

Introduction

Lansana Keita

One of the noted facts about contemporary social science research on Africa is that its societies are invariably analysed as being underdeveloped or, more euphemistically, as 'developing'. These studies complete their observations with prescriptions as to what policies should be implemented so that African societies evolve from states of underdevelopment to states of development. In general, the usual method of determining levels of underdevelopment is by appeal to particular indices that measure sociological quanta such as per capita income, life expectancy, infant mortality, literacy, and so on. According to this kind of template, Africa's status as being underdeveloped is thereby seen to be justified.

In terms of the explanation of the perceived underdevelopment of Africa, a study of recent history offers some insights into the way Africa was seen as underdeveloped, and the solutions offered. In the recent past, the political dynamic of the world was seen as being driven along by a titanic struggle between the capitalist West and the Communist world. According to the argument put forward by the theoreticians of the Communist world, the Western world was historically slated to be surpassed, then replaced first by socialism, then by communism. The basis for this political diagnosis derived from the Marxian stage theory of human history. According to Marx, feudalism was a social order with a particular historical role to play according to his materialist conception of history. This social order was predicated on a particular set of productive and technological forces.

Feudalism met its sociological demise when a fortuitous conjuncture of historical forces that developed first in maritime Western Europe led to the germination and rapid growth of the economic system known as capitalism. But the development of capitalism, justified by Adam Smith as 'private vices, public benefits' while leading to great wealth for some led also to exploitation and misery for the labour inputs into the capitalist equation of land, labour and capital. This critique of capitalism was fiercely pursued by the likes of Karl Marx and his epigones. Marx argued that as capitalism developed, the workers would eventually recognize the nature of their exploitation and would then seek to replace it with a system more amenable to their interests.

The idea that economies develop was certainly engendered by the very nature of capitalism, whose *raison d'être* was the reward of growth for capital investment. That very idea was evident in the Adam Smith's treatise *The Wealth of Nations*. In this text, Smith sought to explain the dynamics of the economic growth that led to the wealth of nations. The same idea of the accumulation of wealth and the growth of economies was also central to the

subsequent shapers of theoretical political economy: Ricardo, Malthus, Say, and others. By the time Marx came along to engage in his comprehensive critique of capitalism, the idea that the essence of economics was growth was firmly entrenched. What was novel with Marx was that under the influence of the age of Darwin, he interpreted capitalism not only as a system of growth but also one of evolution. According to Marx, capitalism would eventually be forced to evolve into a new system that would develop out of capitalism. But the new system of capitalism was not only accompanied by the sociological transformation of society, but also by very important technological developments. The ultimate discovery of the steam engine together with the usage of gunpowder for warfare constitute perhaps the most important technological developments of the new age. These technological changes gradually led to a diminution of the reliance on human labour as the major factor of production. Capital now dominated the production functions of the new capitalist order with its double guise of finance capital and physical capital in the form of productive machinery. As suggested above, the major characteristics of the new capitalism were economic growth in the form of the accumulation of capital and the qualitative transformation of existing technology. In this regard, it would be instructive to refer to this new era with regard to the new capitalism as one development even though that term was not in vogue at that time.

The new capitalist system seemed to be dominated by three main characteristics: the need to exploit labour so that gains be maximised and costs reduced, the need to constantly increase capital holdings, and the need to seek out new sources of raw material and labour inputs. This was the essential basis for European colonialism and world economic globalisation according to which two elements were at work: Western Europe and North America experienced economic growth with the accumulation of capital and the raw material for such were obtained from the colonies. It was this dynamic that led Lenin and Mao to adapt Marx's critique of capital to the social conditions of Russia and China respectively to stave off the threat of becoming colonies of the economically dominant Western nations. The communist revolutions of Russia and China were founded on the principles of Marx's critique of capitalism as an exploitative economic system and the need to have a strong state to resist such.

For Lenin, the expansion of capital into all parts of the globe was an intrinsic part of the Western imperialist project. Lenin's text *Imperialism – The Highest Stage of Capitalism* bears this thesis out. The decolonisation process in Africa and other parts of the non-European world was seen by many of the anti-colonial leaders, not as a struggle against colonialism but also as a struggle against capitalism in the form of imperialism. The result was that the rise of the Soviet Union as a political and technological power was seen to represent the correct model to overcome colonialism and to rapidly develop both economically and technologically. Africa became then a contested territory for the colonising West and the Communist bloc led by the Soviet Union. The Soviet model of socialism and state power was seen as the solution to the question of transition to development as a post-colonial nation. And what was supposed to be transformed was not only existent economic systems, but also existent technologies and cultures. Marx's evolutionary stages of human sociological development was seen as the optimal path in the wake of decolonisation.

In the case of Africa, the socialist model with its statist trappings was adopted, not only by political leaders such as Nkrumah of Ghana, but also by Ben Bella of Algeria and Nyerere of Tanzania. The East-West conflict in the form of the Cold War was a fiercely contested one which ended with the West emerging triumphant at the dismantling of the Soviet experiment. Development in all its dimensions was henceforth being confidently promoted by the West as entailing a necessary adherence to the neo-liberal economic model in the context of what the West promulgated as 'free markets and democracy'. But this seemed to be mere theory, given that what actually transpired was a reformulation of the world according to the traditional division of labour. The West has accorded to itself the role of provider of high technology goods and services. Japan, Korea and Taiwan were brought into the fold as answers to the communist threat in East Asia. Other countries have been designated the role as producer of cheap low and high technology goods. Consider China and Korea in this regard. And Africa has been designated the task as supplier of raw materials only. The whole structure is kept in place by the monitoring activities of the West's global finance institutions: the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF.

Thus, what we have now, following the era of the Cold War, is a return to the global economic arrangements that held sway before the rise of the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc of nations. It is for this reason that the issue of development for those areas of the world deemed 'developing' has fallen under the almost complete purview of Western theoreticians. The obvious empirical proof of this claim is that the vast majority of books and journal articles on the development are produced in the West and acted on by Western agencies. In this regard, the African subaltern has little voice. The slogan now is 'sustainable development' ministered at the micro level by Western NGOs and at the macro level by the officials of the West's financial and credit institutions. The situation is not much different from the one that obtained during the colonial era.

Development as Economic Development

The idea of economic development has been broadly understood as the implementation of economic ideas and policies that led to increased private and public wealth and the introduction of novel forms of technology and sociologies. Thus, the ideas about economic decision making that heralded in and directed the modern era of increased economic growth, more varied and complex divisions of labour, and most importantly novel and more efficient technologies could properly be described as ideas of economic development. In this regard, the works of European theorists such as Smith, Say, Hume, and Ricardo could be described as works in economic development. After all, there was a qualitative change in the European social order in all dimensions after the demise of feudalism.

But the term 'economic development' itself was not used in specific terms until after the second World War to refer to policies adopted by post war theorists to boost the economies of those parts of the world that were technologically less developed than those of Western Europe and North America. It should also be noted that the urgency to find solutions to the question of how to effect development was prompted especially by the economic and political model of development promised by the Communist world of the Soviet Union and China. In this highly competitive struggle, the main theorists of economics in this

regard were Keynes and Marx. Those who supported the Keynesian model indirectly endorsed the free market theories of Smith and Ricardo and assumed that free trade and markets were the essentials for economic transformations in areas deemed underdeveloped. The classical model of Smith and Ricardo was revived as the neo-classical model that served as the template for subsequent works such as *The Stages of Economic Growth* authored by W.W. Rostow (1960) and *The Theory of Economic Growth* by W.A. Lewis (1955). The theories of growth that were developed out of these seminal works were myriad. But students of neoclassical economic development have been schooled on models such as the Harrod-Domar model and the Solow growth model. However, despite the plethora of research literature on the topic of economic development for the last fifty years, the results of their implementation have not been encouraging.

Those who adopted Marx's approach argued that genuine development would result only from breaking post-colonial links with the capitalist world in order to establish genuine socialist nations. In the case of Africa, only Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana chose that path. There was a negative reaction from the West which led ultimately to the erasure of the only socialist experiment in that continent. The theoretical basis for the socialist alternative was developed initially by critics of the neo-liberal international order such as Paul Baran (*The Political Economy of Growth*, 1957), Andre Gunder Frank (*Dependent Accumulation and Underdevelopment*, 1978); and of the African post-colonial order by theorists such as Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963).

And perhaps the most persistent African critique of the post-colonial order has come from Samir Amin who has argued that the continuing economic dependence of the post-colonial African state on Western capitalism has been the major impediment for African economic development. One might consider in this regards some of his works, such as *Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment*, 1974; and *Unequal Development*, 1976. One might consider too the non-radical critiques of theorists such as Stiglitz, Sen and De Soto to recognise that the topic of economic development is not wanting for committed analysts.

Development Studies

Yet not much is changing in terms of the recommendations of those theorists who make recommendations to the World bank or IMF. It is on account of the failures of economic development theory with its tepid prescriptions for 'sustainable development' and 'poverty reduction' that theories of development have now been expanded from mere economic analysis to include considerations of history, sociology, political economy and anthropology. It is on this basis that the relatively new research area of Development Studies has been founded. In this regard, one might note the works of theorists such as Jan Pieterse (*Development Theory*, 2001) and Wilfred David (*The Humanitarian Development Paradigm*, 2004). It is on this basis that the collection of essays that constitute this anthology has been assembled. The goal here is to appraise the issue of development holistically, not only in terms of economics, but also in terms of the history of ideas, political theory, sociology, social and political philosophy, and political economy.

Most of the chapters in this volume were prepared by philosophers who implicitly practise their discipline as one whose most effective modern function would be to appraise the human experience in all its dimensions from the standpoints of the modern social and natural sciences, all disciplinary offspring of philosophy itself. It is for this reason that the tenor of the included contributions is not only propositional but also engaged in the meta-analysis of the theories on which the concept of development is founded and practised.

The following brief statements on the text's contents support this claim. Thus, in alphabetical order, we note that Samir Amin's chapter 'Modernity and Religious Interpretations' argues that development of the Islamic world – shared by much of Africa – has been restrained by old traditions which have not been effectively challenged intellectually to yield eventually some kind of secular enlightenment that clear the path for the intellectual and technological transformations needed for development. Amin's sociology of ideas offers us insights into the relative limitations of the Nahda renaissance in Islam, as compared to what occurred in the Christian world of Western Europe.

David offers illuminating insights into the idea that economics is not just about the maximisation of expected utility according to the theorists of neo-classical economics but about the ultimate goal of human welfare. This would not be achieved by assuming that humans are mere maximising agents but anchoring the discussion of development on a paradigm founded on egalitarian human rights. His chapter 'The Human Right to Development' informs us that the world has reached the stage where such rights, though already enacted by international organisations, have been fully put into practice. David's contribution is an excellent reference text for those who would wish to compare the huge gap between the comprehensive rights due to individuals in theory and what actually occurs in practice.

The chapter by Diagne is the development explored within the context of time as 'prospective'. He examines and finds problematic the theories of 'African time' as formulated by theorists such as John Mbiti and Lucien Levy-Bruhl. Daigne makes a case for time as a dynamic 'prospective' an important ingredient for models of Africa development in the context both of a political projection for the youth and that of ongoing economic blueprints for African development in all its dimensions.

Gordon's approach to the issue of development is to examine the concept essentially from the seminal ideas of Frantz Fanon whose works focused on the idea of development as being embodied in the beings of people as problems. Fanon's solution to the problem of development was an actional one that would seek to break through the intellectual and psychological limitations imposed on the objects of underdevelopment. Gordon appeals to the ideas of Winter, Gendzier and Sen to unpack his approach to the problem of development via Fanon's critical viewing of the concept itself. In the course of the discussion, Gordon engages Wynter's interesting notion that development theory itself is more a reflection of Western narcissism than anything else. We are also led to his solution to the problem as requiring an existential and actional stance, in support of Gendzier but in critique of Sen.

Hountondji's contribution entails a lively discussion of the role that philosophy might play in the development dynamic. He adopts a historical stance as he views the present as the temporary end result of the past. In this context, we hear some incisive views on the roles that Fanon and Nkrumah have played in the ongoing dynamic of philosophy applied to politics, culture and economics.

Kebede's approach to the theme of development is to examine Africa's post-colonial comportment in the area of its psychological self conception. This leads him to offer critiques of what he regards as the three main schools of thought concerning African philosophy: ethnophilosophy, and African particularism. Regarding ethnophilosophy, Kebede engages in a critical analysis of the intellectual movement known as negritude as expounded by Senghor and Césaire. He also engages prominent thinkers like Hountondji and Mudimbe. His solution is that Africa must seek an independent evolutionary path because development could not take place without the 'decolonisation' of the African mind.

The problem of development is often approached in static terms without regard to dynamic or historical analysis. Keita's approach is historical in that he views the particularities of African development in terms of its long archaeological and historical past. He positions his thesis in the context of a telos in which there is speculation in terms of an imagined structure of a developed Africa. He also points out the limitations of viewing development purely in terms of poverty reduction or 'sustainable development'. Keita also seeks to endorse Amartya Sen's thesis expounded in *Development as Freedom* that development comes, not only with an economic dimension, but also with the crucial one of human capabilities instantiated as substantive freedoms.

Nyamnjoh's contribution makes the point that a major impediment to development in Africa stems from the alienating effects of the colonial education to which Africans were subjected over many decades. For him, the paradigm of colonial education was one that was strictly empiricist and materialist in content, being modelled on modern science. He argues that this approach is too epistemologically restricting, given its preoccupation with answering 'what' questions instead of 'why' questions. Nyamnjoh embarks on a set of critiques of the systems of Eurocentric education that still dot the African continent. His prescription is that genuine development would necessarily require serious paradigm changes in Africa's educational structures.

Contemporary Africa is confronted with what Osha defines as three large problems: decolonisation, modernisation and globalisation. According to him, development leads in the direction of modernisation, but in the drive to attain such, Africa has to run the gauntlet of the universalising principle of Western origin which would seek to subordinate to its expression of the various particularities of Africa itself. The implicit question here is: does modernisation mean assimilating Westernisation as the form of the universal?

Kwesi Prah's chapter argues that viable solutions to the issue of African development requires a much more holistic approach than the more conventional one anchored mainly on economics. Prah argues that genuine development springs necessarily from an indigenous base. In this regard, the conversation of development must take place in a context where the maximal regard must be held for Africa's indigenous languages through which Africa's peoples view and interpret the world. Prah does not discount the assimilation of novel ideas but that they should be selectively chosen and absorbed according to local modalities.

Tangwa tackles the problematic of development with its attendant sociological, political and economic ills through a historical study of Cameroon. He discusses the triple colonial background of the Cameroon and contrasts pre-colonial sociological and political structures with those that were introduced during the colonial era. His thesis is that one of the reasons

for the present politico-economic imbroglio is the evident disjunction between the social psychology of the behavioural dynamics of the leaders of the pre-colonial past and those of the contemporary era. Tangwa's key points are that democracy is a necessary condition for development and that the post-colonial era has been marked by palpable abuses of democracy, thereby establishing a cause-and-effect relationship between underdevelopment and the lack of democracy in post-independence Africa.

Jean-Pierre Ymele's contribution examines the important question of the relationship between science and technology, and its promise as the catalyst for development in an era of globalisation. He examines the crucial role that scientific and technological knowledge has played in development for the West in the past and its expansion by way of the world-wide exportation of capital under the rubric of globalisation. But there is a problem with the idea that such could be repeated in the developing world, given the constraints posed by levels of technology and variations in culture. In fact, globalisation comes with the risk of producing further occidental exploitation of attempts to assimilate modern forms of science and technology where the socio-economic and industrial conditions are not appropriate for such.

Zein-Elabdin's chapter tackles the question of development from the standpoint of postcolonial theory. For her, the question of development is a metaphysical question involving the ongoing phenomenological relationship between Western theorising about the post-colonial subaltern. In this regard, post-colonial theory seeks to interpret the discourse of 'development' not as an objective scientific analysis but as a hegemonic value-laden discourse of a post-colonial subaltern. According to Zein-Elabdin, to understand the rationale of the seemingly interminable discourse on development, it would be necessary first to recognise the post-colonial relationships between hegemon and subaltern, as the former seeks to maintain control through the power of language while the latter seeks adaptive autonomy through forms of an interactive hybridity. Zein-Elabdin's solution is one which would seek not to repeat the accumulation model of the West – given its tragic modalities in history – but to forge a new model based on human ethics.

What is evident from the above set of contributions is that the problem of development is not a purely economic one, but one which is multidimensional; hence the added insights offered by the analytical and holistic approach of theorists who approach the world epistemologically. At the core of the present African stasis is the perennial intellectual tension between claims to knowledge and their modalities of proof. Those who inquire into the issue of African development and have access to the instruments that seek solutions tend to do so from within the context of variants of neo-classical economics. The assumption is that the framework of neo-classical economics is one that is avowedly scientific and therefore appraises the social world of economics objectively. But cognitive analysis informs us that neo-classical economics, despite its objectivist pretensions, is in reality not much more than an ideological projection of a Western phenomenological interpretation onto the non-Western world, in this case Africa.

In this connection, the symbolic articulations that grace neo-classical economics and its application as economic development theory is to be properly understood as subjective and self-interested interpretations of the world of economics with its institutions and individual decision making. But the problem is that those of the non-Western world who participate

in the game of development may not be aware that they are mistaking ideology for scientific analysis. This could be the main reason why development theory, despite the huge amounts of research output, achieves so little. Thus, neo-classical development theory should be recognised principally as an instance of the cultural anthropology of the West, formulated to serve its own interests in a world characterised by its own culturally particular view of the world. This view of the world is founded on the assumption that humans are naturally disposed to conflict as they seek access to the world's resources for purposes of survival. In this particular *enjeu* guile, cunning, prevarication and Machiavellian problem solving are the tools of the game. The virtue of the chapters of this volume is that such a sociobiological view of the human condition is mere ideology masquerading as objectivity. Theorists of African development would do well to acknowledge this fact.