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HOW COLONIAL DEVELOPMENT THEORIES AND MODELS IMPEDE AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION/ PROBLEMS POSED/APPROACH

The conventional theories and models of development are not relevant to the development needs of Africa and other parts of the developing world to which they are exported for use. In fact, it is generally believed that besides lacking relevance, these theories and models actually act to perpetuate and aggravate the very development problems they are supposed to help in solving.

In this regard, social science research in Africa should go beyond the exposure of the weaknesses of the introduced theories and models to adopting a more radical thinking and scholarship. Furthermore, social science research should search for more pertinent methods of study for the liquidation of the development problems in Africa. This would require an assumption of a radically different political and ideological orientation in mitigating the problem and in a much more consistent and committed manner.

The paper reviews what may be understood as “development“and “underdevelopment” and gives a background of some stages of development in ancient Africa. It examines the structural and cultural realities ignored by the colonialists to impose contemporary theories and models of development, and how these theories and models have failed. Problems of culture and change are also examined.

It proceeds with analyses and critiques of some western theories of development which are the typical examples of neo-liberal paradigms of social analysis and development in Africa.

It is recognised that independent African countries represent a great extent of socio-economic and political conditions. Therefore, any attempt to generalize from the varied experiences may lead to over simplification and distortion. But the fact that there are some particular and common factors in the experienced of these African states warrant some generalization from their experiences, irrespective of who their colonizers were. Some of the important common factors experience include: the acquisition of nominal political independence, leaving the colonial economic structure in place, marginalization of African cultural and traditional values and practices in relation to development, external monopolistic capitalist pressure on African countries and the inherent social, economic and political backwardness and military problems.

The states of the tropical Africa and other areas in Africa, Asia and Latin America share the critical unifying experiences of suffering the effects of colonial and imperialist influence by the capitalist western countries in Europe and north America.

African countries were drawn and made integral parts of the worldwide capitalist system, the thrust of which is economic exploitation, strengthened by military and political domination. Colonization and the influence of finance and trade are all methods of exploitation. For example, Britain learned that it was not always necessary to set up formal colonial power to exploit. So it exercised great influence through finance and trade in certain Latin American countries (Manghezi 1976).

Currently, the world power game is no longer geographical but geo-economic. Its main actors are a new aristocracy, the transnational corporations which dominate the world, penetrating continental and national sovereignties with goods, services capital technology, media and consumption patterns. An important transnational phenomenon is the globalization of the financial world that has impeded national sovereignty, causing weaker nations to lose control over their own currencies and fiscal policies.

With the supervision of the IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation, third world countries are compelled to take part in the global economy on equal footings with the developed countries. Many of these countries especially those in Africa, are unable to cope with the global competition and are therefore seriously disadvantaged in many respects (wheeler, 1989)

The myth about, narrowing the gap between developing and developed nations has resulted in a disaster. The United Nation's three decades of efforts for development in the third world nations has turned out to be a kind world socio-economic apartheid. This is a condition where the world's northern hemisphere is constituted of wealthy nations and dense populations and the southern hemisphere comprising a population of over 130 poor or extremely poor nations. In these poor states, the governments are unable to control economic life, the state activities are hardly visible in the rural areas, there is massive rural- urban drift and most people are in the informal sector of society, life is distressful and difficult and internal migration and immigration for greener pastures is the only aspiration for the young people.

Furthermore, many of these states cannot control important components of their informal economic activities, while the formal sector is controlled by the IMF and the World Bank. Legal control over most parts of national territories is difficult due to insurgent groups, drug dealers, rebels or armed bandits.

Even political life is generally controlled externally with monitoring of human right obligations and electoral processes. The problem is compounded by the inherent authoritarian leadership and governance tenderness in Africa. Many nations in Africa have very little negotiating power and they find it difficult to exert positive influence on major issues. Instead, they are often the source of problems for the Western World or International community, labeled as undemocratic government, where violence and

violations of human rights are practiced, where there is instability and where governments are overthrown with violence. Consequently, these poor states are unable to be partners or allies because of their relative problems or disadvantages.

Foreign policy is mainly to solicit aid and exoneration from international obligations. They are often compelled to accept being driven by donor programme even when such programmes are detrimental to African development (Rivero, 2001).

The paper concludes with a summary of the arguments and gives recommendations toward an alternative African development which emphasizes inward looking approaches.

THE HISTORICAL, STRUCTURAL AND CULTURAL REALITIES IGNORED BY THE WEST

No matter how 'development' is defined, its process has many aspects in human society. At personal level it requires improved skills and capacity, creativity, greater freedom, self-discipline, responsibility and well being. But the achievement of any of these aspects very much depends upon the condition of the society as a whole.

Often, the western concept of "development" is understood mainly in an economic sense because it is considered that the type of economy is itself an index of other social characteristics. Economic development then refers to a society's capacity to deal with its overall environment. The capacity of dealing with the environment depends on the degree in which people understand and make the best use of their resources for advancement. Evidently, colonialism had not allowed Africans to tap this potential and the same trend is happening during this neo-colonial era.

In fact, there has been consistent economic development in ancient Africa as demonstrated in the early histories of the African society. Early western scholars made no mention of the manner by which factors and relations of the development combined to form one historical epoch to another and they ignored the fact that colonialism was a logical phase of capitalism and exploitation.

Every society has more or less developed in one way or another. "Underdevelopment" could be understood by comparing levels of development between the north and the south but it is not an absence of development. The contemporary notion of the underdevelopment of the African continent expresses a clear relationship of exploitation by the wealthy nations. African and Asian countries were developing autonomously until they were colonized directly or indirectly by the western powers. Exploitation increased through the export of surplus goods and through other measures, depriving societies from benefiting from their natural resources, know-how and cultural heritage. The same exploitation strategy is currently being intensified in new ways such as through trade and globalization. Some of the consequences to Africa by this strategy are poverty, reduced life expectancy, morbidity, mortality and illiteracy rates. These are all preventable with

resources, knowledge and services but Africa finds it difficult to mitigate them because the continent's economies are integrated into the western capitalist economic structure in a way that plainly ensures that Africa continues to depend heavily on the powerful nations. Other forms of integration and dependence are through cultural penetration and dominance, as well as entrenchments through religion and education even at the highest academic levels like universities. Another important human vehicle like language also serves as a mechanism of integration and dependence. The scope is not exhausted; even music and sports are used as channels of cultural domination especially affecting African children and youth.

These are some of the reasons why Africa has not gone anywhere close in making the best of its natural resources, human resource, cultural heritage and wealth for development. What is happening to Africa's identity, image, poverty, social injustice, inequality, unemployment and so on? If any or all of these questions are getting worse, then we can say that Africa in general is backward even if per capita income is high in some African countries (Manhezi 1976, Rodney, 1980).

Similar tactics were used by many imperialist historians of Africa who wrote negative history about the continent because of their personal dispositions and prejudice. They wrote that Africans had no history of their own. But we now know that this view is totally false and baseless. Africa has a very long history, which in fact is a crucial aspect of world history. Africans had lived, worked, believed and thought, built and evolved the historical civilization for centuries. In fact, it has been discovered that Africa is probably the origin of mankind. Some scholars believed that the use of tools was first developed by early men in Africa many years ago.

African civilization varied with a great variety but with a great underlying unity and continuity, as well as a consistent change, development and growth. Even in the absence of modern science knowledge, Africans had developed a degree of immunity against serious diseases and had learnt the secret of many medicinal herbs and their applications in treatment. Some of these abilities still prevail in Africa.

Africa was a broad community with similar practices in culture and development, for example, in manufacturing, in music and in arts. These practices were disregarded by colonialism. Egyptian, Sudanese and Ethiopian arts for instance, were well-known to the world long ago. Arts in other parts of Africa are still being discovered and rediscovered by Africans and others. African manufactured goods, like cotton, iron and pottery were also significant. All these talents, techniques and achievements could have developed into greater integrated modern African entities if initial progress were not disrupted by foreign interference.

Let me cite some specific examples of the most developed societies and states of Africa over a thousand years before Africa came into permanent contact with the colonizers.

Egypt is the oldest culture in Africa and it rose to eminence in arts, culture and production. Ethiopia was a great power known for its literature and Christian cultures. The ancient western Sudanic empires which included the Ghana, Mali and Songhai areas covered the entire Africa south of the Sahara. It was called the “Balad as Sudan” by the Arabs, meaning the land of the blacks. And it is this area that is pointed to show that Africans too had political, administrative and military capabilities. The area is now occupied by Senegal, The Gambia, Burkina Faso, Niger, part of Mauritania, Guinea and Nigeria and other parts of West Africa.

In the middle of the 19th century, a British, John Hanning Speke visited the East/ African kingdom of Buganda and was surprised about the scale of the king's palace, which consisted of huge grass huts neatly thatched. The Buganda skills in craft production of bark cloth, soap and pottery were praised by the British but this was only a brief admiration before the traditional craft industries had almost disappeared, and the local demands were supplied by imports from Britain. Eventually, the Baganda Craftsmen were made to produce cotton and coffee to export to Europe (Allen/Thomas, 2000)

The Nubian states had also achieved a lot in terms of development from the 9th to the 11th centuries despite major pressures from the Arabs. Muslims Magreb in North Africa made an impressive achievement as well. This was in marine, military, commerce and architecture. Other notable achievements in Africa were made within ancient southern Africa between the rivers Zambezi and Limpopo covering areas occupied by present Mozambique and Zimbabwe. One of the great constructions of bricks was found in the Zimbabwe area around the 14th century, and this was an outstanding accomplishment by Africans, without using slave labour, unlike the colonialists. Some slaves were only found in certain traditional communities in Africa. (Rodney, 1980).

The above stated examples illustrate that the western development agenda, theories and models do not respect the legitimacy of Africa, and they are not designed within the contextual reality of the African culture. Consequently, they are not in our interest, have failed, and are not sustainable in Africa. For sustainable development to be realized, the shared ideas, beliefs and values as well as the intellectual, moral and aesthetic standards of communities must be respected. These have been ignored by the imposition of western development approaches on Africa. The approaches assume that changes in the economic system can be segmented so that the effect on any other part of the cultural system is negligible. A cultural system is composed of various interactive components: economic, political, tradition, customs, language, religion and so forth. Any change in any component causes changes in the others, and consequently alters the system as a whole.

It is difficult for the western mind set to understand holism because it is inclined in the structuralist way of thinking, which is the tendency to divide the whole into elements and to focus on them separately.

This way of thinking is clearly reflected in the western neo-liberal paradigms of development that have not proven successful in Africa because our cultural realities are very different.

WESTERN DEVELOPMENT THEORIES AND MODELS AND HOW THEY HAVE FAILED

The second half of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s witnessed various conceptions of development. This resulted in the creation of the IMF and the World Bank with the notion that development is something positive and good and particularly geared towards the third world countries. Development was seen as a change process in greater similarity with the situation in USA and in Western Europe.

To this end, a series of related major western development theories and models have been introduced vis-à-vis the structuralist theories, the growth and modernization theories and the derivative neo-liberal theories. For the purpose of this paper however, I will delve more into the growth and modernization theories which emphasized internal factors both as sources and barriers to economic growth. These theories proposed modernization as a model of economic and social development of the third world and theorized that institutions and cultural values were compatible. They see a dichotomy between one group of countries called “traditional” and another group viewed as “modern”. The cultural attributes of the traditional or third world societies are seen in negative terms and those in modern societies are considered positive and conducive to socio-economic development and change (Rivero, 2001, Allen, 2002).

An American Sociologist, Talcott Parson, was one of the strong pioneer proponents of this polarized distinction. His theory received a lot of criticism by researchers such as C.S Whitaker on the basis of research conducted in Northern Nigeria. I fully agree with Whittaker’s critique that growth and modernization theories are inadequate and cannot be applied universally. He stated that the theories have an implicit ethnocentric bias by equating development with the western culture. Clearly, the problem of the western development theories is that their political and ideological roles directly impede efforts of third world countries to liberate themselves from cultural and socio-economic domination and exploitation.

Another researcher like Gunder Frank has radically criticized the growth and modernization theories. The key point advanced by him is that these theories must be rejected because all evidence demonstrates that they are inadequate in theory and empirically invalid and ineffective as a policy. In fact, it is believed increasingly that the theories of growth and modernization perpetuate rather than alleviate problems in the third world. They tend to conceal the root causes of the actual problems they claim to solve, by ignoring the historical and structural realities of the third world. Parson for instance, was very open in stating that western countries should primarily and carefully select the social groups to support in third world countries. Such choices to be followed by educating and training equivalent functional western middle class elite groups in governments, who will dissociate from any traditional groups in their societies. Unfortunately, the effects of such colonial strategies are still prevalent in many African societies today.

Other western scholars have made efforts to restate and reaffirm the alleged usefulness of their development theories and models without success. The shift of emphasis from one paradigm to the other is simply a change of tactic but not of original strategy of colonization, domination, control and continued exploitation (Manghezi, 1976).

In all the imported western development theories and models, the economic dimension is prominent, despite concomitant consequences to the environment such as pollution, resource depletion, global warming, hurricanes and so on. Africa can still learn from these lessons and search for alternative indigenous socio-economic development theories and models through experience and research.

The globalization option is only an extension of the western neo-liberal paradigms and it has to do with the interdependence between the third world countries and the industrialized ones. This interdependence basically involves three forms. The first form is “demand dependence”, which is demand deriving from local consumers and from foreign buyers for mutual benefits. But this relationship is asymmetrical and it does not favour Africa. The growing international trade discriminates Africa by the level of participation, resulting in Africa losing its share, while the share of the industrialized countries grows very fast. Growth in financial flows also remains concentrated in the west. Sub-Saharan Africa receives the least. Rapid technological development further created a knowledge gap between the developed and the third world countries. The least developed countries (LDCs) have seen a marked decline in living standards. Trend analysis show increasing inequalities between and within many countries in the world, and many of the millennium development goals (MDGs) will not be met.

The second form of interdependence is the dependence of the industrial countries on certain raw materials and other commodities in Africa. This form too, is disadvantageous to Africa because prices and demands are often determined by the richer countries.

Comparative advantages is the third one, whereby countries specialize in producing products cheaply for export, and use the proceeds to import other commodities from outside. Again benefits are relatively less for most African countries in terms of value for money.

There is growing suspicion that globalization is shifting the global resource flows away from Africa to eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia (Martinussen, 2000).

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

After hundreds of years of colonization and after tens of years of independence, trends in Africa are still gloomy with misery, illiteracy, poverty, starvation in many areas, diseases, environmental degradation, economic, social and political crisis and so forth. Certainly,

it will be disastrous for most parts of the continent if this trend continues into the future, while at the same time, Africa's population is increasing.

Much of the current situation in Africa derives from the failure of the western theories and models of development from the colonial times until today. Therefore, there is an urgent call for radical changes in the social, economic, institutional and political trends in Africa and for the reorientation of current policies and development priorities.

I am convinced that the situation in Africa can be averted if, instead of continuing to reproduce the current western development theories and models with exploitative and consumer patterns which cannot be sustained, we look into measures that will stabilize the continent and provide better livelihood for Africans.

During the first decade or more after independence was the time of euphoria for Africans, when economies were "artificially" booming and the social and political spheres were open and optimistic. This was followed by the natural catastrophes of the 1970s and a series of economic, environmental and social-political problems which changed optimism and resulted into a "crises mentally". I believe progress can occur in Africa with concerted research and inward-looking efforts by African countries. To realize this, the following three vital pre-requisites must be addressed:

- 1) More social science research to be undertaken by African scholars to obtain more credible and reliable data on Africa. To move away from conventional variables for which data exists and focus on newly identified variables that are more relevant to African problems;
- 2) Demographic projections that include all sectoral projections from bottom to top
- 3) The moving away from assumptions derived from the western development theories and models that ignored indigenous cultural values, social interactions, human creativity and African self-esteem.

The main goal is for the African self-image to improve greatly and Africans to be proud of who they are and are equal partners in international trade. African women to be empowered and well-represented in decision-making positions. Scientific discoveries based on African realities, to be promoted in geo-physics and agricultural science for more food processing, storage and surpluses primarily aimed at African-based markets (eg.NEPAD). Africans to eat healthier food by using organic method of food production as before. Local managerial skills to increase with improved farming methods. Easy and accessible transport system within the continent. Literacy and technical know-how to improve at all levels. (Achebe etal, 1990).

To achieve progress in development like China for instance, Africa must divert its resources to the development of internal material and technological development base. Development is impossible when Africa's production strategy is controlled by world

market demands. Africa must develop a capacity for self-sustaining growth, which is a precondition to development.

In order to escape from Africa's current development impasses, we must adopt a revolutionary route, a deviation from the western development theories and models. To hope that the western development powers will one day liberate us from our predicament will be a mere self-delusion. The vested interests are two great. Africa must now and in future make decisions based on the knowledge and experiences of its problems, continuously informed by systematic research activities.

However, all these positive ideas and recommendations will be impossible to attain without committed political will and leadership. When political leadership in Africa fails to find solutions even to peoples' basic needs like food and health, but instead amasses wealth for self interest, military exploitation and instability are invited. Good leadership was very prominent in African traditions. Unfortunately, there has not been much success in translating this into modern independent states of Africa. Instead, we witnessed dictatorial tendencies which result in the lowering of people's self-esteem and morale, universities losing motivation because students and lecturers are labeled as trouble makers, even when they contribute constructively in debates on important development issues that can inform national policies and programmes. Traditional forms of social organisations like ethnic groups or tribes are used to reinforce leaderships, especially if leaders face development challenges. This way, culture is abused to the detriment of the development of a new Africa.

The current development impasse in Africa, the reduced international interest in Africa, and failure of the conventional development theories and models warrant "development" of the African culture and economies, requiring an intensification of inward looking development efforts within the continent. This will obviously meet some resistance and undermining attempts but Africans must persevere to succeed. Restoration of the African cultural heritage and development would involve utilization of the full potentials of women, youth, intellectuals, local communities, ethnic groups, religious groups and so forth. Innovations in science and technology would also involve grassroots activities and an emphasis on aspects of language, social organisations and local products.

African governments must be more responsive and accountable, and should be organized in broader sub-regional and regional entities in order to enhance the African market as well as an economic and a political union.

The need to develop an indigenous social science research tradition in Africa, with African scholars in the fore front, cannot be over emphasized. Some writers have stated that western social scientists hardly showed interest in social science research in Africa until during the cold war politics, after World War II. This sudden vested interest had a direct bearing and implication for directing the content and purpose of the social research in which they were engaged. It is now imperative that African social science researchers assume full responsibilities in research, developing African theoretical framework which

depict African relevance, meaning and continuity from the past while encouraging careful integration of new cultural values.

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