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Rethinking Africa's Development Models: Between Modernization and Dependency Paradigms

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Abstract
From the time of political independence through the 1990s and beyond, the political economy of development in Africa witnessed application of four different models of development. The first model was industrialization through import substitution; second was a focus on agriculture and redistribution of the benefits of economic growth; the third focused on social equity and targeting of special publics, and the fourth was the neoliberal approach whose inception saw the forced adoption of the shock therapy of structural adjustment programs. This article explores these models of development and observes that all the models of development in Africa have been informed by the assumptions of modernization theory. The article explores the practical implications and limitations of the assumptions of modernization theory as advanced by Africanist scholars in the Global North and juxtaposes these with the counterarguments of the dependency and underdevelopment perspectives articulated by Global South scholars. The article argues that the development models applied in Africa have not yielded the desired results by way of transforming the lives of the majority Africans. They have only worked to serve the interests of global capital and the local political classes. The article concludes that there is imperative need to rethink Africa's development models if development has to be meaningful to the majority. However, given the harmony of interests between global capitalism and the African political elite, such an eventuality of rethinking the development approaches requires the emergence of an effective social movement from below to champion this cause. Otherwise Africa's economies are doomed to remain mere appendages to global capitalism with little if any developmental benefits for the majority poor on the continent.

Key words: Africa; Modernization; Dependency; Walter Rodney; Samir Amin

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Introduction

African countries gained their political independence from colonialism in four distinct waves. The first wave came in the 1950s when countries like Ghana, Guinea, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia attained their independence. The 1960s marked the second wave of independence, when more than thirty countries, mainly former British and French colonies gained their independence. These ranged from Algeria in the North to Botswana in the South and from Somalia in the East to Senegal in the West. The third wave occurred in the 1970s when Angola, Djibouti, Cape Verde, Comoros, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, and Seychelles became independent. The fourth and final wave came in the 1980s and 1990s when Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe attained their independence. The political agenda on the part of these countries upon attainment of independence was socio-economic development with a view to eliminating poverty, ignorance, and disease. Four distinct models have been applied in Africa's quest for development. The first model emerged in the decade of the 1960s. in this model, development was equated with establishment of heavy industrial plants geared toward industrialization through import substitution. This model was informed by the logic of trickle down and spread effect – in which the developmental benefits of heavy industries would spread across entire economies and trickle down to all sectors of society.

By the early 1970s, the second development model came to be implemented. Herein, emphasis shifted from industry to agriculture, and from 'trickle down' to deliberate 'redistribution' of the benefits of economic growth and development with the realization that these were in fact not automatically 'trickling down' as previously assumed. Particular focus was placed on population control with the argument that populations were growing much faster than the capacity of the economies to sustain these populations. A third development model was adopted in the mid-1970s, which shifted to social equity and targeting of special publics, especially women, who, it emerged, were being marginalized and left behind by the development process. This led to the emergence of concepts such as 'women in development,' 'women and development,' and 'gender and development' (see Parpart and Staudt 1990, Boserup 1970). The fourth and final model of development was applied in the 1980s and beyond. This period was marked by a gloomy economic outlook in Africa characterized by economic stagnation and reversal, mounting external debt, and balance-of-payments deficits. The extent of the debt crisis on the continent is captured by then Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere who, in 1985, asked: "must we starve our children to repay our debt?" (Nafziger 2012: 543). Against this background, structural adjustment programs were introduced with their mantra of free markets and privatization as the panacea to Africa's economic problems (see Murunga 2007). This laid the ground for the current neoliberal approach to economic management in Africa, which has facilitated the concentration of ever more wealth in fewer and fewer hands across the continent.

Overall, therefore, the various models of development implemented in Africa from the time of independence have not generated the desired results of development for the majority of the peoples of Africa. Whereas all the four development models were largely informed by modernization theory coined by Africanist scholars in the global north; a critique of the dismal development performance of these models emerged in the form of dependency theory and the underdevelopment thesis advanced by global south theorists. The article provides a critical look at both paradigms, particularly the modernization approach that has largely informed development planning and implementation in Africa, and argues that there is an imperative need on the part of African states to rethink their development models.

Modernization Theory

Most of Africa's quest for development, for industrialization, for economic growth, for democratization, and social transformation, is informed largely by modernization theory. Modernization theory was promoted by Africanists such as Gabriel Almond, James Coleman, and Sylvester Whitaker Jr. among others as the key to Africa's development. The theory assumed that African states would advance through the same path of development as their Western counterparts. Modernization theory envisioned development of free market democratic political systems in Africa. The theory has economic, social, and political trajectories.

At the economic level, Modernization theory draws from Walt Rostow's (1960) exposition of stages of economic growth. According to Rostow, all political systems develop through the same stages of economic growth as leaders strive to transform 'backward' agricultural societies into 'modern' industrial economies. Walt Rostow (1960) argues that all countries go through the same five stages of economic growth: 'Backward' agricultural societies are transformed into 'modern' industrial ones through mechanization of agriculture; industrialization of major urban areas; and enhancement of GNP growth, which is seen as the best measure of the modernization process. The five stages are:

1. **Traditional society** – characterized by subsistence, barter trade, and agriculture, and dependent on a rural economy.
2. **Transitional Stage** – characterized by specialization, surpluses, and infrastructure, and dependent on social appreciation of education and skills development.
3. **Take off Stage** – characterized by industrialization, growing investment, regional growth, and political change and dependent on a sub-urban economy.
4. **Drive to Maturity Stage** – characterized by diversification, innovation, investment, and less reliance on imports and dependent on growth and developed economies.
5. **High Mass Consumption Stage** – characterized by consumer orientation, flourishing of durable goods, and dominance of the service sector and dependent on a global economy or market managing economies.

Emerging in the 1960s, the theory assumed that at the time of independence, Africa was at the beginning point of a process of development that would enhance education and literacy, mechanize agriculture, industrialize urban centers, and facilitate economic growth measured in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP).

The social trajectory of modernization theory borrowed heavily from the ideas of Max Weber (1930) and Talcott Parsons (1967, 1951, 1937) in the fields of psychology and sociology. Socially, modernization theory focuses on the process by which individuals replace their 'traditional' ways of thinking with a more 'modern' outlook to life. It assumes that ethnic divisions, viewed as a hindrance to development, would fade away as modernizing societies become melting pots as a result of the shift from rural to urban life; exposure to various forms of mass media; formal education at high school and university levels; and occupational experiences in the modern industrial sector. The end result would be culturally melted societies in the image of the Western world (see Nasong'o 2008: 21, Schraeder 2004: 303).

At the political level, modernization theory borrowed from theories of democratic pluralism in political science. Herein, the key to political development was a rapidly growing electorate both willing and able to participate in the political process. As political participation grew, it was expected to generate corresponding growth and specialization of government agencies as leaders responded to the legitimate demands of citizens. It was envisaged that the economic, social, and political trajectories of modernization would culminate in the establishment of modern industrial democracies in Africa.

As argued elsewhere (see Nasong'o 2008: 19-44), however, modernization theory was based on shaky assumptions. First is the a priori assumption that ethnic identity is, in and of itself, a hindrance to development, however defined; whilst industrialization is the ideal end of a modern political economy (see Schraeder 2004: 303, Almond and Coleman 1960). Second is the assumption that modernization is a unilinear process in which traditional attributes like ethnic affiliation would ultimately erode away to be replaced by modem forms of affiliation to civic and professional associations. The reality, however, is that ethnicity and other forms of ordering societies including clan and caste systems are often revitalized and strengthened by the modernization process. Third is the assumption that the modernization process is a zero-sum game in which certain social and political advances along the modernity trajectory would inevitably result in an equal decline in traditional culture and values. On the contrary, it is apparent that traditional institutions often adapt to and co-exist with modern institutions. Whitaker Jr. (1970) demonstrated this with particular clarity in the case of northern Nigeria where the creation and expansion of modern political institutions was accompanied by the strengthening of the political roles played by traditional Muslim leaders (emirs). "Far from modern institutions having simply driven out traditional ones, elements of the institutions of each type or origin coalesced to form a workable system of power and authority" (Whitaker Jr. 1970: 460).

Fourth and finally, modernization theory assumed that traditional attitudes and institutions are inherently irrational and thus a hindrance to modernization or development. On the contrary, modernization revisionists such as Whitaker Jr. (1970) emphasized the importance of building on traditional cultures and values to promote development in Africa. Disregarding the significance of such traditional attributes as ethnic affiliations and beliefs, he argued, is to court failure. Indeed, historically, ethnicity provided the basis for organization of resistance against colonial rule; it was a basis for adaptation to the uncertainties and insecurities caused by the rapid changes introduced by colonialism; and for mobilization of the nationalist struggle for political independence. In more contemporary terms, ethnicity functions to cushion the individual against the deleterious effects of alienation inherent in the rapidly modernizing societies of Africa by providing a sense of belonging and appreciation of one's social roots in a community. Even more importantly, ethnic movements demand justice and equity in the political and resource dispensation of the moment and thus effectively contribute to democratic practice (Nasong'o, 2008: 24, Nasong'o 2005: 97; Nnoli 1998; Nyangira 1987).

Dependency and the Underdevelopment Thesis

Dependency/underdevelopment theory is a major alternative to modernization theory. It originated among Latin American scholars who saw modernization theorists as too western-centric. They thus sought to understand why, despite modernization theory's optimistic projections, the Global South continued to suffer economic stagnation and reversal; dictatorial leadership, both civilian and military; as well as socio-political instability and even state collapse through the 1970s, 1980s, and beyond. Modernization theorists explained these

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problems in terms of factors internal to Africa, especially poor governance institutions, poor leadership quality, misguided policies, corruption and rent seeking, ethnicized politics, militarization of politics, crisis of instability, population growth rates, and lack of a capitalist ethos. Dependency and underdevelopment theorists on the other hand focused on external factors and argued that the problem of underdevelopment in Africa was a product of the continent's incorporation into the global capitalist system from an unequal footing, the impact of colonialism and neocolonialism, unfavorable terms of international trade, the impact of the cold war, the role of international financial institutions, and the overall deleterious effects of the world capitalist system especially its underlying division of labor, which leads to the extraction of resources from Africa and their transshipment to Europe hence the underdevelopment of Africa.

Walter Rodney (1971) noted that by the end of the 16th century, Africa was developing politically and economically. However, colonialism ended all forms of independent development. It blunted, halted, and reversed African development, gradually impoverishing the continent. The underdevelopment thesis categorizes countries into: (a) Satellites/Periphery – controlled and exploited and (b) Metropoles/Core – centers of economic and political power. The African compradors help maintain the system. European domination, Rodney argues, resulted in the development of underdevelopment, i.e., the gradual impoverishment of the African continent as previous development was halted, blunted, and reversed (see also Caporaso 1978; Leys 1975; Cardoso 1977; Frank 1972, 1970, 1967). Instead, under the colonial economy, surplus value was extracted from the colonies and shipped to the colonial metropolises. Substandard wages were paid to African workers while no profits were reinvested in the colonies in the form of social services to benefit Africans. Profits were instead expatriated to the metropolises where they contributed to the material wellbeing of Europeans, a process that led to the development of Europe and the underdevelopment of Africa simultaneously (Rodney 1982: 212; Schraeder 2004: 324).

For his part, Immanuel Wallerstein (1979), divides countries into core, semi-periphery, and periphery. He focuses on the world capitalist system controlled by major powers and notes that the system is characterized by expansion and contraction. In his view, true change in the Global South is possible only with the overthrow of the World Capitalist System via a world-wide revolution to be replaced by a world economy based on socialism. The problem, however, is that semi-peripheries delay the polarization process hence undermine a unified front against the core. Overall, dependency theorists advance four main propositions to make their case:

1. Under-development is fundamentally different from un-development. Under un-development, resources are not being used to their potential. Under underdevelopment, resources are actively used but only in ways beneficial to dominant states in the global system and dominant groups within states, not the poor, who are the majority – look at land resource use in Kenya, mineral exploitation in the DRC, oil extraction in Nigeria, Gabon, Angola, etc. all of which are dominated by global capitalist interests.
2. Poor countries are poor because they were integrated into the international capitalist system on an unequal footing – only as producers of raw materials and to serve as repositories of cheap labor. They are denied the opportunity to market their resources in ways that compete with dominant states. Note: Uhuru Kenyatta flagging off four lorries carrying crude oil from Turkana to Mombasa – why not construct a refinery in Turkana and thereby transform the economy of that long-neglected area? The

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implication here is to export the crude oil, then import back the refined stuff – at whose benefit?

3. Diversion of African resources is maintained through the power of dominant states and that of elites in dependent societies. African elites share the values of dominant state elites hence the notion of harmony of interests between the elites of the periphery and the elites of the core. The dependent relationship is thus a voluntary one because it benefits the elites of the periphery.
4. There is a clear national economic interest for African states that needs to be articulated: Alternative resource-use patterns preferable to those imposed by dominant states. Why cash crop not subsistence farming? Export agriculture in the midst of malnutrition! National interest should focus on satisfying the needs of the majority/poor – not corporate or governmental needs.

From the dependency/underdevelopment perspective, governance in postcolonial Africa has less to do with the management of public affairs for the benefit of Africans, but more to do with the maintenance of the unequal relations between the postcolony and the former colonial metropolises. Those in charge of African governance constitute a comprador class that advertently or inadvertently serve as the political, economic, and cultural agents of global capitalist forces. According to Dani Nabudere (1979, 1977), transnational corporations constitute the neocolonial form of this form of imperialism. The local comprador class, who manage subsidiaries of these corporations, or sit on their boards benefit from the survival and success of these businesses and thus influence domestic policymaking to protect these foreign interests. Such policies benefit only the foreigners and their local allies (see Frank 1972; Leys 1975). Hence African governments preside over the impoverishment of local majorities and, as Anyang' Nyong'o (1989) argues, have to be strong enough to master the tensions and conflicts generated among the masses by this process of underdevelopment. Inevitably, therefore, authoritarianism becomes the established mode of governance in this scheme of things, the process of democratization notwithstanding.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, the quest for development in Africa within the modernization paradigm has simply produced African caricatures of their Western counterparts that remain mere appendages to the global capitalist economy. The unfortunate reality about this scheme of things is that there exists a harmony of interests between global capital and the African political elite, which works to sustain and perpetuate the economic status quo to the benefit of both and to the disadvantage of the majority African people. Arguably, therefore, unless an effective social movement emerges from below and the middle to push the case for rethinking Africa's development models and its mode of leadership, African economies are doomed to remain subordinates of the global capitalist system for the foreseeable future.

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