Introduction

May I begin this address by first and foremost congratulating The Nordic African Institute on its assumption of the important age of 40 years? As in the life cycle of humans, the age of forty is an important milestone in the biography of institutions and countries, and although it is only a short period from the point of view of larger historical time, it is an appropriate and convenient point to stop and take stock of what have been one’s achievements, contributions and of course, weaknesses in life.

It is my understanding that as an institution the Nordic African Institute has been very fortunate to have been part of the terrain that has tried to offer scholarship and knowledge production on Africa in this part of the world, not only in the service of Nordic interests, but also in the genuine pursuit of knowledge and truth that recognises the importance of the subject of knowledge as also both a producer and consumer. In this regard, your attempts at understanding and interpreting Africa, for whatever reasons, have not been from the point of view of Africa as the ‘perpetual other’, but also from the point of view of a methodological empathy that has accepted Africans as legitimate producers of knowledge and as respectable and valid interpreters of Africa. You have indeed been one of the earliest genuine pace setters of this trend before it became one of the politically correct traits of parts of the liberal Western academy. This is one reason why I am sure I share this platform not only to celebrate with you, but also to share my reflections on certain aspects of development that has been engaging my attention.

I would like to see this time as an opportunity for genuine sharing about concerns that can be said to be central to the whole theme of this conference, that is, ‘Knowledge, Freedom and Development’. My topic is: ‘Scales of suffering, Orders of Emancipation: critical issues in democratic development in Africa’.

In recognition of the condition of existence of not only Africans, but billions of other teeming humanity, I want to explore with you in this paper, the issue of ‘suffering’, as a trait and quality of the outcome of recognisable human agendas and social projects. I know that this is a very difficult terrain outside of theology and psychology (disciplines that have monopolised the discourses on suffering and redemption both in their secular and spiritual manifestations), but I believe that another dimension of the failure of our analyses and our practices of development is that we have never seriously attempted to incorporate what can be called the distribution of distress, misery and suffering into our considerations. We have examined poverty, exploitation and domination either
as objective or/and in certain cases unacceptable dimensions of social and political existence. We have however, often not linked these to the concrete burdens and experiences of actually existing human beings. It is possible that by operating with abstractions and sanitised analytical categories, we have protected ourselves as social scientists from the often messy and untidy dynamics and occurrences that often define ordinary peoples’ engagements with the political and economic initiatives and agendas that both global and national elites and institutions create. We have therefore ignored important elements that make up major aspects of concrete human experiences. As these experiences continue to influence not only our politics, but also our sociology, it is important that they begin to have a more prominent place in our analyses. Thus, when we talk about issues such as poverty and inequality, social stability and upheavals, about various actions, events and human efforts directed at creating lives and livelihoods, ensuring individual and collective well being, and improving the human condition, we can not effectively do this without seeing how they embody the qualities of ‘suffering and distress’, either in structures or processes and how these are unevenly and unequally distributed. This is an elementary lesson that the great literary works of Africa by writers such as Achebe, Soyinka, Sembene Ousmane, Negib Mahfouz, Nadine Gordimer and Ngugi wa Thiongo have taught us and which as I shall point out later, has not been absent in the consideration of some of our important social scientists and development theorists. I hope that by examining some important social projects and agendas, such as ‘development’ and ‘democracy’, that have been key elements of some of the major transitions in recent African history, from the perspective of the scales and distribution of suffering, and in relation to their manifestly declared goals, their failures and disappointments, we might be able to ask the question: whatever happened to ‘development and social transformation’ in Africa?

A Story as Entry-point

I want to begin to address these issues by telling a little true story that forcefully conveys to me some of the questions that we are struggling with. Some time ago, I had the opportunity to visit a development project in one of our African countries. This was a land rights/human rights project in a small village on the outskirts of one of the largest cities in Africa. It was an attempt to provide legal aid and human rights advocacy to farming communities that were being made landless and disinherited by banks and state corporations for their indebtedness. In actual fact, their experience was as a result of having been encouraged, about 10 to 15 years earlier( in the mid-eighties), to borrow money to improve and modernise their enterprises. They had been approached to borrow to buy tractors, farming implements, improved seeds and all the other elements of modern agricultural production that were seen as parts of and necessary for ‘development.

The farmers ranged from small holders to those with sizeable medium holdings. Their assets included land, tools, crops and livestock. Less than five years into their credit situation that was initially defined in medium to long terms, changes began to occur in the national and global economy. A key occurrence was the new regime of economic deregulation, particularly that of the interest rates and other related forms of liberalisation that removed subsidies on farming inputs such as fertilizers, imported seedlings, veterinary materials, equipment and related items. Suddenly farmers who have been paying their loans back gradually over the years, found out that their indebtedness had trebled or quadrupled.
Many of the farmers had paid more than the initial principal they borrowed. But they found that they were still heavily indebted. They were being taken to court, sometimes detained without trial at police stations, and were having their properties seized and auctioned without proper notice and due process. Their vulnerability and ignorance were being exploited in the most brutal manner by an unholy alliance of the State Credit Corporation, the Agricultural and commercial banks and the law enforcement agencies.

These farmers found some support and defence in the presence of an organisation of urban-based human rights lawyers who specialised in land rights and pursued the protection of their rights and properties. The stories were sordid enough and included evidence of ‘red tapism’, rigid rules and laws, some corruption and plenty of ignorance. But there was the question of the other combination of factors that seemed to make both the lawyers and the farmers helpless, and that was the fact that there were certain forces beyond them were at play here. These were forces that defined new interest rates for their loans, new currency exchange norms for what they imported and new prices for their products. These were forces very far from this little village deprived not only of services and infrastructure, but also of understanding and more significantly, justice. Here, we are dealing with a nation state, the Agricultural Credit Banks, the commodity boards that have suddenly being shut down or disempowered, the police and judiciary, some commercial banks, and a vague and shadowy international system that has changed the rules of the game mid-way by pressurising the government to liberalise and remove what were in effect social protection covers for these villagers.

An added point is that according to the farmers’ testimonies, corroborated by some officials and local scholars, the farmers were encouraged to borrow when their country had not only a lower interest rate for agricultural credit, but also a stronger national currency that has now being subjected to a wave of massive and multiple devaluations.

Sad, but you might ask what is special about this situation. Is this not the state of the world and many African countries today? Indeed, this is why I have refused to name the country, because it could be any of our African countries. The story itself as it is, poses enough questions about the lures and meaning of development, the importance of knowledge and information about risks and of course, the uneven and unequal vulnerability of different actors in our economies and societies. They are questions that have been posed by scholars ranging from those with global reputations such as the Nobel laureates Joseph Stiglitz and Armantya Sen, to fresh graduate students grappling with the so-called first principles of conventional development theory (Sen, 1981, 1992, 1999). But beyond all the questions above, I was struck by other facts. At the meeting I am referring to, women and young people were almost completely absent, and when they present they came as supporting actors, to do things such as bring in chairs and tea. It became clear here that we were dealing with potential multiple struggles and structures of domination and exploitation (Mustapha, 1996). We were operating in a society and economy where women were severely disadvantaged, and where structures and social behaviour reinforced the disadvantages. Rural women in particular in this context experienced multiple jeopardies. They were not able to own productive land directly, as a result of cultural and religious obstacles, they were often ‘infantilised’, denied of a wide array of rights while saddled with obligations and responsibilities and were expected to be mute or invisible players.

Around us the village was the conventional picture of rural poverty. It had poor sanitation with open sewers, human and animal waste, and garbage everywhere. There were no services such as regular supply of running water and electricity. It was clear to me that what we had here were
layers of neglect, grievances, deprivation, exploitation and domination. I asked why women were not at the meeting, and was told that they were not only busy, but that in this case, we were dealing with issues that concerned mainly adult men. I wanted to know about women’s property rights, and women’s access to land and other resources. My questions were deflected. I was becoming a source of irritation here. We were talking about human rights, about the bigger problems linked to the livelihoods of the community and of course the presence of the almost unshakeable authoritarian ruler and his henchmen. Yes, there was this great struggle for democratic transition and this big issue of peace in the region. There was also this supposedly big struggle with Western hegemony and its domination of both the national and global economies and the introduction of all these terrible conditionalities with aid and loans.

And here I was, asking about insignificant secondary matters, about the smaller issues. The concern was with the greater ‘sufferings’ of the whole nation, the people, the masses, and the region. It was with the significant emancipatory priorities, and not the ‘lesser’ problems of women and youth, particularly peasant ones for that matter. I tried to make the link between the injustice of the indebtedness of the farmers, the question of regional peace, and the position of the village women, but it was obvious that I was being disruptive and overstepping my role as a visitor. My concern with the ‘politics of the lesser issues’ and the ‘secondary’ emancipatory projects was neither understood nor appreciated.

Though my guides were sympathetic, I was the one who displayed a lack of understanding and maybe cultural sensitivity. But in my understanding, we have here a challenge and questioning not only of our conceptions and definitions of development and struggles for rights and social justice, but also of our practices and the way we understand them. I have always seen development as liberation from want, undue suffering and distress, and as an issue of priorities about how societies and peoples make choices, create spaces and places for the attainment of collective and individual well-being, and provide the opportunities for these within a context of justice and equity. In my scale of values, I have never thought we could weigh one set of injustices above or below others or continue with some while we pursue the end of others. It seems to me that the struggles with the ‘greater’ injustices will never be won if we are not sensitive to or struggle against the ‘lesser’ injustices. And who does the weighting anyway?

And perhaps, this is the endless dilemma of our 20th Century emancipatory projects. I mean the tension between our concentration on the great structural liberations and moments meant to produce massive changes and resolve the perennial troubling issues of our times, and the concern with improving and changing the more concrete conditions of the ordinary persons and the relationships in which they are embedded in identifiable groups, communities and institutions. It is a key dilemma of development as a social project.

But the question is, can this be ‘development in practice’, the expression of what we see on a daily basis in people’s lives? Can we approach development without confronting the inherent inequalities and inequities that are located in the organisation of ordinary human existence? Can we transform and transcend development, as we know it, without confronting the hierarchies and scales of sufferings and distress, and the inequality in the orders of emancipation?

The story of this little village tied it up for me. All the ingredients were there, presented in a short moment of confrontation and interaction. There was the power of a relatively powerless state - powerless in relation to the outside international system and unable or unwilling to protect its own vulnerable people, but a state that sees itself as powerful and ready to unleash its force of repression on those who question its power and legitimacy from within. There was the inequality
between state corporations, international donors, the banks, their officials and the farmers. There was the knowledge divide tied around and manipulated by vested interests and the inequality between members of the community, particularly between men and women, brown and ‘browner’, old and young. Of course, there were the real differences on what really mattered and how these were decided.

This story is the story of most of Africa with different variations in detail. It is a story that reminds us that after almost forty years of political independence, and many more with experimenting with different forms and notions of ‘development’, we still have to grapple with the first principles. We have to get back to the basics of the notion and practices of development as they relate to the lives of ordinary peoples, to its constitution, the nature of its wide array of players, to the distribution of power and knowledge, and of course, that of suffering and misery.

These are the considerations that I will like us to engage with as we think about whatever we understand as Africa’s development, and more so, of Africa’s entry into a new age in the social transitions of contemporary human history. This is an age, which for the want of a better word has been described by numerous authors as the ‘age of globalisation’ (a notion which in itself is ideological, as well as descriptive of a series of processes and phenomena). These considerations are important because Africa’s entry in to this age has been driven by several forces, some of which have rejected the usefulness of the discussions of issues and questions such as inequality and inequity. The emphasis has been on poverty blamed on and ascribed to its victims; and wealth, well-being and social directions and entitlements of society and peoples as determined by an impersonal but efficient market. But as revealed by evidence of goings on in global capitalism, its think-thanks and corporate board rooms, we all know that this ‘almighty market’ is neither impersonal nor that efficient in certain areas (Stiglitz, 2002). In my view, it is time to bring inequality back on the agenda. This is because more than a sanitised and superficial project of dealing with poverty reduction, the problem of inequality can take us back to the roots of poverty. It can lead us to a meaningful way of addressing the unblocking of the channels that constrain the energies and creativity of large numbers of Africans currently compelled to function below their optimal capacities.

Indeed, this moment is appropriate for reflection and stock taking on what history and transitions in Africa have been all about, in the past fifty to sixty years. A period that is insignificant when compared to the time frame represented by the pyramids of Egypt or the rock art of Namibia and the Niger Republic. Yet it is a time frame in which many Africans in a life time and in one country, have lived through colonisation, seen independence, experienced military coups, fought at least one civil war and have elected both a parliamentary style Prime Minister and an Executive President.

Talking about development, this same time frame has seen Africans subjected to externally-driven strategies ranging from import substitution industrialisation with ‘unlimited supplies of labour’, through those of ‘redistribution with growth’, the ‘basic needs approach’ and ‘integrated rural development’, to that of export-led growth. More recently, the ordinary African has had to deal with two to three decades of structural adjustment programs (which gave the era its name of that of crisis and adjustment), and is now learning the ropes of ‘poverty reduction strategy programmes’, (PRSPS). Africans today continue to struggle with what all of these are about, as there has been no significant upward turn in their well being in the last two decades (IFAD, 2001). This is why it should not surprise anybody if people are asking the question: whose development is it and for what? It is to this that we now turn.
Whose development is it?

This question is indeed a valid question for many Africans. For them, the development approaches and strategies mentioned above mean nothing. They neither understand them nor see them significantly transform their lives. Indeed, the beneficiaries of these ‘developments’ are increasingly becoming numerical minorities in African societies, when the trend should have been for greater expansion and inclusion. In order to understand why this amount of distance exists between the peoples and one of the key processes and phenomenon meant to define their lives, let us examine the historical context of the idea and process of development for most of what constitutes sub-Saharan Africa today.

Of course, this has to be put in the context of what I call key social transitions in the contemporary history of Africa. By this, I refer to key historical moments of social change of systemic importance. These are moments of change that involved the modification or/and transformation of institutions, social values and social action in directions that constitute a break or shift from previous ways of organising society, culture, economy and the polity. Such moments may be the result of internal evolution or may have been induced by external forces such as conquests, new technologies, or some major trading contacts and related upheavals. They are often the products of interaction between internal and external forces and often give rise to qualitatively different patterns and dynamics of society and economy, demography and geography. Let us examine how what we have come to know as development is related to this.

In spite of several decades of use, the notion of development as applied to the process of transforming the economy and society remains contested (Escobar, 1995, Leys, 1997). We need not delay ourselves with the details of the linkages between the various paradigms and the way they understand the substance of development; the point is that this variety in the application of the notion is one of the key contributions of the field itself (Leys, 1997). We also need not detain ourselves asking how the notion has evolved to take on more holistic and humanistic forms that have incorporated elements of social and environmental justice, equity, participation, democracy and rights (Leys, 1997, Sen, 1999, Mkandawire, 1998). The conventional history of the notion has been that of the growth and transcendence of its more ‘economistic’ and sectoral origins to an increasingly inclusive, holistic and emancipatory notion with several qualifiers such as ‘human development’, ‘social development’, and ‘sustainable development’.

It is however a history that has been queried in terms of its origins, the gap between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘practice’, the ‘diagnostic’ and the ‘prescriptive’, and the agendas that the different perceptions and conceptions of the notion embody. There are thinkers today who believe we should drop the idea of development and they are on both the right and the left of the ideological spectrum (Escobar, 1995:15). In fact, the core thinking of the neo-liberal and structural adjustment orthodoxy had abandoned ‘development’ as a goal and focused more on ‘adjustment’ and ‘growth’. And of course, there are those who feel we should reclaim and re-appropriate the notion of development as both a guide to our efforts and as an explanation and description of processes around us (Aina, 1993). This seems to me to be the key issue: that for many, the history and origins of the notion, the process, and its practices are too compromised. But are they unsalvageable? Should we just drop the discourse and look for another way, another mode of understanding and construct, for the collective struggles of peoples to better themselves materially while at the same improving their total well being? This is because the notion and process suffer from a kind of ontological entrapment, development is what many peoples and countries want to
be, are struggling to be, and are yet not! It remains an elusive object of desire. It also has an ideological component. Also, what is the relationship between the more emancipatory and liberatory aspects of the notion and the actually existing conditions and situations of millions of ordinary Africans? What practical lessons can we learn about the gaps in the ways people live and how the structures and processes they daily experience are theorised? Are our discussions of development that are emancipatory and transformational in a positive sense mere fictions and products of our imagination of a better world? Or are there out there significant if small changes that are making differences in and to people’s lives? I want to argue that there are possibilities for concrete changes in the lives of ordinary peoples and that development as emancipatory and transformational is neither fiction nor the figment of our imagination. I am sure that it is now clear that I am on the side of those who want us to re-appropriate and reclaim the notion and practices of development. This is because there are actually existing examples of lives and livelihoods that have been and are being transformed all over the world (Escobar, 1995; Sen, 1999, 35-53), just as there are examples of many lives and livelihoods experiencing degradation and increase in suffering and misery. It seems to me that the issue is about examining possibilities without submitting to monolithic forms and expressions of outcomes. We need to be clear that that development is about the possibilities, and unintended and sometimes unpredictable outcomes of the intentional search and construction of human beings, and their societies and communities for their material and other well-being. I want to add that there are no guarantees that positive outcomes will always be attained, which is why the factor of intentionality is very important. It is also why as a notion and process it is valid that it retains the objective of improving human well-being that transcends the merely economic. In that sense, development is not an ideal, but a gigantic and perpetual human work-in-progress that communities, societies and some states undertake. The progressive humanistic and emancipatory nature of development is clearly stated by Armatya Sen (1999:3), who declares that:

> Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as as well as intolerance or over-activity of repressive states.

This is why it is important to interrogate whose agenda it carries at any given time and to weigh its scales of suffering and their distribution. When we talk about agendas, we now have enough evidence about the loss or lack of innocence of the ‘development process’, particularly as it has so far been applied to Africa. This is especially so when we think of the ideology of ‘developmentalism’. Historians of Africa have clearly made the linkages between the transition from colonial rule and Africa’s adoption of developmentalism. According to Zeleza (1997:200), ‘…developmentalism was born during the Great Depression and bred into a hegemonic discourse in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The seeds were sown with the 1929 British Colonial and Welfare Act. They turned into sturdy developmentalist weeds under the Colonial development and Welfare Act of 1945. It was in colonial Africa that most of these seeds and weeds were nurtured. It was there that the term development lost its naturalistic innocence and acquired the conceited meaning of economic growth modeled on the West’. Escobar (1995:26-27) has also confirmed that:

> The slow preparation for the launching of development was perhaps most clear in Africa,
where a number of recent studies suggest...there was an important connection between
the decline of the colonial order and the rise of development. In the interwar period, the
ground was prepared for the institution of development as a strategy to remake the
colonial world and restructure the relations between colonies and metropoles. As Cooper
(1991) has pointed out, the British Act of the 1940s - the first great materialization of the
development idea - was a response to challenges to imperial power in the 1930s and must
thus be seen as an attempt to invigorate the empire. This was particularly clear in the
settler states in southern Africa, where preoccupations with questions of labor and food
supplies led to strategies for the modernization of segments of the African

Zeleza (1997), in a closer examination of ‘Colonial Developmentalism’, advises us to go a little bit
further than Escobar’s points above and to see the complexity and multi-sided nature of colonial
developmentalism, especially, the fact that the subjects of colonial territories were not mere
passive subjects on which the colonial rulers acted without receiving a response, and who in many
cases initiated the actions.

For Zeleza (1997:225):
The Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1929, was one of the many instruments the
British state developed to deal with simultaneously, the crisis of legitimacy in the colonial
empire and of capitalist rationality at home. It was part of the response to growing anti-
colonial resistance in the empire and anti-capitalist revolt in the metropole. It represented,
therefore, a defensive, conservative discourse, one that recast the role of the state and
framed development as a managed process.

The literature on African experience with colonisation has pointed out that the colonial mission
had the dominant objective of transferring resources to the colonial powers from the colonies
through direct exploitation, unequal exchange and other economic mechanisms (Zeleza, 1993).
Therefore, if a key agenda of early developmentalism in Africa was renegotiating colonial
relations and domination with the former subject territories, then it was clear that the development
process pursued was not African peoples’ development. Of course, there were agents and
intermediaries who benefited but the process was not about transforming structures and
relationships for the purpose of improving the well being of most ordinary Africans. That was why
it was a narrow sectionalist and limited project that neither fundamentally changed structures and
relations, nor improved the well being of large numbers of Africans beyond a limited privileged
The foundations of the economies and societies of large parts of Africa were being laid at the
moments of the nationalist struggles of the 1940s and 1950s and colonial developmentalism
contributed to the process of restructuring productive structures and relations that accommodated
new African players as intermediaries and agents, thereby creating and/or reinforcing new forms
of social and economic inequality.

The emerging dominant African social actors here were the nationalists. They were the key
players in mobilising the different alliances and coalitions of social groups against colonial rule.
They were also the key beneficiaries of the transition from formal colonial rule as they negotiated
its modalities and timing with the colonial rulers. This is not to say that the process of transition
was an easy transfer of power without struggles and violence in many cases. The transitions
embodied in the independence struggles were in fact heroic and decisive moments in Africa’s
history (to be replicated in different places at different times over three decades), both in terms of
constructing broad platforms with clear goals and the uniting of different groups towards fighting
and contributing to the goals of the struggles. But these transitions, given the complexity of the
forces mentioned above, contained significant compromises in the ways they were effected.
Several scholars have criticised the nationalists for the kind of economies, societies and polities
that were created in post-independence Africa. The nationalists have been accused of poor
leadership; of ignoring diversity and pluralism; of lacking clear-cut nationalist agendas and of
suffering from a tremendous lack of capacity to transform the colonial formations they inherited.
Their biggest failure was said to be with regards to the development agenda.
Claude Ake (1996: 1), believed that the ‘… problem is not so much that development has failed
as that it was never on the agenda in the first place’. This position is not shared by some other
analysts who recognised that key elements that constituted the nationalist project included
national independence, nation building and of course, national development, both as means and as
goals of transforming the lives of their peoples for the better.
The educated elites in most cases in Africa led the nationalist movements that initiated the
transitions to nationhood and attempted national development. In recent years, African scholars
have returned to an assessment of the contributions of these actors. The predominant reactions
have been those of condemnation and criticism for the lost opportunities for meaningful
development and nation building. They have also been attacked for the political styles and cultures
that they nourished (particularly their decline into authoritarianism and monolithic politics), and
for failing to transform both the colonial economy and its other institutions.
For Ake (1996:4), the nationalist movement that they formed was a ‘coalition of disparate groups
and elements’ that in spite of its unity against colonial oppression could not hold together because
of the tensions and conflicts that the platform contained. These tensions and conflict, the
structural configurations of the inherited political economies, the manipulation and misuse of
ethnic, racial and religious differences, and the strain towards personal enrichment and interests,
effectively obstructed the attainment of any loftier goals of social transformation and beneficial
development.
Ake’s (1996: 40) judgment was that: ‘At the beginning of the independence period, African
leaders, with few exceptions, were so absorbed in the struggles for power and survival and so
politically isolated by their betrayal of the nationalist revolution that they could not launch a
national development project but instead opted for dependent development, letting their
metropolitan patrons determine the agenda and find resources to implement it’.
But Thandika Mkandawire has asked us to reconsider our concentration on their failures and
appreciate some of their achievements. ‘He believes that after independence, African leaders made
significant progress in development by investing in education for all, by improving healthcare
facilities and infrastructure, and by making a serious drive towards import-substitution. Given this
kind of endeavor, he believes that they can not be accused of having sought high office only for
personal gain’(Anyang’ Nyong’o, 2002: 15).
Without holding brief for the failures of the nationalists, we need to take Mkandawire’s points
very seriously. We cannot fully understand the strategies and agenda of the nationalists without
reminding ourselves of the extensive nature of the exclusion, discrimination and very limited
capacities and services of the colonial society and state. Also, we need to remind ourselves that
not all those who took over power from the colonial rulers after independence can be termed
‘nationalists’ in the real sense of that word. Either by inclination, politics or even self-definition, there were African leaders who were not nationalists. Some would be more appropriately described as ‘accommodationists’, while others were no more than ethnic, racial and religious chauvinists. The nationalists on the other hand, in most cases, were struggling with a corrective and building phase, and in the pursuit of their projects had to resort to legitimising, accumulative and incorporationist strategies. But the unfortunate element of most of their agendas is that they contained the same fundamental problem of confronting the different scales of suffering found in society and imposed hierarchies of emancipation that deliberately put several groups and communities at a disadvantage based on their social positions and identities.

As a collection of ‘disparate’ actors, I read more than one agenda into the projects of the nationalists, this along with the existent agenda of the different factions of the colonial rule made this period of transition, one of multiple and contradictory social projects. There were of course dominant agendas and projects carried out and effected by more or less dominant groups. Under the period of colonial rule, we can identify the colonialist agenda of colonial modernity and the nationalists’ counter agenda of national liberation and political independence.

In the process and period of transition to post-independence, there were also several agendas. There were the dominant nationalist agenda of liberation/independence, nation building and that of development, depending on how it was perceived. And we need to recognise the complexity and differences in the definition and perception of the notion and process of development. This made the agenda of national development a broad, diffuse one which expressed itself in most African countries either as the pursuit of capitalist development as it was in Kenya and Cote d’Ivoire, or the pursuit of different variants and hybrids of socialism as was experimented with in Guinea, Tanzania, Angola and Mozambique. However, there was a unifying element in the pursuit of national development across the board, irrespective of ideologies. This was the importance given to statist strategies, that is, the tremendous significance given to the state for social provisioning, the delivery of services and in many cases, economic management. This was what Mkandawire (1998) has analysed as a variant of ‘the developmental state’ (Mkandawire, 1998).

One more important point that should be stressed about agendas during this period, is that given the different and ‘disparate’ nature of the social forces involved, there were other minor agendas that were very important to different groups in the different countries. There were, for instance, irredentist and secessionist forces operating during this period. Thus, one cannot effectively adduce the same agenda to the projects of Patrice Lumumba and Moise Tshombe in the period of transition from the Belgian Congo to the independent Congo (Kinshasa). In this case, what the latter represented contradicted what Lumumba stood for.

This brings us to another key project that was an important feature of 20th Century Africa and which found some correspondence to greater or less degree with other key projects. This is what can be called the democratisation agenda or the democratic project. This project is in substance an emancipatory project that through social values, the creation and growth of relevant charters and institutions, and the use of laws and other practices, seeks to promote the significance of the conditions of equality, justice, representation, participation and due process in the ways individuals and groups interact not only with each other, but also with institutions of government and the state. Of course, there are differences on what constitutes the democratic project and how these should be prioritised, but even in its most formal rudimentary state it is a potential foundation of larger emancipatory projects.

Aspects of this project can be found in all the political and at times, economic struggles of
Africans. Other aspects were also embedded in the nationalist struggles at the beginning, and were carried by individuals and groups that were part of the independence movement. The democratisation project has however either been subverted and undermined by various forces and players in 20th Century Africa or never allowed to grow and develop so as to expand the full possibilities of many African societies and polities. Those who have subverted the project range from nationalists who either were never democrats or were unable to accommodate diversity and pluralism, to military rulers and power drunk potentates, as well as agents of international institutions and donor organisations whose policies will never survive democratic discussions or encounters.

But the democratisation project is still very much on the agenda today, and it has in recent times been adopted as a ‘global agenda’, not only by the international civil society movement but also by agents of the international financial institutions, who have appropriated it, sanitised it and re-baptised it under the notion of ‘good governance’. This has become a technocratic notion and instrument tagged on to the new international regime of credit and aid, and aimed mainly at constructing some universals of ‘accountable and transparent rule and management’, without the requisite attention to contexts (Anyang’Nyong, o, 2002:80-83). Because it embodies continuous growth and expansion of learning, the project today accommodates a wider range of emancipatory and social justice issues. In fact even more than before it provides a platform for the realisation of human development as it includes significant elements of social, economic and cultural rights as well as political and civil rights. This is why the idea of democratic development as means and ends of meaningful and relevant social transformation in Africa is an imperative (Sen, 1999: 35-56).

Before concluding the discussion in this section, let us examine whose development it is in the era of globalisation. As can be seen from the literature, the last two decades of the 20th century in Africa can be termed an era of crisis and adjustment (Aina, 1993, Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999). The era of crisis started around the early 1970s beginning with the world oil crisis and the decline in the prices of key African commodities (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999:21-22). This was the point at which the new global economic restructuring was said to have commenced (Hosbawn, 1999; Castells, 1998). The period between the beginning of the crisis and the end of the Cold War was a grim social and political era for Africa. For as most African countries were adjusting, several African regimes, supported and encouraged by the Cold War powers, became more repressive and undemocratic. The emphasis in this period was on the economic reforms and adjustment. These however did not produce any significant recovery or growth except for a few isolated cases. Failed and mis-applied economic reforms and declining resources aggravated the process of erosion of state capacities, and the degradation and decay of public institutions, utilities and social services (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999). All of these expanded the scope of suffering and misery experienced by ordinary peoples in most of these countries, with the greatest amount of pain unmitigated by access to justice being the lot of the poor and marginalised.

With the breakdown of state capacities and the erosion of much that is left of post-independence legitimacy, accountability and participation, political violence became a major mode of political expression. This was in the form of riots, wars, rebellions, insurrections, banditry and the unleashing of state-sponsored terror on political opponents. While a lot of the violent expression occurred in the urban areas, much more took place in the rural setting, aggravating ecological and other natural disasters and resulting in famines and related calamities that not only diverted attention from developmental activities, but also provided the much needed copy for negative and
pejorative media attention on the African condition. During this period, there was not much development, either in the form of meaningful economic growth or the other emancipatory qualities mentioned above. So intense and pervasive was the last decade of crisis and adjustment, that it has been called ‘Africa’s lost decade’ (Aina, 1993). According to Mkandawire and Soludo (1999:93), the economist, Griffin had identified three paths of adjustment, each emphasising a different set of fundamentals, namely adjustment by recovery, adjustment by contraction and finally, adjustment by an investment-driven development process. They pointed out that the emphasis in Africa was on the former two, adjustment by contraction and by recovery.

We now know that the adjustment strategies were not designed by Africans and did not heed the calls of Africans for modification, and also that they had relatively few African beneficiaries. One can state that if in earlier periods, there were combinations of agendas and thus what constituted development could be claimed by some African interests, the period of crisis and adjustment was closer to the period of naked colonial rule, as very few Africans could or would claim ownership of the strategies or agendas of that era. This was why the Bretton Woods Institutions’ search for relevant and legitimate internal African constituencies for adjustment proved elusive for a long time.

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Aina, 1997), the adjustment and crisis era ushered in Africa’s encounter with contemporary globalisation. Fortunately, this encounter is ongoing, and is being negotiated in the context of a growing and broadening array of available knowledge, the reconfiguration of social and political forces in Africa, and the availability of technologies that not only contribute to domination and global divide, but can also play a role in mobilising emancipatory forces and disseminating useful knowledge. The significance of knowledge in this new era, its availability and its capacity for instant dissemination have all created new conditions that have implications for democratic struggles. We cannot only very quickly identify trends in the production and distribution of suffering and distress as part of social projects; we can make them available for analysis and action. Let us examine the substance and pattern of this distribution.

**The Distribution of Suffering and Distress**

If there were illusions about the costs of development and transitions, it is perhaps the African nationalist leaders who harbored them in the boundless optimism and courage that the prospects of national independence carried. Outsiders, including the authors of United Nations documents as far back as 1951 knew there had to be pain and suffering:

> There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustment. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who can not keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress. (United Nations, 1951; cited in Escobar, 1995:3).

On the other hand, a nationalist like the Nigerian Obafemi Awolowo (1960:314) in his discussion of Nigeria’s development was more concerned about the promises of abundance and prosperity. Awolowo stated that: ‘Our human and natural resources are great potentialities which, if properly organized will bring prosperity and orderly progress to our nation as well as to humanity’. The
problem with both positions is that they generalised too much. Neither of them pointed out that both the pain and suffering, and the prosperity and bounty, that they talked about were never evenly distributed and that different groups received different and uneven shares of these in the development process. The same observation applies to the neo-liberal theorists of adjustment economics, who recognised and accepted that structural adjustments in Africa in the seventies, eighties and nineties, should and must be painful, but argued that this pain must be borne by the over-subsidised non-disaggregated urban sectors (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999).

More significantly beyond the formal and official conventional data on development, there are indicators that tell us about incomes, productivity, sales of produce and extent of inputs and export sales, and others that benchmark misery and suffering that occur in the every day lives of many ordinary Africans. These include experiences such as the extent of rural and urban indebtedness, infant and female mortality rates, degradation of infrastructures, the extent of waste and destruction of products and produce through disease, poor storage facilities and the vagaries of nature such as drought and floods. There are still many others embedded in human relationships based on structures of inequality and oppression, and the conditions of injustice, wars and other forms of violence. These include wanton killings, mutilations and amputations, forced marriages, abductions, conscriptions and rapes. All of these continue to testify to the weight that ordinary poor Africans bear on the scales of suffering.

As we proceed with our discussions of the distribution of suffering and distress, let us remind ourselves of the fact that work around this area as it relates to the human condition and development is not completely new. We can cite for example the important contribution of Frantz Fanon in his book The Wretched of the Earth. Armatya Sen’s story of Kader Mia, the young Muslim daily labourer who was killed by extremists because he went looking for work in the wrong neighborhood, is also an illustration of how the expression of personal suffering and distress can give rise to critical and far reaching scientific projects. Sen (1999:8) states:

> The experience was devastating for me. It made me reflect, later on, on the terrible burden of narrowly defined identities, including those firmly based on communities and groups…But more immediately, it also pointed to the remarkable fact that economic unfreedom, in the form of extreme poverty, can make a person a helpless prey in the violation of other kinds of freedom. Kader Mia need not have gone to a hostile area in search of a little income in those terrible times had his family been able to survive without it.

Coming closer home, Mamdani’s book (2001) on the larger social and political implications and lessons of the Rwanda genocide is an attempt to confront pain, suffering and distress not only in relation to the seemingly more abstract categories of justice and identity, but also in relation to the concrete expression of experiences of citizenship, nativism and colonialism. Of course, Mkandawire’s recent paper (2001) on ‘The Terrible Toll of Post-Colonial “Rebel Movements” in Africa’, was more than an explanation of the violence against peasantry in Africa. It contained both a lamentation and profound anguish at the waste, devastation and distractions that these movements have unleashed mainly on African rural societies.

Given Africa’s recent history, we could provide an endless list of materials that are devoted to the narratives of suffering and distress among ordinary peoples. But what is important is the lesson for our analyses and interventions, particularly as they relate to development. This is, that poverty provides a fertile terrain for the flowering of suffering and distress, and that the poor, often denied
power and privilege, and ravaged by disease and want, bear the brunt of its harvests. Without getting into the disputes about who the poor are, I am referring in this discussion to ‘…those peoples who combine low average incomes and assets, with considerable instability of incomes and employment along with insecurity of tenure to land and shelter and … are extensively deprived of, or barred from access to basic services and infrastructures’ (Aina, 1997:57).

Africa remains one of the poorest regions of the world. According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Report on Assessment of Rural Poverty, Western and Central Africa, 2001, page 14:

SSA is one of the poorest regions in the world and poverty seems to be increasing, at least when measured by the poverty line of USD 1 per day and during the period for which incidence data are available (1987-98). By 1998, all developing regions together accounted for about 1.2 billion poor persons, amounting to 23.4% of the total population in these areas. Since 1990, both the absolute number of poor and their proportion of the total population seem to have declined. In SSA, on the contrary, the total number of poor has risen from 217 million to 302 million persons, and by 1998, the poverty incidence had reached 48.1% of the total population. SSA has the highest poverty incidence among all developing regions. While the incidence of poverty has declined since 1990 in all developing regions taken together, primarily due to progress in Asia, in SSA its incidence has continued to increase. The number of poor in all developing regions decreased during 1987-98 by 0.5% per year, in spite of a total population growth of about 1.5%. In sub-Saharan Africa, a reverse trend can be seen: poverty increased faster (by3.3% per year) than the population (3.1%).

I have quoted the above passage extensively so as to bring out clearly the extent of the developmental challenges we face in Africa with regards to poverty. Africa’s poor are of course to be found in rural areas where they make up 75 percent of the poor in West and Central Africa (IFAD, 2001:v) and 73 percent in Eastern and Southern Africa (IFAD, 2002:9). Among the poor, we find hierarchies of vulnerability and domination, among groups such as women, the aged, children, and deprived and marginalised ethnic, racial and occupational minorities, on whom the scales of suffering and misery weigh more heavily. Amidst the disasters, problems and turbulence that have been the lot of Africa’s rural areas, namely wars, HIV/AIDS, famines, banditry and raids, floods and droughts, these more vulnerable groups have been at the bottom of the heap, always the first to be hardest hit and the last to receive sustained relief. They lose out and are invisible in the statistical aggregates and their stories are scarcely told. Yet, for any development process to be meaningful, relevant and valid, and to be truly emancipatory, it must address the plight and the conditions of these Africans, who constitute the continent’s majority.

**Democratic Development: Towards an Emancipatory Agenda**

So far in this paper I have discussed how development in Africa is the outcome of an interaction between structures and choices that agents make in relation to their vested interests, the position of others and themselves, and how priorities are defined, perceived and pursued. I have pointed out the importance of the dominant agendas of significant actors at different periods. These agendas and social projects have often left out or reduced the importance of the concerns and agendas of those who are either less powerful or insufficiently organised and mobilised to be
where decisions are made. This has been the story of development around the continent for the
greater part of the last forty years. It has been ‘development’ alienated from the interests and
needs of the majority of Africans.
However from around 1992 to 1994, the continent has entered another phase of democratic
struggles and transitions. This phase has very many elements including the ‘empty shell’ multi-
party electoral politics that has not fundamentally changed the way most Africans are governed.
We must however, not demean the many small victories of this emerging era. For instance, there
is the opportunity to reclaim greater space for human rights and freedom of expression, which we
see gradually emerging all over the continent. We must not deny the emergence of the opportunity
to challenge impunity and question political infallibility. Neither must we demean the ever-
expanding space for the expression of pluralism and diversity even in the contexts of constructing
and reconstructing states. Above all, we must not demean the gradual return of emancipatory
discourses, no longer indelibly implanted along unchangeable ideological divides defined by the
Cold War, but defined rather by struggles with principles of emancipation that derive from our
experiences of confronting monolithic and authoritarian politics and different forms of
domination, fighting lack of transparency and official corruption and demand-making for
development policies that are relevant and begin with our internal problems and our consensus on
how they are to be solved.
It is in this regard that the notion of democratic development becomes central. I link democracy
with development because in this age and era, they cannot be disconnected if we are to reclaim a
development process that serves the ordinary African. Development without democracy has all
the potential of being reduced to a process determined by the agendas of powerful groups, both
internal and external, with the resources to buy, cajole, ignore and marginalise other less powerful
actors. Democracy is perhaps the only safeguard and source of defence through the building or
enacting of legal/institutional frameworks that define the rights and obligations of all actors (both
individual and collective) based on mutually agreed and accepted principles.
Democracy in this sense goes beyond purely seasonal electoral contests to determine pseudo-
representation. It is the building and reclamation of the rule of just law and political cultures of
dialogue, debates and negotiations between different groups, individuals and institutions. It is
about the reconciliation and resolution of different and divergent interests and conflicts based not
on naked force and population size but rather on the fundamentals of why groups have come
together. In Africa today, this new democracy of nations struggling with development and other
priorities require the renewal of national social contracts and charters. It requires a new
participatory constitutionalism beyond those manufactured at independence (Adejumobi, 1998;
Ihonvbere, 2000; Oloka-Onyango, 2001).
Democratic development must be a process through which Africa must feed, clothe, house and
educate Africans in reasonably good health. African societies must reclaim their wealth-generation
and sustaining capacity. They must promote plenty and ensure and organise access and
opportunities for all their peoples. They must put in place the basis for the renewal and
transformation of institutions, productive systems and technologies. Africans must find incentives
within Africa to mobilise and encourage the necessary changes such as new and transformational
leadership, the reclamation of a culture of public service and stewardship, the promotion of
tolerance for difference and the putting in place incentives and rewards for merit and service. The
goals must include the advancement of the individual and collective well being as a minimum
element of the new social contract. This is more than growing the per capita income. It includes
the material and other elements of human development in terms of access to basic needs, peace, security, good health and the knowledge and capacities to function in the emerging new world. All of these will however not be given to Africans. They will require organisation, mobilisation and regional and international solidarity in the pursuit of democratic change. It will require bringing back political struggles.

Notes


References


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**Third Worldism**

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Third Worldism and Internationalism

The theory and practice of socialist internationalism has gone through several transmutations since it was given its basic form by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto. Marx and Engels’s innovation was to link what had until then been primarily a normative idea to a distinctive analysis of the ways in which common class interests came to be shared across national boundaries and to a new strategic perspective for revolutionary struggle. This change was signaled by the old motto of the League of Communists, ‘All men are brothers’, being replaced with ‘Proletarians of all countries, unite!’ Since then the meaning of internationalism has shifted along with the global patterns of power and resistance.

The Russian Revolution was the first revolution to be made with consciously internationalist intent. Its isolation after the defeat of revolution in the West brought to an end the assumption that socialist internationalism could take its lead from the advanced capitalist countries. After the formation of the Third International, Lenin looked towards the ‘toilers of the East’ - the majority of humankind - to continue the conquests of the Russian Revolution. In time this perspective led to a shift in the class basis of socialist internationalism from the working class to an alliance of classes in which the peasantry had a major role.

Under Stalinism, socialist internationalism came to be equated with compliance with the foreign policy needs of the Soviet Union. After Stalinism came to be discredited in the West - initially by Khrushchev’s revelations, and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 - no single model of revolutionary internationalism gained the same degree of hegemony. For a time, the Soviet Union and China competed for the central role in the international socialist movement, with the Chinese championing the cause of the Third World in opposition to the Soviet project of co-existence with capitalism. But the contest between them did as much to discredit the idea that any single party or state should occupy that central role, especially once China’s support for Third World liberation struggles became more erratic and opportunist in the 1970s. And at the same time as this contest between China and the Soviet Union was taking place, the international challenge to capitalism was itself being transformed both by the liberation of former colonies and by the emergence of new struggles within the advanced capitalist world. The predominant form of internationalism that took the place of solidarity with the Soviet Union as it declined after about 1960 was Third Worldism.

Third Worldism can be defined roughly as the political theory and practice that saw the major fault-line in the global capitalist order as running between the advanced capitalist countries of the West and the impoverished continents of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and saw national liberation struggles in the Third World as the major force for global revolution. Third Worldism was the form of internationalism specific of an age in which colonial rule was coming to an end - an age in which the economic power of western capital remained intact, but its global political dominance was contested. It was the internationalism of an age in which the capitalist divide between economic and political power was in the process of being globalised but was not yet firmly established, in which formal equality among nation-states accompanied continuing and then growing inequality in the global economy.

Until 1945, there was no pretence at formal equality between the Western powers and their
colonies in Africa and Asia. The defeat of Nazism and the rise to global hegemony after 1945 of the Western power of the United States that had never had a significant colonial empire made it possible to extend the divide between formal equality and material inequality into a global realm bounded by the reach of the world market alone. In this context, socialist internationalism orientated towards the emerging political power of the Third World and its struggles to remake its place in a global economy dominated by capitalism.¹

**Perspectives on Third Worldism**

Third Worldism has been both an ideology of the Third World and about the Third World. Viewed as a product of the Third World, it can be seen as no more than the assertion of the humanity of colonised or previously colonised people; an essentially timeless proposition, conditioned by the strategic needs of the moment in which it was made. This is the approach of Sartre’s famous preface to Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*: ‘Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men, and one thousand five hundred million natives’. This situation is brought to an end, according to Sartre, as the Third World ‘finds its voice’.² In this view, the ‘natives’ were simply discarding an alien classification and becoming the ‘men’ they always had been.

Viewed as a Western ideology, Third Worldism is often seen as a rootless and passing fad, easily discounted and easily disclaimed. ‘I have never been a “third worldist”’, writes Samir Amin, one of the leading theorists of Third Worldism. ‘I believe the term applies only to certain Western leftists who in the Bandung era (1955–1975) thought they could substitute “third world peoples” for the “proletariat” in expressing their messianic expectation’.³ These perspectives are in conflict with one another, but there is a certain limited truth to both of them. The driving force behind Third Worldism was indeed the entry of millions of people from the former colonial world into a world-historical arena that had for centuries been dominated by a relatively small number of western capitalist societies. In the West, Third Worldism did not grow out of a rigorous critique of Eurocentrism. Often, the moral imperative of solidarity with specific Third World struggles obscured theoretical question of how processes of global change were determined. In this context, Third Worldism has become a derogatory term, often defined so that no-one would wish to admit to it.

But both perspectives stand in the way of a clear assessment of the historical meaning of Third Worldism and prevent us from recognising the important role it has played in the making of the politics and intellectual life of the contemporary Left. The defects of Third Worldism were significant. At the same time, it was an extraordinary and unprecedented achievement to construct and sustain over decades a political and intellectual project capable of inspiring and harnessing the effort and commitment of millions of people in the advanced capitalist countries in solidarity with the struggles of people in the poorest societies. Even larger numbers of people in the Third World came to see their struggles as part of an effort to create a new world. Third Worldism provided as viable a model as we have of revolutionary internationalism as a living force, an ethos constantly shaping ideas and actions not through pronouncements from above, but through building links of solidarity, exchanging ideas, developing common resources, and engaging in collective action.

**The Philosophical Roots of Third Worldism: Marxism**
Within the history of Marxism, Third Worldism could be seen as a way of ridding earlier forms of socialist internationalism of their Eurocentrism, historical parochialism, and residual ideas of racial superiority. Eurocentrism was not simply a result of socialist theory having its historical roots in western Europe. Although Eurocentrism conflicted with Marx’s keen sense of how societies are formed by specific conditions, it still had a logical place in the Marxist conception of history. Because capitalism was most developed in Europe, a theory that gave the key role in any process of social change to the working class could not easily avoid the expectation that the process of global social change would be initiated in Europe. There was nothing arbitrary about Marx’s expectation that the liberation of India would have to await ‘a great social revolution’ that will have mastered ‘the results of the bourgeois epoch, the market of the world and the modern powers of production, and subjected them to the common control of the most advanced peoples’.

Before 1917, the Marxist who most fully anticipated an internationalism of truly global reach was Rosa Luxemburg. Not only did she give more importance than her contemporaries to capitalist expansion into the pre-capitalist societies of Asia and Africa in the analysis of capitalism as a global system. She was also more inclined to locate capitalism within a longer historical perspective, seeing it as ‘no more than a parenthesis in human history between two great communist epochs, that of the ancient past and that of the socialist future’. In this perspective, Luxemburg foresaw the modern European proletariat and the indigenous peoples of the colonised countries forging an alliance against their common enemy, imperialism. But her argument was still very far from suggesting that the leading role in the struggle against capitalism as a global system could be assumed by the indigenous people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America - what came to be known as the Third World.

After the failure of revolution in the West, Lenin and the Bolsheviks looked towards the periphery of the capitalist system, Asia, in particular, for a new political upsurge. From the Second Comintern Congress of 1920, when Lenin first put forward a perspective for democratic revolution, led by the national bourgeoisie in colonised countries, to the ‘non-capitalist’ form of development proposed for allies of the Soviet Union in Africa and the Middle East under Brezhnev, Soviet Marxism always proposed a secondary role for the less developed countries, following cautiously on the path opened up by the Soviet Union. Soviet Marxism preserved the linear and evolutionary historical model of Second International Marxism while giving the Third World a more conspicuous role in it. In contrast, Western Marxism, as the name suggests, was mainly concerned with forms of cultural and political hegemony specific to the advanced capitalist countries of the West and had little to say about the Third World. In this sense, the emergence of Third Worldism in the West represented something of a reversal of roles.

Third Worldism, then, did not simply grow out of earlier forms of internationalism. It was a response to the end of European colonial rule and the emergence of national liberation struggles in Asia and Africa. But it was also a response to deep-seated problems within radical thought and strategy in the West. It was a way of resolving a central problem of Western Marxism: the problem of revolutionary agency.

This problem lay at the heart of Western Marxism from the outset. On the one hand, the Western Marxist tradition was born from a sense that the vanguard party - especially in the bureaucratized form it took in Soviet Marxism - did not ensure the active participation of the oppressed in their own liberation, and became a tool for actively denying that participation. On the other hand, for as long as the theorists of Western Marxism remained outside the ambit of Soviet Marxism, they were cut off from the working class whose role they asserted. While the international working-
class movement was dominated by the Soviet Union and the communist parties that followed its line, Marxist theory could do little to address the question of the agency through which revolutionary change could be brought about.\(^6\)

The major theorists of Western Marxism sought essentially philosophical solutions to this conundrum. From Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* to Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, the major works of Western Marxism were concerned with grasping the dialectical movement of consciousness in such a way as to show how workers could come to an understanding of the necessity for their own self-emancipation. As long as the enquiry remained at the philosophical level, it was relatively independent of the actual existence of such revolutionary consciousness and its embodiment in concrete organisations and struggles. As the New Left emerged in the West - partly through radicalisation of student struggles and partly in solidarity with the liberation struggles of the Third World - this problem of agency became more pressing.

At the same time, there was no obvious source of revolutionary agency in the advanced capitalist countries in the 1960s, after decades of economic expansion. The majority of the working class were either integrated into the politics of reformism, or looked to communist parties on the Soviet model, or, in the crucial case of the United States, lacked political instruments of their own. In this context, the revolutionary struggles of the Third World provided a kind of solution to the problem of agency that had been central to Western Marxism for decades, and at the same time defined the task of the emerging movement in the West.

If any single work drew together the Western Marxist theme of the dialectical movement of consciousness with the struggle against colonialism, it was Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* - in effect, the manifesto of Third Worldism. Fanon’s account of the need for the victims of colonial oppression to discover their selfhood and autonomy through armed resistance reworked the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave, one of the central philosophical motifs of postwar French Marxism. For Fanon, decolonisation is ‘the veritable creation of new men’; the victim of colonialism ‘becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself’, putting into practice the Biblical saying, ‘The last shall be first and the first last’.\(^7\)

But in Fanon’s hands, this dialectic led to a different outcome than previously envisaged in Western Marxism - that is, the freedom that results from the struggle for recognition by the other is not the freedom of the servant, or the exploited class, but rather of the part of humanity excluded from its major institutions, the *outcast* rather than the oppressed. The violence of colonisation is not merely aimed at holding the colonised in a subordinate position within a common set of social institutions, recognized as the product of a common history, but rather to exclude the colonised from those institutions.

Consequently, the colonised cannot seek to join the colonial world on the basis of equality, but must ‘break up the colonial world’. Their resistance is aimed at the ‘destruction of native social forms’ that must be ‘broken up without reserve’. This ‘does not mean that after the frontiers have been abolished lines of communication will be set up between the two zones. The destruction of the colonial world is no more and no less than the abolition of one zone, its burial in the depths of the earth or its expulsion from the country’.\(^8\) For Fanon, the struggle for freedom takes place on a global stage, but the freedom that results is strangely contained. Freedom is as much a burden and a historical duty as a blessing. Solidarity rather than freedom is often the central normative category of the struggle itself and the vision of the new society it seeks to create.

Fanon was sufficiently consistent to extend his emphasis on the desperate energies of the most marginalised and excluded to his assessment of the class forces ranged against colonialism. He
saw the lumpenproletariat, ‘that horde of starving men, uprooted from their tribe and from their clan’, as ‘one of the most spontaneous and most radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people’.

Third Worldism adopted and extended Fanon’s assessment of the revolutionary potential of the anti-colonial struggle, but seldom shared his view of the class forces within that struggle. Even in Fanon’s own work, the concept of freedom for the outcast was never explicitly contrasted with that for the oppressed. But this changed concept of freedom provided the implicit starting-point for Third Worldism. The difference between the two conceptions of freedom - for the oppressed, seeking equality, and for the outcast, seeking inclusion within a new social whole - is often obscured by a conception of the two conceptions of freedom as representing different points on a historical continuum between the Biblical world of semi-nomadic pastoralism, on the one hand, and capitalist modernity, on the other. To see the difference in this light is implicitly to attribute the Third Worldist conception of freedom to the historical backwardness of Third World societies, and to comply with a linear conception of history that equates capitalism with progress. It is also to ignore a distinctively modern conception of freedom for the outcast that was most fully developed in Tsarist Russia, between the 1840s and the 1880s, the decades in which Russia’s place in Western modernity was most intensely contested.

**The Philosophical Roots of Third Worldism: The Modern Outcast**

There are complex historical reasons why this conception should have come to the fore most conspicuously in nineteenth-century Russia and not elsewhere - the sudden confrontation of an ancient moral tradition conveyed by Orthodox Christianity with modern scientific and philosophical ideas, rapid capitalist industrialisation along with serfdom and its rural legacy, above all the complex and overwrought class structure of Russian society and the precarious position of the intelligentsia within it. It was in this context that the ancient figure of the outcast took on a modern guise.

The figure of the outcast was morally significant in Biblical times because the mechanisms of social control in ancient Israel were so rudimentary that exclusion was often the only available response to the halt, the lame, the blind, or the prodigal. The figure of the outcast in Russian thought is instead the product of a society in which the mechanisms of social control, especially within the tiny polite, middle-class society, separated by a social gulf from the rural peasantry, exceed the social roles available. Within so small a circle of the privileged, any failure to conform has catastrophic results: Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* no longer has smart enough clothes to make money by giving lessons, and falls into poverty, despair, and murder; Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky in *Demons* faces the prospect - which he views as equally dismal - of ‘ending my life as a tutor in some merchant’s house, or dying of hunger in a ditch’ if he loses the favour of his aristocratic benefactor.

The modern outcast that came into view in the context of Russian populism was the product of a peculiarly tense critique of Western modernity. In the work of Dostoevsky, it combined an aspiration to ‘learn from the people’ and develop the spirit of humility and sacrifice that would bring the intelligentsia closer to the peasantry with a belief in religious redemption under the guidance of a benevolent Tsar. For the populists of the 1870s and 1880s, ‘going to the people’ had a similar moral cast but was aimed at creating a secular and democratic political order. Both theocratic and populist structures of thought could not easily be reconciled with a linear
conception of history that dismissed the outcast as a relic from a bygone time. The debates within Russian Marxism about the peculiarities of Russian history, from Marx’s correspondence with Vera Zasulich to Trotsky’s idea of combined and uneven development, are in their own way a continuation of this theme. \(^{12}\) For them, too, the question of whether the first will become last and the last first has an eminently practical meaning.

The legacy of Russian populism lived on despite the Marxist critique developed by Plekhanov and continued by Lenin and its seeming relegation to the status of a historical footnote by the Bolshevik revolution. It would be more accurate to say that Russian populism produced two distinct legacies that lived on with little contact with each other. In the context of anti-colonial struggles, Tolstoy’s defense of nonviolence had a crucial influence on Gandhi. \(^{13}\) The idea of sacrifice as the principal means of authentication of national leadership in these struggles had a history that spread far beyond Gandhi, India, and the strategy of nonviolence. In a different vein, ‘learning from the people’ became crucial to anti-colonial struggles, and was formalised in the radical pedagogy of Paolo Freire. Finally, the Russian populist critique of the idea that each society had to pass through a predetermined set of historical stages found an echo in Maoism, and in anti-colonial struggles elsewhere in Asia and in Africa.

Within the history of political thought, Third Worldism can be seen as an attempt to reconcile these two divergent conceptions of freedom within a unified set of struggles. It has not succeeded, in some measure because it has not been conscious of its own tasks. Despite its stress on the role of the modern outcast - the ‘wretched of the earth’ - Third Worldism as an intellectual construction has reconciled these two conceptions of freedom mainly within a philosophical framework, derived from the Enlightenment, in which freedom is conceived in opposition to oppression. Paradoxically, Third Worldism has given a global reach to the Enlightenment conception of freedom, and helped to ensure that the radical potential of the Russian theme remains submerged.

The figure of the modern outcast had a second, less explicitly political, afterlife. It lived on also in literary form, in Kafka’s victims of an impenetrable bureaucracy, Camus’s outsider, Beckett’s derelicts and tramps. African–American writers, such as Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, have drawn on Dostoevsky’s archetypal outcast - the underground man - for their depiction of race in twentieth-century America. But it found no clear political expression again until the intersecting needs of national liberation in the Third World and Western Marxism brought together its populist and existentialist strands and gave a new charge of political meaning to the modern outcast.

**The French Origins of Third Worldism**

The conference of African and Asian governments held in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955 is often taken to mark the point at which the Third World decisively entered the arena of world history. Aijaz Ahmad’s analysis of the roles of three of its leading figures - Nehru, Nasser, and Sukarno - demonstrates that Bandung was a much more ambiguous exercise, as much electoral *realpolitik* as ideological call to arms. \(^{14}\)

As with many other such initiatives, going back at least to the Anti-Imperialist League that met in Brussels in 1927, Bandung did not result in any lasting political alliance or structure. The attempt by Mao’s China during the 1960s to define itself as the champion of national liberation in the Third World, in conflict with the Soviet Union, had considerable impact on parts of the Third World, as widely separated as Indonesia and Peru. But its impact on the political culture of the
Western Left, though far less significant in political terms, may have had the greater role in making Third Worldism into an ideological perspective of global reach. The internationalist character of Third Worldism was made possible by the political awakening of the Third World, the growth of Western solidarity with it, and their complex interaction in the context of Cold War and superpower rivalry. Rather than the immaculate birth of the Third World at Bandung, the politics of Third Worldism took distinctly different routes in various national contexts, perhaps most distinctively in the major countries of the capitalist West. Both the theory of Three Worlds and the term ‘Third Worldism’ (tiers mondisme) had their origins in France. The term ‘Third World’ was coined by the French demographer Albert Sauvy in 1952. The distinction between the three worlds was modeled on the distinction in pre-revolutionary France between the three estates: nobles, clerics, and Third Estate. In each case, the three-part division rested on two binary oppositions. The earlier distinction distinguished between noble and common, and sacred and profane, with the third estate as the residual category, neither noble nor with a vocation for the sacred. The later distinction distinguished between modern and traditional societies, and free and unfree, with the Third World neither modern nor free. The earlier categories of the noble and the sacred were much contested at the time that the Third Estate discovered itself as a political force. In contrast, the Third World was conceived on the assumption that modernity and freedom were the necessary goals of human development. In this sense, the idea of the three worlds was ‘thoroughly teleological’. The term ‘Third Worldism’ gained considerable currency during the Algerian War of 1954–62. Third Worldism expressed itself mainly in solidarity with the FLN in Algeria, and often in joining the underground resistance to the Algerian War in France. Evans’s oral history of French opposition to the Algerian War documents the extent to which Third Worldism drew on the legacy of partisan resistance to the Nazi occupation during the Second World War. But Third Worldists did not typically see their support for Algerian independence as implying any clear position on social change in France itself. Many of them saw the Bandung conference as an inspiration. But rather than seeing the Algerian War as the front line in a global struggle, they saw it as a form of solidarity owed to a neighbouring country illegitimately subjected to the colonial rule of France.

Support for Algeria was in this sense an alternative to revolutionary politics in France, rather than its corollary. The major figure in the French underground network of the FLN, Francis Jeanson, emphasised the division of political tasks between the Algerian struggle and its French supporters: ‘Since 1 November 1954 the Algerian problem has become, and becomes every day more concretely, a problem for Algerians, so that regrets and criticisms are of no real significance if they are not made by Algerians and if they don’t have roots in at least a part of the Algerian people’. The material and moral difficulties faced by an independent Algeria, according to Jeanson, are ‘almost inconceivable to our European minds’. After Algerian independence, many French Third Worldists took the logical next step of relinquishing French citizenship and settling in Algeria.

There are specific reasons why French Third Worldism took on this moral cast, and did not develop into a revolutionary internationalism. Algeria was not legally a colony of France, but rather a province of it: the fiction was that ‘the Mediterranean cuts through France as the Seine cuts through Paris’. Much of the French support for Algerian, and all of the underground support, was in opposition to the French Communist Party and other established parties of the Left. (The PCF called for ‘peace’ in Algeria, but voted for special powers for the French military
The French Third Worldism was often concerned with the practical tasks of solidarity rather than putting forward new strategies for social change within their own context or globally. Perhaps the most prominent French intellectual to align himself with the cause of the Third World was Sartre, who sometimes acted as a symbol of solidarity with their struggles and at others developed a sweeping philosophical critique of Western domination. The French Marxist most concerned with questions of strategy, Regis Debray, sought to generalise the lessons of the Cuban revolution for Latin America. French Marxist studies of the Third World, with the exception of Samir Amin, an Egyptian writing in French, similarly remained at a remove from the politics of Third Worldism.

The Third Worldism of New Left Review

The French pattern of solidarity with Third World struggles as an extension of, or even an alternative to, domestic politics has some parallels on the British Left in the same period, for example, in the work of Basil Davidson and Peter Worsley. In Britain, this kind of solidarity represented a less dramatic break within left politics. Liberal and working-class opposition to imperialism went back at least as far as the South African War. There was no mass-based Communist Party. The Labour Party’s complicity with imperialism was of a piece with its reformism rather than being a major source of division for the revolutionary Left, as in France. Third Worldism in Britain was initially in large measure a translation from the French, but a translation of a specific segment of the French experience made in response to specific needs. It drew above all on the work on Sartre and Fanon, and formed part of a deliberate attempt to assimilate the theoretical legacy of Western Marxism. The crucial context for the development of Third Worldism in Britain in the early 1960s was the journal New Left Review, especially after the appointment of a new editorial committee under Perry Anderson in 1962.

The new editors had translated Sartre’s account of Cuba and hailed the Cuban revolution. An editorial on ‘Internationalism’ in January 1963 announced that New Left Review had ‘chosen to begin with the most acutely oppressed and explosive zone in the world today: the colonial and independent countries that make up the Third World’ aimed at stimulating ‘a debate on models and options in the Third World’, and contributing to ‘the necessary internationalization of British socialist thought today’. Perry Anderson’s three–part account of ‘Portugal and the End of Ultra-Imperialism’ was intended to provide a model of a new kind of analysis of Third World struggles that linked the colonial system and the process of decolonisation to the economy and society of the colonial power and distinguished clearly between different types of colonialism. It is an impressive work: at the same time historically specific and theoretically informed, more fully materialist in its analysis than the work of Fanon, say. Anderson shows how the ‘torpid fascism’ of the Salazar regime determines the Portuguese system of ‘ultra-colonialism’ - that is, at once the most primitive and the most extreme modality of colonialism; how the brutality of forced labour in Portugal’s African colonies constituted ‘the absolute, literal nadir of African misery’, and at the same time an essential basis for racial capitalism throughout the subcontinent (‘Without gold there is no South Africa, and without Mozambique there is no gold’); and how the whole structure is held together at every point by extreme violence, a contagion which ‘settles on everything and deforms it’ so that ‘in the end, violence tends to coincide with the very notion of social relations themselves’.
But at the same time, the analysis produces no clear perspective for political action; structural determinants are clarified and distinguished, but effective forms of political agency become indistinct. It is ‘the wave of African liberation’ that threatens to engulf Portuguese colonialism; the ‘Afro–Asian bloc’ is crucial in making repression in Angola an issue at the United Nations, and the United States in disrupting previously united Western support for colonial rule.\(^{25}\) *New Left Review*’s global and comparative perspective found no firm point of anchorage within the politics of the British Left.

This omission was not remedied by Keith Buchanan’s overview of the politics of the Third World, which drew heavily on Fanon, but struggled to translate his analysis into a political perspective for the advanced capitalist countries. Indeed, Buchanan’s argument that the ‘efforts of Western workers to raise their standards of living have contributed more to the deterioration of the position of the underdeveloped countries than has the profit motive of industrial or commercial leaders’ provoked the resignation of older board members.\(^{26}\)

This divide between the politics of the Third World and the First was never to be bridged by Anderson or *New Left Review*. Some years later, it was to be articulated by Anderson and Blackburn in their account of the ‘Problems of Socialist Strategy’, describing that divide in terms of the existence of scarcity:

Socialism as a movement and a critique is based on human *needs* and these needs evolve with society itself. The great, permanent landmark of real abundance will not be the end of ideology, but the *end of necessity*. The empire of scarcity, and its curse, will be over. Integral human freedom will at last be possible. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the world, in Asia, Africa and Latin America, men will still struggle to create a socialism of privation and duress. This must never be forgotten, in the task of creating in the advanced capitalist countries a socialism of liberty and privilege. The aims of both are ultimately the same: they are divided by all the immense distance of different historical time. The last and most vital test of an authentic European socialism is to remember this, and to maintain the fraternity between the two.\(^{27}\)

But this division between a ‘socialism of privation and duress’ in the Third World and a ‘socialism of liberty and privilege’ in the First World could not be overcome by the bonds of fraternity alone. The appeal to fraternity never led to an account of the political strategies that would bring socialists in the two zones together. By the early 1970s, *New Left Review* was carrying substantial critiques of the economic theories underlying solidarity with the Third World. Ernesto Laclau’s critique of André Gunder Frank appeared in 1971, and Bill Warren’s critique of Lenin and much of the Marxist theory of imperialism in 1973.\(^{28}\) Robert Brenner’s account of capitalist development, published in 1977, assumed a somewhat one-sided conception of Third Worldism, which it saw as the corollary of the critique of capitalist underdevelopment in the Third World: ‘The notion of the “development of underdevelopment” opens the way to third-worldist ideology. From the conclusion that development occurred only in the absence of links with accumulating capitalism in the metropolis, it can only be a short step to the strategy of semi-autarkic socialist development’\(^{29}\).

The history of *New Left Review* currently on the journal’s website admits to a phase of Third Worldism in 1962–3 but to no more than that.\(^{30}\) By the mid–1960s its main focus had shifted to other themes, above all, the assimilation of Western Marxist theory. But this shift in focus did not bring with it a new conception of the world-revolutionary process and the place of the Third
World in it. It was not so much that Anderson and *New Left Review* had nurtured hopes for the Third World only to have them disappointed, or first defended a Third Worldist perspective and then abandoned it. Rather, the Third Worldism of *New Left Review* - even at its high points - had never quite resulted in a clearly political perspective.

In the context of popular struggle against colonial power, the Third Worldism of *New Left Review* had not been clearly in conflict with the its Western Marxist emphasis on the consciousness of the human subject. The new regimes established after independence, however, gave less encouragement to this approach. To its credit, *New Left Review* never deceived itself about the nature of these regimes. It showed a sober awareness of the tenacity of Stalinism in the Third World, and its Third Worldism may have foundered on this awareness.  

This retreat from Third Worldism was followed eventually by *New Left Review*’s retreat from Marxism during the 1990s - formalised in the relaunch of the journal in January 2000, once more under the editorship of Perry Anderson. In Anderson’s opening editorial, he called for resistance to the provincialism of the English-speaking world while at the same time conceding that the ideal of drawing writers for the magazine from outside the ‘homelands’ of the West remained, for the moment, ‘out of reach’.

The U.S. Model of Third Worldism

Although Third Worldism always retained many distinctive local forms and emphases, it was in the United States that it took on its most influential and its definitive political form. Conversely, Third Worldism played an unusually significant role in defining the characteristic form of radicalism in the United States, in a context in which the socialist Left has been unusually dispersed and fragmented.

The global dominance of the United States since 1945 led to military interventions abroad, most conspicuously in Korea and Vietnam, but also throughout in Latin America. In resisting U.S. imperialism, the socialist left moved towards an orientation to the Third World which had deep roots within sections of the African–American community. Robin Kelley has described how militant critics of the Civil Rights Movement in the early 1960s ‘sought to understand the African–American condition through an analysis of capitalism, imperialism, and Third World liberation’. Kelley emphasises the role of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) which advanced ‘the theory that the Black liberation movement in the United States was part of the vanguard of the world socialist revolution’. RAM and other African–American militants drew on a black nationalist orientation towards Africa that dated back to the nineteenth century. In the upheavals of the 1960s this orientation made itself felt throughout the U.S. Left. In the process it outgrew its nationalist origins and developed into a new model of Third Worldism.

The example of *Monthly Review* is instructive for an understanding of this process, although no single example can be entirely representative. From soon after its inception in 1949, *Monthly Review* developed a consistent critique of capitalist development in ‘backward areas’, which took on growing importance in their analysis. By 1951 the editors described it as the *Monthly Review* position that ‘social revolution must precede economic development in the backward areas’ and that any programme based on contrary assumptions - such as those of ‘sincere liberals and New Dealers’ - was ‘doomed to certain failure’.  

This perspective was more fully developed in Baran’s *Political Economy of Growth* published in 1957. It did not yet give the struggles of the capitalist periphery the major role in global events, but laid the basis for a perspective in which these struggles became increasingly important. The
Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 at the same time led *Monthly Review* to open denunciation of the Soviet Union’s claim to ‘moral leadership of the world socialist movement’.

From the time of the Korean War *Monthly Review* had drawn attention to the problems of U.S. imperialism, not only in South East Asia, but also in Latin America and the Middle East. During the 1950s it also gave increasing coverage to developments in China. But it was the Cuban Revolution that provided a new point of orientation. Paul Sweezy later described how he and Leo Huberman ‘fell completely under the spell of this young and fresh revolution, and became almost immediately convinced that the dialectic of its internal and international development must inevitably turn it in a socialist direction’. Revolutionary Cuba provided a ‘brief glimpse of mankind’s astonishing potentialities’ which was to be crucial for the development of a distinctive *Monthly Review* perspective in the 1960s.

Cuba was an inspiration and in some ways a model for a socialist future, but it did not necessarily make clear the global process that could challenge the predominant position of U.S. capitalism. In that context, the critical case was Vietnam and *Monthly Review* kept up a regular commentary and interpretation of events in Vietnam from the initial U.S. military intervention in 1954 until the fall of Saigon in 1975.

*Monthly Review*’s treatment of the U.S. war in Vietnam became increasingly integrated with an analysis of the political economy of the United States. From the outset, this analysis focused heavily on the illegality of the U.S. intervention and its imperialist character, defending ‘the right of the Vietnamese people to choose Communist leadership if they want it, as they apparently do’.

In an April 1965 article, Sweezy and Huberman raised the larger question: ‘Can a country fight its way out of the “free world” - that is, the free-enterprise world, the world open to exploitation by American capitalism - in direct confrontation with the most powerful imperialist nation?’ They argued that the U.S. would fail to preserve its supremacy in the Third World and concluded that the road taken by the U.S. ruling class in Vietnam would lead to ruin: ‘The course of the Decline and Fall of the American Empire has now been charted for all to see’.

From this point onwards, they came to see the global and domestic implications of the Vietnam conflict as intertwined:

> Inter-imperialist rivalries, revolutionary and national liberation struggles in the Third World, class struggles in both advanced and underdeveloped countries - all will feel the impact of the capitalist world’s deepening economic strains. But the greatest effect, at least in the short run, will show itself in an explosive upsurge of that unique and irreconcilable conflict in the heart of the imperialist metropolis itself - the freedom struggle of the oppressed black inner colony.

Unlike in France and Britain, it is possible to see here an orientation to the Third World that is at the same time an orientation to class struggle in the domestic context.

The basic premise of *Monthly Review*’s Third Worldism was set out by Sweezy in an essay published in 1967:

> If we consider capitalism as a global system, which is the only correct procedure, we see that it is divided into a handful of exploiting countries and a much more numerous and populous group of exploited countries. The masses in these exploited dependencies constitute a force in the global capitalist system which is revolutionary in the same sense and for the same reasons that Marx considered the proletariat of the early period of
modern industry to be revolutionary . . . World history since the Second World War proves that this revolutionary force is really capable of waging successful revolutionary struggles against capitalist domination.\(^{39}\)

In his Foreword to *Modern Capitalism* in 1972, Sweezy was still more specific: The ‘primary or principal contradiction of the system in the present period is not between bourgeoisie and proletariat’, as Marx had believed of his time, but ‘between the metropolis dominated by the United States and the revolutionary national liberation movements in the Third World’.\(^{40}\) Paradoxically, the threat to U.S. capitalism which *Monthly Review* saw coming from the Third World did not imply the feasibility of socialism in the Third World itself. In their review of the Vietnamese victory in 1975, Sweezy and Magdoff rebuked the ‘super-revolutionaries’ opposed to reconciliation between classes and building national unity in South Vietnam:

> The point is that in liberated South Vietnam the transition to socialism is simply not on the agenda. . . . Whether the class struggle, as it unfolds in the new and quite unprecedented conditions of liberated South Vietnam, will lead to the definitive political victory of the revolutionaries and the peaceful reunification of all Vietnam as a socialist state firmly on the road to communism, this we do not and cannot know.\(^{41}\)

This reticence was consistent with a long-held position. *Monthly Review* had praised the ethic of shared sacrifice - ‘poverty combined with justice and hope’ - that animated the Vietnamese struggle. But they had never described that struggle as socialist. Sweezy and Huberman wrote in 1968 that ‘the last stage of American capitalism’ had been reached, and added, ‘The only way this stage of capitalism can end is through a socialist revolution’.\(^{42}\) The location of this revolution was not specified, and perhaps could not be. Although the collective energy that brought the prospect closer came from the Third World, this analysis did not require that socialism be initiated in the Third World rather than within the heart of the U.S. empire itself. The struggles of the Third World were the driving-force for world revolution but were not exemplary for socialists, or only in a secondary sense: exemplifying commitment and sacrifice rather than the socialist ideal. It was only with the splintering of the New Left during the mid-1960s that the U.S. Left’s turn to the Third World became pronounced. Although there were many differences and conflicts within the U.S. left, this model of Third Worldism was widely-held and made itself felt far beyond its original context. *Monthly Review* would never have claimed the pre-eminent role for the United States in the process of global change. But its analysis could not exclude this role, and it came to be explicitly affirmed in other registers. Marcuse’s *Essay on Liberation* stated in so many words: ‘The preconditions for the liberation and development of the Third World must emerge in the advanced capitalist countries’.\(^{43}\)

**Third Worldism and the Struggle for South Africa**

From the late nineteenth century, black resistance to racial domination in South Africa was always informed by its global context, with black South Africans appealing to their rights as subjects of the British Empire, to the principles set out in the Atlantic Charter, and the like. By about 1960 there were three major points of global orientation within anti-apartheid politics. The African National Congress (ANC) had traditionally looked towards liberal opinion in the West for support, and as former colonies became independent relied on their support in such bodies as the
United Nations. African solidarity became central to the breakaway Pan-Africanist Congress and increasingly important to the ANC after the turn to armed struggle in 1960. A less widespread but influential perspective looked towards the Soviet Union as the driving-force and model for liberation.

In the years of underground struggle after 1960 the liberation movement came to base its strategies on the premise that racial domination could not be overcome except by a revolution that would put the survival of capitalism into question. For the ANC, the turning-point was the Morogoro conference of 1969 when this perspective was formally adopted. This was clearly stated in its *Strategy and Tactics*:

> In our country - more than in any other part of the oppressed world - it is inconceivable for liberation to have meaning without a return of the wealth of the land to the people as a whole. It is therefore a fundamental feature of our strategy that victory must embrace more than formal democracy. To allow the existing economic forces to retain their interests intact is to feed the root of racial supremacy and does not represent even the shadow of liberation.44

Although the South African Communist Party upheld the idea of a two-stage revolution, by the mid-1970s its projected stages were not always easily distinguishable. ‘True national liberation is impossible without social liberation’, Joe Slovo wrote in 1975. ‘No significant national demand can be successfully won without the destruction of the existing capitalist structure’.45 The *Green Book* issued by the ANC Strategy Commission after a visit to Vietnam in 1979 called for ‘protracted people’s war’ in alliance with the ‘Socialist world’, the newly independent states of Africa and Asia, people still fighting against colonial rule, and the working class and ‘other democratic forces in the imperialist countries’.46

In effect, the ANC learned to mobilise the constituency specified by Third Worldism without ever endorsing the Third Worldist conception of social change. It fit in with a Third Worldist theory of world revolution without adhering to that theory. The Black Consciousness movement in South Africa during the 1970s was far more ready to become ‘part of a bigger struggle of the Third World that wants to shake off the yoke of imperialism and replace it with socialistic governments’. It rejected alliances with East and West in order to ‘join forces with the rest of the Third World in their struggle to break away from imperialist control by the big powers’.47 But for all its adherence to the theory, this movement never became a legitimate and validated object of it.

The growth of an independent trade union movement in South Africa after 1973 and the emergence of a new Marxist interpretation of South African history strengthened the view of the struggle against apartheid as at the same time a challenge to capitalism. Both the trade union movement and the new generation of radical intellectuals were influenced by Western Marxism and never looked to the Soviet Union for inspiration or support. They helped interpret events in South Africa for the western Left, stressing the need for working-class organisation and pointing out the pitfalls of nationalism.48

But for all that the western Left drew on an analysis that was unsympathetic to the ANC and the project of national liberation, its political conclusions often led in a different direction. Saul and Gelb’s *Crisis in South Africa*, published in 1981, argued that ‘the national liberation movement format remains, under South African conditions, a valid blueprint for socialist revolution’ and that the ANC ‘demands support as best providing of this format, although it seems likely that the ANC that ultimately wins the struggle in South Africa will be rather different from the movement as it is
today’. The ANC would be moved rapidly to the left, they held, through ‘the continuing dialectic between this movement and the considerable revolutionary energies at play within the society’. With the mass uprisings of the 1980s, South Africa came to be seen as pregnant with revolutionary possibilities. In 1986, Sweezy and Magdoff wrote of the South African struggle as ‘crucial to the whole history of our time’.

It is so far the only country with a well developed, modern capitalist structure which is not only ‘objectively’ ripe for revolution but has actually entered a stage of overt and seemingly irreversible revolutionary struggle. . . . There is no other country in the world that has anything like the material and symbolic significance of South Africa for both sides in the conflict that rends the world today. A victory for revolution, i.e., a genuine and lasting change in basic power relations in South Africa, could have an impact on the balance of global forces comparable to that of the revolutionary wave that followed World War II. On the other hand, a victory for counter-revolution - the stabilization of capitalist relations in South Africa, even if in somewhat altered form - would be a stunning defeat for the world revolution.

Decades of mass struggle engaging millions of South Africans and drawing the support of activists around the world yielded such a stabilisation of capitalist relations in the settlement negotiated between the apartheid state and the ANC after 1990. The global context of the settlement played a major role in its capitalist outcome. The ANC’s capacity to contain the demands of its mass base could not be contested by socialists in the West who had argued for the centrality of the organisation.

There is little consensus on how to date the end of Third Worldism, or even whether it has come to an end. In a sense, it has had many endings and also has lived on in residual forms. Certain forms of syndicalist or autonomist Marxism were never much influenced by it. Maoist–inspired versions of Third Worldism were increasingly debunked by indiscriminating Chinese support in the early 1970s for opponents of the Soviet Union - the Shah of Iran, General Pinochet in Chile, Holden Roberto’s FNLA in Angola. The rise of political Islam in the 1980s made the idea of inclusive Third World unity less plausible than before. For those who lived through the struggle against apartheid, the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as president of a non-racial South Africa in April 1994 was spelled both victory over apartheid and the end of Third Worldist hopes.

**Third Worldism’s Unequal Contract**

It is possible to imagine a different outcome for events in South Africa, in which the global movement that had developed over decades of solidarity with the struggle against apartheid actively supported a radical challenge to post–apartheid capitalism and in which popular power in South Africa had a radicalising effect on the southern African region and beyond. The linkages existed, but could not easily be activated. The obstacles in their way can be clarified by examining briefly the work of the figure who wrestled most consistently with the problem of giving revolutionary effect to international linkages of solidarity between the First World and the Third: Che Guevara.

If Fanon had written the manifesto of Third Worldism, then its programme of action was provided by Guevara’s message to the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana in January 1966. The conference was an outgrowth of the Afro–Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Organization and it attempted
to draw together guerilla struggles for national liberation in the three continents targeted by imperialism. Guevara’s message to the conference was written after his own withdrawal from Cuban government and his abortive mission to the Congo, while he was on his way to participate in guerilla war in Colombia. For Guevara himself there was, at that stage, no turning back. His personal defiance was generalised in his call to create two, three, many Vietnams. In 1963 Guevara had spoken of Vietnam as ‘the great laboratory of Yankee imperialism’ where the people were ‘fighting for the common desires which unite the peoples of the three oppressed continents of the present: Asia, Africa, and our America’. In 1966, in what was to be his last message, Guevara acknowledged the ‘sad reality’ that ‘Vietnam - a nation representing the aspirations, the hopes of the whole world of forgotten peoples - is tragically alone’. In this context, solidarity was ‘not a matter of wishing success to the victim of aggression, but of sharing his fate; one must accompany him to his death or to victory’. Imperialism is a world system, he argued, and ‘it must be defeated in a world confrontation’. For this a ‘true proletarian internationalism’ was needed in which ‘to die under the flag of Vietnam, of Venezuela, of Guatemala, of Laos, of Guinea, of Bolivia, of Brazil - to name only a few scenes of today’s armed struggle - would be equally glorious and desirable for an American, an Asian, an African, even a European’. This militant internationalism would be the product of massive sacrifice in the Third World reaching a point where it sparked class struggle in the advanced capitalist countries:

Over there, the soldiers of imperialism encounter the discomforts of those who, accustomed to the standard of living that the United States boasts, have to confront a hostile land; the insecurity of those who cannot move without feeling that they are stepping on enemy territory; death for those who go outside their fortified compounds; the permanent hostility of the entire population. All this is provoking repercussions inside the United States. It is leading to the appearance of a factor that was attenuated by imperialism at full strength: the class struggle inside its own territory. How close and bright would the future appear if two, three, many Vietnams flowered on the face of the globe, with their quota of death and their immense tragedies, with their daily heroism, with their repeated blows against imperialism, forcing it to disperse its forces under the lash of the growing hatred of the peoples of the world.

Even so fervent and authentic a champion of the Third World captures here the unequal contract at the heart of Third Worldism. The Third World would pay ‘with their quota of death and their immense tragedies’ and thereby prompt class struggle within the advanced capitalist countries. The standard of living of the advanced capitalist countries averts the need for such ‘daily heroism’ on their part. The Third World struggle because its national context leaves it no alternative; the advanced capitalist countries take up their role when the global context created by Third World struggles makes this necessary and makes conditions of struggle favorable. Guevara himself traveled to Africa and to Latin America to share the fate of those fighting imperialism in the most exposed positions. He was aware of the moral ambiguity of his own willingness to sacrifice his life in other countries where his arrival had the effect of ‘carrying out a blackmail with my physical presence’. The extraordinary legend that had grown up around him made it possible for him briefly to overcome the barriers between different contexts of struggle. He could become - or symbolise - the global outcast, the prodigal son at home everywhere. But his example could not easily be emulated. Nor could his calculus of sacrifice ensure that Soviet and Chinese differences were set aside in favor of joint support for anti-imperialist struggles in the
Third World.
Nor could the contract implicitly enacted by the Third World’s quota of death and destruction easily be reciprocated by revolutionaries in the advanced capitalist countries. They had to choose between making use of the greater legal space available to them or undertaking armed gestures that were largely symbolic and often self-destructive - the Weather Underground, the Symbionese Liberation Army, and the like. Nor could the dilemma easily be overcome by displacing it. In 1970, when Huey Newton offered to bring the entire membership of the Black Panther Party to Vietnam to fight on the side of the NLF, ‘the offer was graciously declined’.

Insofar as the contract at the heart of Third Worldism effectively reduced each side’s part to their moral commitment and capacity to sacrifice, it obscured a different inequality. The unequal division of death and destruction, in which the Third World carried the main burden, hid from view an unequal division of intellectual labour between the western Left and the Third World, and perhaps continues to hide it. It is not difficult to understand the historical and material reasons why the western Left took on the tasks of theoretical synthesis and renewal and the Third World those of providing raw materials and implementing strategic insights. In the context of left intellectual life, Third Worldism was primarily a Western perspective rather than the product of a genuinely internationalist collaboration. A renewal of socialist internationalism must learn its lessons, but build on a different foundation.

Notes

1. The historical relationship of formal equality in the capitalist polity and material inequality in the capitalist economy is most fully described in Ellen Meiksins Wood, Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
7. Fanon, Wretched of the Earth, p. 28.
8. Fanon, Wretched of the Earth, p. 29.
9. Fanon, Wretched of the Earth, p.103; cf. p. 109 on the capacity of the lumpenproletariat to be mobilised in the cause of reaction.
10. Some of the relevant Biblical passages are: Psalm 147; Isaiah 11, 35; Jeremiah 30, 31; Leviticus 21, Deuteronomy 18; 2 Samuel 5.
30. Perry Anderson’s recent account of the moment of decolonisation as that when internationalism ‘starts to change camps - assuming new forms in the ranks of capital’ - as if national liberation struggles had no international impact on the socialist movement worth noticing - is not as easy to take seriously (Anderson, ‘Internationalism: A Breviary’, *New Left Review* II/14 [March–April 2002], p. 16).
632; cf. p. 701.