is heavily influenced by historical institutionalism, particularly the efforts of Theda Skocpol (1992) to analyse the political origins of American social policy. Here, the potential for purposeful change (pro-poor or otherwise), depends on 'the ways in which state and societal actors are constituted, become politically significant, and interact across the public-private divide' (Houtzager 2003: 13), which can in turn be understood as being shaped by four main components, namely: the relationship between state and societal actors and their capacities; the 'fit' between actors and the 'historically changing points of access and leverage allowed by a nation's political institutions' (which are determined by the degrees of centralisation and bureaucratisation); the fact that political institutions severely constrain the ability of actors to engineer this fit, and also influence which social groups coalesce into collective actors; and, finally, the sequenced episodes of mutual engagement (involving conflict and negotiation) or iterative struggles, that in turn influence later ones (Houtzager 2003: 14-18).

Using this approach to explain how localised forms of collective action in the Philippines and Peru managed to gain access to the centres of national policy-making, reveals that pro-poor coalitions had most influence when they faced a relatively coherent state with a professionalised bureaucracy whose authority was broadly accepted (Houtzager with Pattenden: 90). This draws attention to the civil service in a more politicised way than debates over good governance have tended to. Here, state bureaucracies play a central role in processes of democratisation, as well as service delivery, a finding strongly noted by Berman's (2004) study of how democratisation and civic politics in many countries in Africa have floundered on the failure to transform state bureaucracies. From this it can be argued that 'the state and public policy on the one side, and civil and political society on the other, are mutually constitutive. They shape one another' (Moore 2003: 262). Large-scale membership organisations and social movements are unlikely to emerge where states are weak. An important implication for development policy here is that the most effective way of empowering the poor would be to strengthen public authority rather than seek to directly resource civil society organisations, and perhaps also to support the development of the programmatic political parties that have historically secured norms of public service (Szeftel 2000). This argument is taken up by James Putzel (2004), who suggests that even where development agencies cannot engage with political society, they should avoid the tendency to undermine it, as with constant accusations of 'corruption'. Further applications of the polity approach show that, contrary to claims within the civil society approach concerning the necessity of maintaining 'autonomy' from potentially co-opting forms of politics, it is the capacity of civil society actors to represent the poor can be significantly increased by closer working relationships with political actors (Lavalley et al 2005). This is the case both in terms of links to political parties and with reformist elements of the state, and opens up new strategic opportunities for civil society theorists and activists alike.

A further key relationship – that between the poor and national elites – is found to be closely defined by the level of intra-elite conflict over patterns of political authority at national level; the geography of state-society relations and the strength of the social bases of poor people's organisations (Houtzager with Pattenden 2003: 91). The first finding here is particularly insightful, significantly advancing the recent focus on how the attitudes of political elites shape poverty reduction (Hossain and Moore 2001, also below), by revealing how the *political* – here the level of antagonism at the political centre – directly shapes outcomes for the poor. Here, the optimum level of intra-elite conflict for the poor involves medium-high levels of institutionalised conflict,

as this pushes elite groups into forging alliances with new social forces. Low levels of conflict will tend to allow elites groups to ignore the claims of such groups, while high levels of less or un-institutionalised conflict will tends to produce forms of instability that are inimical to sustained coalition-building. This again resonates with current explanations of how prevailing political forms in some African countries have tended not to have developmental outcomes. As Bayart notes, 'What African political regimes have in common is that they are dominated by the competition that divides their political actors' (Bayart 2003: 40), with these factional struggles tending to 'shoot through the public institutions charged with delivering development' (Bayart 2003: 41).

Overall, the polity approach is able to reveal the ways in which 'the political' shapes 'politics' by focusing directly on struggles both between and within elite and popular groups, in ways that less historical and more technocratic approaches to 'governance' have often failed to grasp. However, the approach shares with political capabilities a limiting tendency to focus on policy as the only form of political engagement undertaken by governments that is worthy of analysis. This ignores the salience of other political events such as elections, the potential for political mobilisation to occur on the basis of government inaction, and also the more discursive forms of politics (e.g. political discourse). More problematic still is the fact that the causal structure of the polity approach rests explicitly on the notion of 'path dependence' (Houtzager 2003: 13), despite recent studies that reveal that the ways in which how political institutions and social movements develop over time do not conform to the expectations of path dependency (Alexander 2001, Oliver and Myers 2003). In particular, the notion of 'path-dependence' leaves little scope for actors to influence structural conditions, and so effectively 'eclipses the role of political ideas, political action and the state' in determining political progress (Putzel 1997: 946). This suggests that the historical turn within the polity approach seems to be in danger of overshadowing the political to an extent as yet unjustified by the evidence for path dependence.

### *Political space*

The notion of 'political space' also seeks to capture the interplay between agency, institutions and development possibilities, and resonates with Mouffe's (2000: 17) demand that political analysis engages with 'the contemporary proliferation of political spaces and the multiplicity of democratic demands'. A term familiar within political geography (of which more later), its more specific codification into a systematic

analytical framework by Webster and Engberg-Pedersen (2002) focuses on three key dimensions of political space: the institutional channels through which policy formulation and implementation can be accessed, controlled or contested by the poor; the political discourses in which poverty and poverty reduction are significant issues; and the social and political practices of the poor. The methodological individualism that underpins some notions discussed above is absent here, with ethnographic and historical case-studies typically preferred to survey-based work (e.g. Paerregaard 2002, Villareal 2002, Millstein et al 2003, Hickey 2005b).

Such studies have the potential advantage of exploring the precise ways in which different political actors, institutions and discourse shape poverty reduction in particular contexts. For example, Villareal's (2002) study of political space in Mexico shows how the poor make alignments with certain sympathetic elements of the state and also play different departments and levels of the state off against each other. In South Africa, the concept reveals how Homeless People's Federation engaged in various socio-political practices (e.g. lobbying, positioning on the political terrain) in ways that enabled them to transform the discourse surrounding housing policy in South Africa towards a more participatory one, thus securing the political inclusion of poor and marginal communities in relevant policy processes (Millstein et al 2003): 463). Local peasant movements in Peru, meanwhile, have tended to adopt a more pragmatic and less oppositional approach to relations of domination within their political space in seeking to extend their control over land, and have tended to reproduce the changing contours of national power hierarchies (Paerregaard 2002). Adopting a multi-levelled and historicised approach to political space, Paerregaard reveals how peasant groups successively engaged with different forms of regime and discourse as opportunities presented themselves (e.g. agrarian reform in the 1970s, democratisation in the 1990s), while withdrawing when political space for peasant participation shrank (e.g. during the civil conflict and neoliberalism of the 1980s).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Two further insights are worthy of mention. The first concerns the way in which political space recognises a wider range of actors and institutions, such as the role of traditional leaders determining access to land, as in Blom (2002), rather than wished away as in more 'modernist' accounts of 'civil society' critiqued by Howell and Pearce (2001). Second, the understanding of policy processes suggested by the notion of political space recognises that 'anti-poverty' interventions are rarely straightforward responses to poverty, but respond 'to a larger arena of contestation where other issues are at stake and both national and international actors have a large say' (Villareal 2002: 83), issues that include the prevailing development ideology of the regime, and the need to secure leadership status. This view of policy-making is particularly instructive concerning which policy interventions will be seen as politically persuasive.

These sophisticated reading of the ways in which relations of domination and resistance are closely entwined (e.g. Masaki 2004) arguably reflect a direct engagement with critical theory. Political space adopts a Gramscian understanding of the necessarily counter-hegemonic nature of political action by and on behalf of the poor, and a Foucauldian analysis of how power operates (Engberg-Pedersen and Webster 2002a: 13). This critical ontological position contrasts with the more positivist approach that underpins the notions of political capital and political capabilities, which tend to hold a rather voluntaristic understanding of agency and power relations, such that all individuals and groups might be able to obtain the same levels of assets and outcomes from a similar range of strategic activities.<sup>11</sup> Working across and in-between the threefold dimensions of political space allows a direct focus on the interplay between structure and agency – such that ‘political agency has also to be understood as being rooted in the underlying relations that give rise to certain actions and not others’ (Webster 2002: 251) (in this case the ‘room for manoeuvre’ created for Adivasi women’s cooperatives by the presence of a reformist, pro-poor leftist state government in West Bengal). In terms of understanding the power relations that intimately shape the relationship between politics and poverty, this marks a methodological advance on the binary and economic ‘supply-demand’ understandings of the links between citizens and states, as with the World Bank’s (2000) depiction of empowerment as limited to increased ‘social capital’ on the one hand and ‘responsiveness’ of the state on the other.<sup>12</sup>

The political space framework addresses this field of power relations primarily through a focus on *political discourse*. Political discourse here refers to ‘...the discursive framing of rights and responsibilities, institutions and popular actors, political injustices and goals’; moreover, ‘...such discourses and their institutional manifestations, define political spaces for various individual and collective actors who claim to be the legitimate expressions of these good causes and “the people”’ (Millstein et al 2003: 459). This resonates with recent studies of how the ways in which political elites frame issues of poverty and poverty reduction are central to the prospects for poverty reduction (e.g. Hossain and Moore 2001, Hossain 2005).<sup>13</sup> For example, the finding that elites in Bangladesh do not appear to see their fate as being directly connected to the poor in the way that the British elites did in the

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<sup>11</sup> See Lincoln and Guba (2000) for an elaboration of the range of ontological and epistemological approaches in current social science research.

<sup>12</sup> This point is further expanded upon in Hickey (2005b).

<sup>13</sup> In some ways, this marks a return to an earlier phase of political analysis, whereby the utterances of postcolonial leaders were taken seriously by academics (Young 2003: 1).

nineteenth century, in ways that led them to lobby for health provision, means that other routes need to be sought, possibly through tapping into the sense of national pride amongst this elite. For some, what is striking is the extent to which political elites tend to distinguish between the poor – particularly in terms of a bias towards the productive or economically active poor, who are therefore ‘deserving’ – in ways that are likely to leave some groups bereft of state-support and in need of other forms of provision (Hossain 2005, Hickey 2005b). However, in focusing also on the socio-political practices of the poor, the notion of political space also reveals the extent to which ‘the recourse to political discourses and practices of naming are extremely important in most political struggles, and that marginalized groups may take advantage of such discourses as one of their few assets’ (Engberg-Pedersen and Webster 2002b: 267). Exploring political discourse within the broader frame of political space enables analysis to make the links to the practices of a wide range of political actors and outcomes.

However, a caveat is required here regarding the extent to which issues of power are fully uncovered within the political space approach. Contra a purely post-structural analysis of discourse, political discourse reflects and reproduces power relations between particular groups rather than being constitutive of them per se. These power relations and social forces require analysis in relation to their *material* basis, as do the political coalitions that sustain inequality and might sustain pro-poor change. Several exponents of political space (rightly) eschew a purely class-based analysis of collective action, arguing that that struggles for access and control of poverty-reducing resources often includes associations between ‘dissimilar’ actors (Villareal 2002: 79). However, the insufficient focus on the material factors that constrain expressions of agency by and for poor people derives largely from a failure to integrate a political economy perspective into the notion of political space. In terms of politics and development research, Herring’s (2003) analysis of how progressive politics may only emerge in rural societies where agrarian reform has transformed the field of power relations to which state functionaries respond offers a paradigm study here. More broadly, the concept of political space would benefit from a fuller engagement with critical political geography, where the ways in which political space regulates and perpetuates relations of domination are well-explored (Lefebvre 2003: 94), as are issues of resistance, particularly concerning how such strategies need to operate at the same level of engagement as those dominating forces (e.g. Cox 1998: 8), revealing the need for multi-scalar networks.

Overall, then, the concept of political space is centrally informed 'with an understanding of politics as resulting from an ongoing series of contests and conflicts over how society should be organized' (Hickey 2005b), in a way that engages persuasively with Mouffe's notion of 'the political'. To the extent that this focus flows from an engagement with critical theory, this suggests that the underlying ontological positions of approaches to explaining the links between politics and poverty – as with political capital – closely shape the types of understandings that emerge.

#### **4. Analysing the political turn: politics, development and methodology**

The purpose here is to take a broader and more composite view of the new approaches to political analysis within development studies discussed here, with particular reference to three dimensions: their insights into politics and the political; their contributions towards thinking about development; and in conclusion, issues of methodological and disciplinary approach. Again, it is important to note that these are essentially new approaches to political analysis in development studies, thus making any judgements necessarily limited at this stage. Nor is it constructive to view their comparative strengths and weaknesses as a 'winner-takes-all' competition, in part because there are clear synergies between these approaches that can be further developed. Moreover, the general paucity of political analysis within development studies until recently has left room for a wide enough range of approaches, to the extent that even proponents of one concept or another should welcome the diversity.

##### *Examining politics and the political?*

For Tornquist (1999: 31), research on politics and development tends to focus on either the acting subjects; on structures and institutions; or on the interactions between actors and these conditions, and to privilege either the local, national or global as their key level of analysis. What is striking from the approaches reviewed here is the extent to which they focus on actors (political capabilities and political capital) and their interactions with structures (polity, political space and to some extent political capabilities also), but relatively little on the institutions and structural conditions themselves. These tendencies, including the omission of the global level of politics, are reviewed here in turn before turning to the issue of how well such approaches have engaged with the issues of power relations that Mouffe places at the centre of the political.

### Understanding agency

The approaches reviewed here offer a rich portrayal of the ways in which agency is expressed by and on behalf of poor people in the *political* arena. This move into the primary arena of power and decision-making thus marks a significant advance on the more restricted civil society/social capital paradigm, and brings into play a wider range of potentially pro-poor actors and strategies. In addition to stressing the importance of collective action in forms other than 'community'-based responses, both the polity and political space approach also strongly suggest the importance of the linkages between civil and political society movements (also Tornquist 2002), of the relationships that pro-poor advocates can build with reformist elements of the state, and the role of political elites more broadly.

Importantly, some efforts are made to avoid romanticising or overemphasising the role that agency can play for the poor. For example, Engberg-Pedersen and Webster (2002b) acknowledge the extent to which fear constitutes a real barrier concerning whether the poor engage in socio-political practices, and frame popular agency as one dimension of a broad set of strategies aimed primarily at coping with rather than transforming the wider and often overwhelming structural constraints offered by both state and market. On the other hand, the capital and capabilities approach can be critiqued for holding up a vision of empowerment that is very difficult to attain (Pressman and Summerfield 2002: 433), and which risk exaggerating the makeability of social life (Clever 2004). This is a particular problem for chronic poor and destitute, amongst whom 'agency-based' strategies may find little or no purchase. It is not clear that the organisational capacities of 'the poor' in general will be of much benefit to the poorest (Thorpe et al 2005), and may actually constitute a further dimension of exclusion (Clever 2005).

Although the institutional constraints on popular agency may be recognised under the broader polity and political space approaches, the importance of economic and cultural constraints are underplayed. Conversely, none of the approaches here seek to account for the cultural or identity-based dimension of active popular agency. As noted by Corbridge et al (2005), it is 'the identity and qualities of the agency that mediates power in political society that is often the key to the livelihoods and sense of dignity of the poor'. It may be useful here to introduce insights from citizenship theory, versions of which pay explicit attention to the links between agency and

identity within political communities at multiple levels (from local to global), and in multiple forms (including ethnic or cultural).<sup>14</sup>

#### State-society linkages: a partial view of the state?

The strong emphasis that these approaches accord the linkages and interactions between actors and their institutional surroundings resonates with wider advances in the social sciences, such as Giddens's structuration theory, and also reflect the influence of 'new institutionalism' within development studies (e.g. Evans 1995). This has involved the merging of historical insights with broad political sociology perspectives, in ways that have produced significantly more insightful findings concerning the scope for the poor and their representatives to advance pro-poor reforms than those offered by either state- or society-centric approaches, or the 'voice' and 'responsiveness' calculus of some mainstream development thinking. Particular inspiration is drawn here from social movement theories on how collective action must be read against changing political structures (e.g. Tarrow 1994).

Nonetheless, it is remarkable that the current phase of political analysis in development makes no real effort to conceptualise the state itself. Indeed, both the 'polity' and 'political space' approaches are comfortably vague concerning precise definitions and theorisations of the institutions and actors that exist within them. This is not to claim that the role of the state is downplayed in these approaches. For most, the state remains the primary political institution – the mountain that shapes the responses of the poor (Houtzager with Pattenden 2003). However, the finding that a strong state (including a regularised and efficient bureaucracy), is beneficial to pro-poor collective action is insightful but does not amount to a re-theorisation of how different types of state, or different levels of democracy for that matter, tend towards different developmental outcomes. For example, there is no dialogue with the literature on the 'developmental' state (e.g. Leftwich 1994) or the nature of the state in late development (Mouzelis 1994). The need for a fuller elaboration of the state within development theory is particularly critical given the extent to which a 'mythical' notion of the minimalist, managerialist state still pervades the mainstream development agenda, despite clear evidence of the central role played by developmental states in reducing poverty (Gore 2000: 797).

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<sup>14</sup> On the links between identity and agency in the form of citizenship, see Isin and Wood (1999), while Hickey and Mohan (2005) outline how such a conception of citizenship might develop within development studies.

In terms of insights into state-society relations, the approaches examined here curiously omit a focus on a key form of these linkages within many developing countries, namely patron-client relationships. Strikingly, the terms on which the poor gain political inclusion are not problematised, thus foregoing the insights of how this tends to occur as either integration or elitist incorporation, and that, within the latter is more common in developing countries, and usually involves either clientelism or populism, neither of which tend towards empowering outcomes for the poor (Mouzelis 1986). Nonetheless, they may provide the only recourse to power available to the poorest groups, and more needs to be known concerning the extent to which they offer security (Wood 2003) and even a form of direct democracy for poor groups (Benjamin 2000). This oversight – somewhat surprising given that historical forms of political sociology are particularly well-placed to uncover the ways in which the political remains embedded within social – appears to be related to the institutional approach that pervades the polity and political capabilities approaches. Here, such approaches are liable to offer only partial insights into forms of politics that are only imperfectly articulated with formal institutions, particularly given the sense in which, ‘the postcolonial State (in Africa) lives as a rhizome, as a set of underground roots of which the parts above ground, the political institutions, are less important than the happenstance roots, their multiple correspondences with the various social formations’ (Bayart 2003: 41). This seems to reflect a tendency to ‘wish away’ those forms of politics that do not appear to conform to liberal democratic norms, a further example of which includes the apparent reluctance to engage with issues of civil conflict, despite its clearly political character. This threatens to create an unhelpful dichotomy within work on politics and development, whereby ‘normal’ states get mainstream political analysis, while others enter the ‘basket-case’ or ‘failed states’ category, despite being formed through broadly the same historical, political and economic forces (e.g. Moore 2001).

#### Missing the global?

Although local and national level forms of politics receive a great deal of attention in these approaches, the global is notable by its absence, deliberately so in some cases. Houtzager (2003: 5) argues that it is ‘most important to limit our focus to political dynamics within territorially-based, national political communities’, an approach largely acceded to by others in the politics and development field (e.g. Tornquist 1999, Wilson et al 2001, Webster and Engberg-Pedersen 2002). For example, most work on political elites tends to focus on the national level, whereas it may be elites in Washington who have the greater influence, and little mention is

made of the transnational character of 'national' elites in most developing countries. The related failure to acknowledge international donors as an important form of political agency is a serious omission, particularly so in countries characterised by 'post-conditionality, wherein donors have effectively become integrated as political actors within state-level decision-making processes (Harrison 2001). Although perhaps a necessary oversight in order to 'bring the state back in' to development studies, and overcome the pessimism regarding the alleged incapacity of domestic political actors in the face of overwhelming processes of globalisation (Moore 2003), political analysis cannot forego an engagement with the global if it is to make a more thoroughgoing and sustained contribution to this field – it must be multi-levelled as well as multi-disciplinary. While the notion of a 'polity' is limited to the nation state, the notions of transnational political space (e.g. Lipschutz 2000) and global political community (Linklater 1998) have already gained ground in this respect.

#### Uncovering power relations and the political

Although a general justification for increasing the role of political analysis in development studies concerns 'the significance attached to powerlessness in the poor's own definitions of poverty' (Rakodi 1999: 334), the agency-centred approaches discussed cannot claim to fully engage with issues of power. Although the focus on 'relations' (between state and society, civil and political actors) adopted within the polity approach is useful, Mouffe (2000: 21) shows how power cannot simply be conceptualised as an '*external* relation taking place between two pre-constituted identities, but rather as constituting the identities themselves'. The political space approach moves towards such an understanding, as with its understanding of the interaction between discursive and material representations of the poor. Issues of conflict also lie at the centre of its ontological approach, such that, 'Political space entails a crystallization of strategies, organizational schemes and discursive practices, whereby an actor or a group of actors are included in a particular contest for political gains' (Villareal 2002: 80), revealing a close engagement with Mouffe's notion of antagonism within 'the political'. The potential promise of Bourdieu's approach to political capital offers further evidence that while much of political studies remains within a broadly positivist ontology, it is the adoption of critical realist understandings that are more likely to place issues of power at the centre of their analysis.

#### *Towards a rethinking of development studies?*

In general, it is notable that the political turn within development studies appears to contribute relatively little towards a rethinking of 'development' itself, a role that some erstwhile disciplinary 'outliers' have explicitly set out to do. Arriving from the margins of development studies from the 1970s onwards, some variants of the environmental and social turns sought to fundamentally challenge the basis on which development was conceptualised (e.g. Kothari and Minogue 2001). Although this may be strongly conditioned by the limited space available to propose alternatives to what has become a 'mainstream' with a voracious appetite for the 'margins' (Pieterse 1998), it may also reveal a bid by political studies to return to its erstwhile place within the normative mainstream of development theory and policy.

However, some elements do seek to make more critical contributions here, the first of which involves debunking some popular myths concerning the alleged impossibility of implementing more radical forms of pro-poor change (e.g. involving redistribution) than those currently considered by the mainstream poverty agenda. Here, Moore (2003) offers solid grounds for optimism regarding the scope of domestic political action for pro-poor change despite narrow donor agendas and domestic political opposition. Another notable contribution here not only emphasises the importance of political parties in this process, but also ones from a broadly leftist stance (Harriss 2000, Herring 2003). Finally, the conceptual grounds for a more thorough critical contribution is offered by proponents of political space in their conceptualisation of poverty as an explicitly relational rather than a residual phenomenon, and that '...the contested nature of political space reflects the relational dimensions of poverty' (Engberg-Pedersen and Webster 2002a: 13). In tying together the underlying causes of poverty with understandings of how politics works, this approach goes beyond the current and depoliticising tendency to see poverty as something separate from the social and political relations that causes it (Green, this volume). From here, it is also possible to take a more disaggregated approach to understanding the links between politics and poverty, as with Jeppesen's (2002) findings that some groups of the poor became worse off just as others gained from recent governance reforms in Bolivia. the failure of most of the approaches discussed here to adopt a disaggregated conception of poverty is increasingly untenable in the face of growing evidence that the type, level and duration of poverty experienced by different groups of the 'the poor' may well influence the types of political strategies open to them (Hickey and Bracking 2005).

Linking politics and development: towards causal explanations?

Proponents of these approaches are wary of claiming to have identified causal connections between politics and development. For example, even where political space is present, with all three dimensions in place, 'this will not ensure that poverty reduction does occur' (Engberg-Pedersen and Webster 2002b: 267). Although this reveals a sound awareness of the limitations of politics, such that political reform is a necessary but insufficient move for poverty reduction, there is evidence that more can be achieved in terms of establishing causal links between politics and poverty. For example, recent studies have argued persuasively that certain forms of extreme poverty and destitution are directly reproduced by political institutions such as political parties and elites (Good 1999), and legal systems (Harriss-White 2005), reflecting the insight that 'poverty is imbricated with a range of processes entailing social discrimination and exclusion', which are in turn reflected in the political sphere (Villareal 2002: 79). Having made the important point that politics is not merely contextual to development studies but needs to be fully integrated as part of the development story, politics and development research should now seek to explore more explicitly the ways in which politics shapes poverty reduction, but also produces and reproduces poverty itself. The work of Charles Tilly (e.g. 1999) concerning not only how processes of state formation, their categorisation of citizens and modes of accumulating power tend to perpetuate inequality, but also the efforts of political struggles against such inequalities, offers a paradigmatic route forwards here.

## **5. Conclusion**

Following the quote that opened this article, and also to paraphrase Goldsworthy (1989: 505), there remains 'much more work to be done in "assimilating areas of political enquiry"' into development studies. However, whereas mainstream development discourse has hitherto tended 'to essentialise and romanticize local communities and to downplay issues of citizenship and power' (Harriss et al 2004: 34-35), this new wave of political analyses has made important progress towards putting such issues back at the forefront. This constitutes a genuine form of the 'multi-disciplining' within development studies, particularly, it is argued here, when pursued through certain methodological and disciplinary approaches.

It has been suggested here that quantitative applications of the political concepts discussed here tend to face particular problems concerning their capacity to generate

significant insights into the links between politics and poverty.<sup>15</sup> In particular, where such complex and fluid concepts such as political agency are condensed into variables to be measured through cross-sectional surveys, there is a clear danger that frameworks become reified, losing sight of the dynamics of politics over time. Meanwhile, many of the key dimensions of politics discussed here, such as political discourse, relations of domination and resistance, and the sometimes 'off-stage' character of politics, clearly require in-depth qualitative approaches (Devine 1995). The extent to which the new range of political concepts and frameworks offer the scope for experimenting with mixed quantitative and qualitative as yet to be fully explored, although there is arguably potential here, particularly regarding the political capabilities approach.

With regards multi-disciplinarity, it is notable that the growing impact of politics within development studies has coincided with a broader shift within political studies, whereby it has become more open to accepting and analysing the role played by other social dimensions in shaping the political. As Hulme and Toyé note (this volume), Lipton's (1970) view was that the disciplinary boundaries around classic social science subjects in Western academia grew in response to the increased differentiation of economic, social and political spheres within the context of modernity. This, Lipton argued, is not as applicable within developing countries, where multidisciplinary research is required to engage with the relatively lower degree of differentiation. Amid some otherwise controversial conclusions, Chabal and Daloz (1999) also argue convincingly that political analysis in Africa requires a multi-disciplinary approach due to its 'exceptionally multi-faceted' nature, noting that, 'Whilst, in the West, the realm of politics is relatively well-defined and self-contained, both concretely and analytically separate from those, for instance, of the economy or society, such is emphatically not the case in Africa' (Chabal and Daloz 1999: xvii).

As such, arguably the most promising characteristic of the approaches discussed here concerns their 'internal' integration of perspectives from other disciplines. Each draws insights from political sociology, political theory and history, with political space also incorporating elements of political geography, political anthropology and discourse theory. Importantly, this strongly suggests that political analysis within development studies yields its closest insights into the links between politics and poverty when an inter-disciplinary approach to politics is adopted from the outset.

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<sup>15</sup> Further problems concerning the quantification of political variables in relation to development, see Orkin (1998) and Moore et al (1999).

The range of meso-level concepts and analytical frameworks discussed here appear to provide a space within which such multidisciplinary political perspectives can be employed, mobilised, and also further deepened through an interrogation of their relationship to other dimensions of social life. However, perspectives from political economy remain notably absent.

Finally, a more specific conclusion drawn here would be that, alongside history, political sociology and critical theory have proved to be particularly important contributors to the new insights generated around politics and development. Political sociology focuses on the social basis of power within all institutional sectors of society (e.g. Nash 2000), and ‘...seeks to relate socio-economic conditions to political constitutions and institutional arrangements, and to relate these structural considerations to policy propensities’ (Almond 1990: 24). Within its broad focus on the interrelationships between polity and society, key subject areas include the respective configurations of and relationships between ‘elites’ and ‘masses’; the links between ideologies, identity and political behaviour; collective action and social movements; and the political and social origins of social policy.<sup>16</sup> It is arguably insights from this perspective, particularly when directed and supported by an engagement with critical theory, which appear to have engaged most closely with how ‘the political’ shapes development. One promising way of ensuring that the politics and development turn continues to move forward in this direction, would therefore be to pursue the project outlined by Nash (2002), involving a close dialogue between political sociology and post-Marxist approaches.

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<sup>16</sup> Pioneering studies here include Barrington Moore’s work on the socio-economic basis of democratisation, Kohli’s analysis of the social basis of power in India and the work of Tilly referred to above. As noted by Nash (2002: 110), ‘The best of this work is methodologically rigorous, using comparative analysis and the development of ideal types to organize empirical research and produce generalisations that are theoretically informed but sensitive to differences across contexts’ (Nash 2002: 110).

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