

Coloniality of Power in Development Studies and the Impact of Global Imperial Designs on Africa

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Abstract

This article draws on a world-systems approach and decolonial epistemic perspectives to reveal how Development Studies has remained deeply interpellated by its Euro-American modernist and ‘civilising mission’ genealogy. This reality has made it difficult for alternatives to current Western-centric neo-liberal thinking to emerge. An orientalist discourse permeates existing development discourses, which provokes the need to unpack the imperial global designs embedded in development thinking and determine how these impinge on African political and economic discourses. Besides unmasking how particular language and discourse concealed global imperial designs, this article will also analyse how postcolonial states and their African national projects have remained hostage to the immanent logic of colonialism and coloniality. Broadly, this article demonstrates how ‘development’ as a concept, process, discourse and practice, remains caught up in coloniality of power, which hampers the formulation of possibilities for decolonised, democratic and inclusive development in Africa.

Introduction

This article lays the foundation for a call for further decolonisation that can transcend the coloniality which constitutes the present asymmetrical global power structure. Development Studies is analysed as a product of global imperial designs and technology of subjectivation, which masquerades as emancipatory while in reality serving the perpetuation of coloniality. This article deploys the concept of ‘coloniality of power,’ which highlights the darker side of modernity that has resulted in the underdevelopment of Africa. Coloniality is an invisible power structure that sustains colonial relations of exploitation and domination long after the end of direct colonialism.¹ Coloniality of power works as a crucial structuring process within global imperial designs, sustaining the superiority of the Global North and ensuring the perpetual subalternity of the Global South using colonial matrices of power.²

¹ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” *Cultural Studies* 21:2-3 (2007): 240-270.

² Mignolo Walter, “Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking,” *Cultural Studies* 21:2-3 (2007): 155-167.

Colonial matrices of power are a set of technologies of subjectivation that consist of four types. The first is control of *economy* which manifests itself through dispossessions, land appropriations, the exploitation of labour, and control of African natural resources. The second is *control of authority* which includes the maintenance of military superiority and monopolisation of the means of violence. The third is *control of gender and sexuality* which involves the re-imagination of 'family' in Western bourgeois terms and the introduction of Western-centric education which displaces indigenous knowledges. The last is *control of subjectivity and knowledge* which includes epistemological colonisation and the re-articulation of African subjectivity as inferior and constituted by a series of 'deficits' and a catalogue of 'lacks.'³

This article contends that Development Studies and development discourses are not free of the colonial matrices of power that underpin coloniality. Development Studies continues to suffer from a crisis of ideas, dating back to the development impasse of the 1980s. The current economic crisis affecting global capitalism and which is manifesting itself as financial crisis, is a further indicator of troubled economic epistemologies that have implications on discourses and practices of development. What will emerge in this article is that 'development' is not innocent of power and cannot be understood outside of current power dynamics.⁴ It cannot be reduced to simply real-life problems of hunger, water scarcity, disease, malnutrition and poverty, as if these were untouched and unshaped by broader questions of power, epistemology, representation and identity construction.

This article is organised into four sections. The first section introduces the concept of decolonial epistemic perspectives, which illuminates how Development Studies has been colonised by global imperial designs and highlights the need for its decolonisation. The second section discusses development challenges as an integral part of the African national project, highlighting how African political economies have remained hostage to invisible colonial matrices of power. This section will also discuss the character of postcolonial states as colonised institutions incapable of re-inventing the national project such that it benefits ex-colonised peoples. The third section analyses the reality of neo-liberal imperialism and its impact on current thinking about development issues. The final section deals with what needs to be done for Africans to realise development, and

³ Mignolo, "Introduction: Coloniality," 156.

⁴ Jyotirmaya Tripathy and Dharmabrata Mohapatra, "Does Development Exist Outside Representation?," *Journal of Developing Societies* 27:2 (2010): 45-68.

builds a case for the reconstitution of the postcolonial state into one capable of serving the interests of ordinary Africans.

The Case for Decolonising Development Studies

The exercise of decolonizing Development Studies entails four tasks. The first is that of probing development's relative amnesia about coloniality.⁵ The second is that of revealing its embeddedness in enlightenment and modernity's notions of scientific progress, civilizing mission, and universal economic prescriptions. The third is that of interrogation of development's deep imbrications in Euro-American knowledge and global imperial designs. The last is that of critiquing the current neo-liberal tendencies that masquerade as salvation for Africa.⁶

The best approach to achieve decolonization of Development Studies is to deploy decolonial epistemic perspectives that reveal coloniality embedded in development discourse. Decolonial epistemic perspectives are predicated on the concepts of power, knowledge, and being. Coloniality of power locates the discourse of development within the context of the politics of constitution of a racially hierarchized, Euro-America-centric, Christian-centric, patriarchal, capitalist, heteronormative, hegemonic, asymmetrical, and modern global power structure.⁷ Within this structure, development exists as one of the technologies of subjectivation in the same league with ideas of modernity, progress, civilization, and modernization. Coloniality of knowledge enables an investigation into epistemological foundations of development as a modernist-apparatus that has been utilized to construct what became known as the 'third world'/ 'developing world' inhabited by a people whose being was constituted by a series of 'lacks' and a catalogue of 'deficits' that justified various forms of external intervention into Africa including the notorious structural adjustment programmes.⁸ Coloniality of being extends the debates to the realm of the making of modern subjectivities and conceptions of humanism, where racial hierarchization and classification of people according to race pushed Africans to the

⁵ Ramon Grosfoguel and Ana Margarita Cervantes-Rodriguez, "Introduction: Unthinking Twentieth-Century Eurocentric Mythologies: Universal Knowledge, Decolonization, and Developmentalism," in Grosfoguel and Cervantes-Rodriguez (eds.), *The Modern/Colonial/Capitalist World-System in the Twentieth Century* (Connecticut: Westport, 2002), xi-xxxii.

⁶ Ilan Kapoor, *The Postcolonial Politics of Development* (London & New York, Routledge, 2008), xv.

⁷ Grosfoguel and Cervantes-Rodriguez, "Introduction" xi-xxxii.

⁸ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: Second Edition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), viii.

lowest rank of human ontology where even their being human was doubted and where they existed as objects of development.⁹

The concepts of power, knowledge, and being help in unmasking coloniality as an underside of modernity, without necessarily rejecting the positive aspects of modernity. Through decolonial epistemic perspectives we seek to discover the benefits of analysing development discourse from the perspective of ‘colonial difference.’ Colonial difference is a reference to the spaces, borders, and peripheries of empire that have suffered the negative consequences of modernity, such as the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid and neo-colonialism.¹⁰

What distinguishes decolonial epistemic perspective from dominant Euro-American-centric hegemonic neo-liberal discourses, is its locus of enunciation. Locus of enunciation here refers to the geographical spaces from which academics and intellectuals speak, their ideological orientations, subject-positions (racial, gender and class identifications), and the historical processes and events that inform their knowledge-claims.¹¹ Decolonial epistemic perspective does not attempt to claim universality, neutrality, and singular truthfulness. It is decidedly and deliberately situated in those epistemic sites such as Latin America, Asia, Caribbean and Africa that experienced the negative consequences of modernity and that are facing development challenges. At the same time, it openly accepts its partiality, in the awareness that all knowledges are partial.

The overarching objective of decolonial epistemic perspective is to unveil epistemic silences hidden within Euro-American epistemology as well as deceit and hypocrisy that conceal epistemicides. It challenges what Aime Cesaire termed ‘the fundamental European lie,’ which articulated colonization as a vehicle of civilization.¹² In short, a decolonial perspective is meant not only to change the content of intellectual and academic conversations on development, but also the terms of this conversation so as to engage with the crucial issues of epistemology, being, and power that maintain the present asymmetrical global relations.

⁹ Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” 240-270.

¹⁰ Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 49-88.

¹¹ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 32-45.

¹² Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1955), 84.

Coloniality of power is at the core of the present global power structure where ideas of development fall neatly within a genealogy of discourses that presented African subjectivity as constituted by a series of ‘lacks’ and catalogue of ‘deficits’ ranging from lacking writing, history, civilization, development, democracy, to lacking human rights.¹³ At the centre of these negative renditions of African subjectivity lay social classification of human population according to invented racial categories of inferior/superior, primitive/civilised, rational/irrational, traditional/modern, and developed/underdeveloped.¹⁴

The agenda of decolonizing Development Studies entails revealing what development meant within the context of colonialism (and now coloniality)? How was (is) it defined? In the first place, understood from the perspective of empire as the locus of enunciation, imperialism and colonialism were grand ‘civilising missions.’ Europeans were agents of development and Africans were the objects of development.

Within colonial discourses development meant opening up the African continent for economic exploitation and the permanent settlement of white settlers. Development also meant defeating African resistance (read as the pacification of barbarous tribes resisting modernity) to pave the way for the construction of colonial states. Development meant the designation of land as the private property of white settlers in those areas that fell victim to settler colonialism, like South Africa, Algeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya and others.¹⁵ Development meant the rearrangement of African agrarian systems to make sure they produced the cash crops needed in Europe and America.

Development meant the dispossession of Africans, forcing them off the land and transforming them into peasants, workers and domestic servants. At the same time, acquired land was quickly transformed into plantations and farms owned by victorious white settlers. In other words, development in the colonial context meant pushing Africans out of their modes of life and production and into the evolving capitalist one, where they participated mainly as sources of cheap labour. Mbembe argued that “in implementing its projects, the colonial state did not hesitate to resort to brute force in dealing with natives, to destroy the forms of social

¹³ Grosfoguel, “Epistemic Decolonial Turn,” 214.

¹⁴ Grosfoguel, “The Epistemic Decolonial Turn,” 215-220.

¹⁵ Bernard Magubane, *The Making of a Racist State: British Imperialism and the Union of South Africa 1870-1910* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press), 15-20.

organisation that previously existed, or even to co-opt these forms in the service of ends other than those to which they had been directed.”¹⁶

Within the colonial context, development meant the transformation of African society according to the needs, demands and imperatives of colonial regimes. Frederick Cooper noted that colonialism never provided a strong national economy to benefit African people because the colonial economies were “externally oriented and the state’s economic power remained concentrated at the gate between inside and outside.”¹⁷ It was Cooper who described the colonial state as a “gatekeeper state” that was not embedded in the society over which it presided, that stood astride the intersection of colonial territory and the outside world, and drew revenue from imposing duties on goods and taxing Africans.¹⁸

Socially, colonial development entailed the reorganisation and classification of the colonial population according to race. Mamdani described the colonial states as bifurcated social formations inhabited by “subjects” and “citizens.”¹⁹ To prevent the coalescence of colonised peoples into nations, colonialists used cartography, censuses and law to classify and categorise the population. Political and legal identities were enforced via the issuing of identity cards. Through its technologies of governance, colonialism transformed fluid and accommodative pre-colonial cultural identities into rigid, impermeable, singular, non-consensual and exclusionary political ones. Within this, ‘races’ were acknowledged as having a common future as citizens, whereas tribes, as subjects, were to be excluded from this common future. Further, colonial governments denied the African people the space to coalesce into a majority identity, by fracturing them into different and competing tribes and minorities.²⁰ A good example is that of the establishment of Bantustans by the apartheid regime in South Africa that enabled the exclusion of black people from belonging to South Africa.

¹⁶ Achille Mbembe, *On Private Indirect Government: States of the Literature Series No. 1-2000* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2000), 8.

¹⁷ Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5.

¹⁸ Cooper, *Africa since 1940*, 88.

¹⁹ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

²⁰ Mamdani, “Political Violence and State Formation in Post-Colonial Africa,” *International Development Centre Working Paper Series No. 1* (International Development Centre, Open University, 2007).

Politically, colonial governance assumed the character of a hybrid military/civilian model where violence was a norm of governance. Para-military authoritarianism was a core component of colonial governance, with disciplining of the ‘natives’ being the order of the day. Mbembe has argued that “the colonial state model was, in theory as in practice, the exact opposite of the liberal model of discussion or deliberation.”²¹ Three forms of violence underpinned colonial governance: ‘foundational violence,’ which authorised the right of conquest and had an ‘instituting function’ of creating Africans as its targets; ‘legitimizing violence,’ which was used after conquest to construct the colonial order and routinise colonial reality; and ‘maintenance violence,’ which was infused into colonial institutions and cultures and used to ensure their perpetuation.²²

Under colonialism citizenship rights for Africans were a scarce resource. Participation of Africans in elections was impossible. By and large, the colonial state became an institution for the exploitation of black labour and a vehicle of repression. Coercion rather than consent formed the DNA of colonial governance. Through its social, economic and political engineering processes, colonialism created a complex ‘native-settler’ question—permeated by white supremacist ideas—that prevented the formation of multi-racial nation-states out of colonial encounters.²³

In countries like South Africa and Zimbabwe, with large populations of white races, the resolution of the colonially created native-settler question has proven difficult and continues to impinge on nation-building and development. Thinking about how this question could be resolved, Mamdani located it within the politics of identity reconstruction and asked how could “a settler become a native?”²⁴ He elaborated on the intractability of the ‘native-settler’ question thus:

In the context of a former settler colony, a single citizenship for settlers and natives can only be the result of an overall metamorphosis whereby erstwhile colonisers and colonised are politically reborn as equal members of a single political community. The word reconciliation cannot capture this

²¹ Mbembe, *On Private Indirect Government*, 6.

²² Mbembe, *On Private Indirect Government*, 6-7.

²³ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 12-18.

²⁴ Mamdani, “When Does a Settler Become a Native? Citizenship and Identity in a Settler Society” *Pretext: Literacy and Cultural Studies* 10: 1 (July 2001): 67.

metamorphosis... This is about establishing for the first time, a political order based on consent and not conquest. It is about establishing a political community of equal and consenting citizens.²⁵

The reality is that colonialism did not bequeath modernity to Africa. Olufemi Taiwo argues that by the time of colonisation, Africa was already becoming modern on its own terms. Colonialism disrupted those indigenous initiatives by imposing such structure as indirect rule, which masqueraded as preservation of pre-colonial institutions of governance while at the same time crippling African agency and impulses towards progress. Taiwo concluded that “colonialism was the bulwark against the implantation of modernity in Africa.”²⁶

Decolonizing Development Studies is urgent today because modernity has created numerous modern problems—ranging from climate change to the global financial crisis—for which it has no modern solutions. Neo-liberalism as a solution has proven to be problematic because it does not enabled a radical transformation of Euro-American hegemonic epistemology, North-South asymmetrical power relations, and racialised perceptions of being in which black races suffer subalternity.

As a result of dominance of neo-liberal thinking, what is driving Development Studies today is a positivist re-evaluation and consolidation of previous concepts and techniques, as opposed to the formulation of new ideas *per se*. Eric Thorbecke noted that the “important contribution to development doctrine in this decade is technique rather than theory.”²⁷ This means that the ability to formulate grand theories like modernisation and dependency has been substituted with a concentration on methodological innovations that do not challenge knowledges of equilibrium. What is lost is a clear understanding of the underlying structural factors sustaining global system of relationships generating negative development outcomes in Africa.

According to Slavoj Zizek, ‘weak thought’ that is ‘opposed to all foundationalism’ and is taking the form of heavy empiricism that misses

²⁵ Mamdani, “When Does a Settler Become a Native? 67.

²⁶ Olufemi Taiwo, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 237.

²⁷ Eric Thorbecke, “The Evolution of Development Doctrine, 1950-2005,” in Mavrotas and Shorrocks (eds.) *Advancing Development* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 3-36.

the bigger picture of coloniality of power and celebrates African agency without considering the structural constraints in place, is celebrated as progressive since the fall of the Soviet Union.²⁸ The development community has run out of ‘big ideas’ and ‘strong thought.’ This reality led David L. Lindauer and Lant Pritchett to argue that:

What is of even deeper concern than the lack of an obvious dominant set of big ideas that command (near) universal acclaim is the scarcity of theory and evidence-based research on which to draw.²⁹

‘Weak thought’ promotes a shallow understanding of global and local power dynamics, to the extent that at times ‘experts’ from the developed North are still given space to deliver their ‘pedagogy of development’ on Africa, in spite of the dismal failure of structural adjustment programmes of the late 1970s and 1980s. What is often missed is John Henrik Clarke’s warning that “powerful people will never educate powerless people on what it means to take power away from them.”³⁰ The reality remains that “the aim of the powerful people is to stay powerful by any means necessary.”³¹ This is as true for African dictators as it is for the ‘experts’ from the Global North, and for those who primitively accumulated wealth in Africa during the colonial and apartheid eras. There is no doubt that developmental disparities in Africa are informed by deliberately constructed power asymmetries which in turn underpin and maintain socially constructed hierarchies of a ‘superior’ West and an ‘inferior’ Africa.

Slavoj Žižek has railed against ‘weak thought’ which, according to him, has resulted in the ‘culturalisation of politics’ which ignores the broader historical, discursive and structural processes responsible for human developmental tragedies. He posed the question:

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 1 and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power*, , 3-10.

²⁹ David L. Lindauer and Lant Pritchett, “What’s the Big Idea? The Third Generation of Policies for Economic Growth,” *Economia* 3:1 (2002), 2.

³⁰ John Henrik Clarke (1915-1998) is an African-American historian and pan-Africanist and this quotation is from his online video entitled ‘A Great and Mighty Walk,’ available at <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-5784756819358533059> (accessed 22 August 2012).

³¹ Clarke, A Great and Mighty Walk.

Why are so many problems today perceived as problems of intolerance, rather than as problems of inequality, exploitation, or injustice? Why is the proposed remedy tolerance, rather than emancipation, political struggle, even armed struggle?³²

The field of Development Studies is terribly affected by “weak thought” as opposed to “strong thought.”³³ To Žižek strong thought produces “large-scale explanations” and “true ideas” which are “indestructible.”³⁴ Large-scale explanations have the capacity to “always return every time they are proclaimed dead.”³⁵ Decolonial epistemic perspective is a good example of cocktail of all those strong liberatory ideas which have proven resistant to neo-liberal mystifications.

Weak thought has even blinded some academics to such an extent that they continue to uncritically believe in the innocence of development discourses and to defend wrong causes—which have appropriated acceptable terms such as democracy, reform, development, good governance and humanitarian intervention—without sifting the dangerous colonial matrices embedded therein. The same weak thought has seen Africans annually celebrating decolonization, which Grosfoguel has correctly depicted as ‘the most powerful myth of the twentieth century’ which ‘led to the myth of a postcolonial world,’ while in reality ‘we continue to live under the same colonial power matrix.’³⁶

In 2010, Achille Mbembe posed a crucial soul-searching question: “Here we are...50 years after decolonisation: Is there anything at all to commemorate, or should one on the contrary start all over again?”³⁷ The answer came from Ali Mazrui who offered that “the 50th anniversary provides a suitable occasion not only to evaluate what has happened to Africa as a whole, but also to estimate the impact of the colonial experience on the African peoples.”³⁸ What is telling is that Mazrui decided to use the 50th anniversary of decolonisation as an occasion to

³² Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2009), 119.

³³ Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, 1.

³⁴ Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, 5-8.

³⁵ Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, 8.

³⁶ Grosfoguel, “The Epistemic Decolonial Turn,” 219.

³⁷ Achille Mbembe, “Fifty Years of African Decolonisation,” *Chimurenga* 25 December 2010, available at <http://www.chimurenga.co.za/archives/539> (accessed 22 August 2012).

³⁸ Ali Mazrui, “Using 50 Years of Independence to Judge 100 Years of Colonial Rule,” Unpublished paper presented at the Centre for African Studies, University of Free State, June 2011, 1.

judge “100 years of colonial rule.”³⁹ Does this mean that the 50 years of decolonisation was not worth judging? The response is borrowed from Grosfoguel who clearly stated that:

The heterogeneous and multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years did not evaporate with the juridical-political decolonization of the periphery over the past 50 years.⁴⁰

There are also crucial epistemological issues such as those identified by Mahmood Mamdani, particularly the proliferation of “corrosive culture of consultancy” that has substituted diagnostic research in developmental issues with shallow technicist prescriptions informed by symptomatic reading of the African development malaise.⁴¹ The pervasiveness of this ‘consultancy culture’ manifests itself in many forms, including an emphasis on training in descriptive and quantitative data collection methods. These empiricist tools enable efficient “hunting and gathering” of raw data and the production of consultancy reports which are eventually processed into theories and developmental policy documents in Euro-American academies. This ‘consultancy culture’ ends up turning Africans into pure ‘native informants’ rather than authentic, rigorous and robust producers of knowledge that can drive African development.⁴² The pervasiveness of ‘consultancy cultures’ was also identified by Mamdani as manifesting itself in the tendency of academics to rely on what he termed “corporate-style power point presentations,” dominated by the parroting of buzz words at the expense of lively, engaged and rigorous intellectual debate.⁴³ The outcome has been the reduction of academic research from a long-range diagnostic enterprise to a quick prescriptive exercise.⁴⁴ It is within this context that ‘weak thought’ has occupied centre stage in much of debates on development and led to the glossing over of pertinent questions concerning the role of empire and Western epistemology in hampering development in Africa.

A further downside to this has been attempts to characterise the humanities and social sciences as irrelevant to development; because

³⁹ Mazrui, ‘Using 50 Years of Independence to Judge 100 Years of Colonial Rule,’ 1.

⁴⁰ Grosfoguel, ‘The Epistemic Decolonial Turn,’ 219.

⁴¹ Mahmood Mamdani, “The Importance of Research in a University,” *Pambazuka News* 526, 21 April 2011, available at <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/72782> (accessed 22 August 2012).

⁴² Mamdani, “The Importance of Research in a University,” 5.

⁴³ Mamdani, “The Importance of Research in a University,” 6-7.

⁴⁴ Mamdani, “The Importance of Research in a University,” 5-7.

development is conceived in simplistic and shallow terms of ‘technicism’ and ‘innovation,’ or in ‘mortar and brick’ terms where there is little space for debate and the critique of knowledge-claims.⁴⁵ This thinking has resulted in what Peter Stewart has termed “the current dominance of instrumental reason” resulting in knowledge being reduced to the “polytechnic/technikon and industry mode of know-how.”⁴⁶ The outcome of this weak thought has been a combination of the commodification, marketisation and pervasive managerialism invading universities as sites of knowledge generation.

Development Studies is terribly affected not only by the heavy empiricism but also by a failure to distinguish between alternatives to the systems and structures that generate underdevelopment and the alternatives within the same systems that lead to development dead-ends. Indeed, there is development literature that blames the problems of Africa on Africans themselves and totally exonerates the responsibility of imperial global designs. It is this different reading of the African development predicament that decolonial epistemic analysis seeks to partly challenge.

The point being that the scale of African development challenges cannot be clearly understood outside of a clear understanding of the historical, discursive and structural contexts of modernity, imperialism, colonialism, decolonisation, neo-colonialism, neo-liberalism and globalisation.⁴⁷ Inevitably, the African national project which included development as its main deliverable remained hostage to global imperial designs to the extent that it was articulated in modernist terms and implemented as top-down state-driven imposition on society.

The African national project and development challenges

Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo defined the national project as an important aspect of state-building involving creation of new institutions, defining new culture, forging new citizenship, formulating new policies, putting in place new political and economic programmes aimed at addressing people’s demands, and institutionalizing the idea of sovereignty of the

⁴⁵ Peter Stewart, “Re-envisioning the Academic Profession in the Shadow of Corporate Managerialism,” *Journal of Higher Education* 5:1 (2007), 141.

⁴⁶ Stewart, “Re-envisioning the Academic Profession,” 141-142.

⁴⁷ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonization*, 17-20.

state.⁴⁸ At the centre of the African national project has been the pre-occupation with development, which was simplistically embraced as involving ‘catching-up’ with the Euro-American world on the one hand, and a rectification of colonially created economic and social problems on the other hand.⁴⁹ The intimate connection between the national project and development is well articulated by Arnold Rivkin who said:

Nation-building and economic development....are twin goals and intimately related tasks, sharing many of the same problems, confronting many of the same challenges; and interrelating at many levels of public policy and practice.⁵⁰

Due to the drive to ‘catch-up’ the postcolonial states tried to achieve multiple national task as quickly as possible and simultaneously. These tasks began with the drive toward nation-building and state-consolidation involving uniting different races and ethnicities into one national identity as well as entrenchment of African political power in terms of building institutions, monopolising violence and forging hegemony.⁵¹ The postcolonial state promised to eradicate colonial autocracy and repression so as to build accountability, legitimacy, transparency and ensure popular participation in governance. This was to be accompanied by banishment of poverty, ignorance and disease, and the promotion of economic growth so as to improve the standard of living. The more radical postcolonial states like those of Ghana, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and others also promised to the reverse colonial dispossession through the redistribution of national resources. All postcolonial states became pre-occupied with the challenge of securing the hard won political independence against external threats.⁵²

What indicated that development occupied the heart of the African national project was that every African state was busy implementing some form of five-year development plan or the other soon after

⁴⁸ Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo, “The National Project as a Public Administration Concept: The Problematic of State Building in the Search for New Development Paradigms in Africa.” *Africa Development*, XXVI: 2, (2011), 70.

⁴⁹ Thandika Mkandawire, ‘Running While Others Walk: Knowledge and the Challenge of Africa’s Development.’ *Africa Development*, XXVI: 2 (2011), 6-12.

⁵⁰ Arnold Rivkin, *Nation-Building in Africa* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 156.

⁵¹ Adebayo Olukoshi and Liisa Laakso, eds., *Challenges to the Nation-State in Africa*, (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 1996), 7-12.

⁵² Thandika Mkandawire, “African Intellectuals and Nationalism,” in *African Intellectuals*, ed. Thandika Mkandawire (London: Zed Books, 2005), 10-55.

achievement of political independence.⁵³ The crucial question is why did the African national project not succeed in realising its core objectives? Why has development eluded Africa? Julius Ihonvbere squarely blames African leaders and the African elite for the failures of the African national project and development.⁵⁴

Ihonvbere's explanation is familiar and shared by many Africanist and African scholars, such as George Ayittey who argued that it is naïve to blame Africa's misery on external factors when African leaders themselves betrayed both the aspirations of their people and their indigenous political systems.⁵⁵ Moeletsi Mbeki reinforced Ihonvbere and Ayittey's views and identified African leaders and elites as 'the architects of poverty' in Africa, keeping their fellow citizens poor while they enriched themselves.⁵⁶ It is clear that African leaders and elites are not innocent when it comes to squandering opportunities for development, betraying the objectives of the African national project, and looting the resources meant to help poor people.

Yet this explanation leaves a number of questions unanswered. How to we explain why the African postcolonial state is best known for aberrant behaviour such as repression, brutality, corruption, inefficiency and failure to promote the collective well-being of its citizens, for instance? Some scholars have responded to this question by articulating an 'African exceptionalism' thesis premised on a static, cultural relativist reading of the African condition and development.⁵⁷ The good example is the work of Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz that deployed Weberian notions of modernity and progress to arrive at the conclusion that development in Africa is informed by a different logic to that which shaped the Western world. In the first place, they assert that development in Africa is concerned with short-term consumption (the politics of the belly).⁵⁸ Secondly, they argue that in Africa there is a preference for reliance if not dependence on outside resources rather than productive activities or

⁵³ Paul Nugent, *Africa since Independence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 214-218.

⁵⁴ Julius Ihonvbere, 'Pan-Africanism: Agenda for African Unity in the 1990s,' Unpublished keynote address delivered at The All-Africa Students' Conference, University of Guelph, Canada, 27 May 1994.

⁵⁵ George Ayittey, *Africa Betrayed* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1994), 15-22.

⁵⁶ Moeletsi Mbeki, *Architects of Poverty* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2009).

⁵⁷ Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999).

⁵⁸ Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 55-56.

proper savings.⁵⁹ Third, they argue that what appears as disorder to outsiders; appears as order to the African beholder.⁶⁰

What this orientalist thinking ignores is the role of coloniality of power in making it difficult for development to take root in Africa. Coloniality of power has positioned Africa at the interface between different value systems and different forms of logic: Western and African; urban and rural; patriarchal and matriarchal; religious and secular; nationalist and tribal/ethnic; modern and traditional; progressive and conservative; cultural and technical—the list is long. Until today, Western values and concepts coexist uneasily with African concepts, partly because colonialism manipulated and deployed both Western and African concepts as tools of control, domination, and subjection, destroying some of the concepts and values originating in pre-colonial Africa and re-inventing others.

The net effect of all this was the creation of an African elite that dreamt in both Western and African languages. From these African elites came African leaders. However, colonialism created elites who aspired to a capitalist lifestyle but had no capital. The black elite had seen how white colonialists used the state to engage in primitive accumulation and authoritarianism to silence African voices. Although never exposed to democracy under colonialism, they were expected to run postcolonial governments along democratic lines.

Emerging from this context, the African national project unfolded as a top-down enterprise informed by a strain of pedagogical nationalism that was intolerant of questions and dissent. Development was to be delivered in an authoritarian fashion. Single-party and military regimes emerged from the same context of intolerance informing the African national project. The postcolonial state became a leviathan suffocating and disciplining any form of opposition. Questions of state illegitimacy emerged as development projects failed and authoritarianism deepened towards the end of the first decade of decolonisation.⁶¹

Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) emerged within the context of economic stagnation in Africa and the global shift from Keynesianism to neo-liberalism, which privileged market forces over the role of the state, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At the same time economic

⁵⁹ Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 58-60.

⁶⁰ Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 56-67.

⁶¹ Olukoshi and Laakso, *Challenges to the Nation-State*, 8-13.

globalisation was accelerating, with enormous implications for the management of national economies. The World Bank and the IMF began to play a leading role globally. SAPs came with anti-statist philosophies, where the postcolonial state was seen as nothing but a “giant theft machine.”⁶² This thinking inaugurated what Mkandawire described as the “wanton destruction of institutions and untrammelled experimentation with half-baked institutional ideas.”⁶³

There is little doubt that SAPs were a wrong diagnosis of the causes of the failure of development in Africa. Pushing the state out of the development project was based on the wrong assumption that the state *per se* was the culprit. What *was* wrong was that the state had been tasked with promoting development beneficial to the African people without having been fully decolonised and thus able to serve African interests. As noted by Fantu Cheru, the age of SAPs reinforced the hold of imperial global designs over African economies,⁶⁴ and African leaders lost the little remaining policy space they had left.⁶⁴

Cheru concluded that: “What is normally accepted as ‘development’ in Africa has been essentially an imperial project, derived and financed by the dominant Western powers to serve Western needs.”⁶⁵ He went further to state that, under SAPs, “policy making, an important aspect of sovereignty, has been wrenched out of the hands of the African state. This is colonisation, not development.”⁶⁶ Africa has not yet recovered from this blow and the emerging consensus is that the state has to be reconstituted into a democratic institution and allowed to regain lost policy space so as to play a positive role in development. But the current neo-liberal dispensation despite being riddled by a series of crises is still favourable to the continuation of Euro-American hegemony.

Neo-liberal Imperialism and the Present Global Crises

The present moment can best be described as a troubled time in which the fate of humanity seems uncertain. At the global level, a devastating

⁶² Mkandawire, “Institutions and Development in Africa,” Unpublished paper presented at Cambridge Journal of Economics Conference, 17-19 September 2003, 10. <http://13.111.165.101/cjeconf/delegates/mkandawire.pdf> (accessed 20/09/2012)

⁶³ Mkandawire, “Institutions and Development in Africa,” 10.

⁶⁴ Fantu Cheru, “Development in Africa: The Imperial Project versus the National Project and the Need for Policy Space,” *Review of African Political Economy* 120 (2009): 275-278.

⁶⁵ Cheru, ‘Development in Africa,’ 277-278.

⁶⁶ Cheru, “Development in Africa,” 277.

economic crisis has rocked the Global North calling into question triumphalist views of the capitalist mode of production as the only viable global economic system. The ripple effects of this crisis have been felt in Africa and other parts of the world, simply because the capitalist system has assumed global proportions. At the same time, there is an intensive drive by the United States of America (USA) and its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) partners to intervene militarily in other states like Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya under the cover of humanitarian intervention and the ‘right to protect’ people suffering from the excesses of dictatorships.

This has revived debates on what has come to be termed the ‘neo-liberal imperialism’ hidden within the wave of globalisation. Development Studies is yet to be well equipped to deal effectively with this rising phenomenon accompanied by a new scramble for African natural resources.⁶⁷ In 2000, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argued that empire was alive and resurgent, carving a new economic, cultural and political globalised order.⁶⁸ Negri emphasised that, today, empire no longer has an ‘outside’ and that it no longer tolerates any realities external to itself.⁶⁹

Since the fall of the Soviet Union no alternative discourse of development has emerged. A close look into the current dynamics of imperial global designs vis-à-vis Africa indicates a looming danger of ‘re-colonisation,’ beginning with those African countries endowed with strategic resources like oil, gas and diamonds. It would be simplistic to just accept recent events in Iraq and Libya as military interventions in support of democracy and human rights.

The reality is that neo-liberalism has gradually managed to naturalise a notion of politics that is dismissive of any radical thinking questioning the current status quo privileging the West. Such thinking is often dismissed as sentimental, nostalgic, anti-systemic and, at worst, terrorism.⁷⁰ At the same time, all Euro-American interventions—

⁶⁷ Anibal Quijano, “The Coloniality of Power and Social Classification,” *Journal of World Systems* 6:2 (Summer/Fall 2000): 342-386.

⁶⁸ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁶⁹ Antonio Negri, *Reflections on Empire* (London: Polity Press, 2008).

⁷⁰ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonization* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2012 in press).

including military ones—are cast as humanitarian and developmental. Radicalism has been beaten into support for the neo-liberal status quo.

The veteran journalist John Pilger unpacks some of the dangers embedded in popular conceptions of development informed by mystifying neo-liberal thought, in this way:

‘Democracy’ is now the free market—a concept bereft of freedom. ‘Reform’ is now the denial of reform. ‘Economics’ is the relegation of most human endeavour to material value, a bottom line. Alternative models that relate to the needs of the majority of humanity end up in the memory hole. And ‘governance’—so fashionable these days—means an economic approval in Washington, Brussels and Davos. ‘Foreign policy’ is service to dominant power. Conquest is ‘humanitarian intervention.’ Invasion is ‘nation-building.’ Every day, we breathe the hot air of these pseudo ideas with their pseudo truths and pseudo experts.⁷¹

To Pilger, neo-liberal discourses of development, which ideally sound noble concepts, have been manipulated into “the most powerful illusions of our time” having been “corporatised and given deceptive, perverse, even opposite meanings.”⁷² The net impact of this thinking has been the increasing articulation of development issues in terms provided by Euro-American hegemonic discourse.

The Washington Consensus which Arturo Escobar described as constituted by ‘the set of ideas and institutional practices that has seemingly ruled the world economy since the 1970s, most commonly known as neoliberalism’ continues to reproduce Euro-American global imperial designs despite the emerging discourse about post-Washington Consensus era.⁷³ Robert Calderisi, a long-time World Bank official, being a neo-liberal argued that most of the misfortunes bedevilling Africa were self-imposed. He linked the failures of development in Africa to kleptocratic governments, mismanagement, anti-business behaviour, family values, cultural fatalism, corruption and tribalism. He called for what he termed “new tough-love” in dealing with Africa, which involved

⁷¹ John Pilger, “Honouring the Unbreakable Promise,” Unpublished address delivered at Rhodes University, 6 April 2008, 4.

⁷² Pilger, “Honouring the Unbreakable Promise,” 5.

⁷³ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: Second Edition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), viii.

cutting foreign assistance by half and channeling the remainder to those countries that strictly and obediently pursued the neo-liberal democratic trajectory dictated by the West.⁷⁴

Of course, Africans are not only victims of underdevelopment; they have invariably contributed to some of the miseries. Yet problems like corruption are linked to the colonial logic of primitive accumulation. For instance, mercantilism, colonialism and apartheid are typical grand corrupt systems. The fact that the postcolonial state was bequeathed by the grand corrupt system of colonialism to some extent explains its predatory tendencies. Colonialism structured the state in such a way that it did not serve the interests of ordinary African people.

It must be remembered that it was the WB and IMF under such leaders as Calderisi, who worked for the World Bank for over 30 years in various senior positions including as the bank's international spokesperson for Africa, that constructed the structural adjustment programmes that wreaked havoc on Africa including cutting of subsidies on basic commodities, and opening up Africa to trade liberalization. Even in the face of the failures of Structural adjustment programmes Calderisi still urged Africans not to point fingers at the West but rather to blame themselves.⁷⁵ It is this deliberate denialism of the complicity the Euro-American world in generating and exacerbating development problems in Africa that calls for epistemological vigilance and political alertness on the part of Africans.

Even when in 2011 African masses in North Africa engaged in what became known as the 'Arab Spring,' which unfolded as an open indictment on both the limits of neo-liberalism and juridical freedom bequeathed to Africa by decolonization, the Euro-American world could avoid hijacking the moment to deal with such enemies of the West as Colonel Murmur Gaddafi of Libya. The case of NATO intervention in Libya during the course of the Arab Spring indicated how Euro-American powers were always ready to hijack popular movements pretending to be on their side while pursuing their permanent strategic interests. A combination of claims to advance humanitarianism, development and the anti-terrorist struggle is today used to justify what Mignolo terms 're-

⁷⁴ Robert Calderisi, *The Trouble with Africa: Why Foreign Aid Isn't Working* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 15.

⁷⁵ Calderisi, *The Trouble with Africa*, 8-11.

westernization' that began with the invasion of Iraq and involves the task of trying to save capitalism.⁷⁶

This reality of Euro-American world's attempts to 're-westernise' the world so as to save collapsing capitalism, calls for Africa to act in concert and re-build radical postcolonial states that are free from coloniality.

The State Reconstitution Consensus

There is an emerging consensus: not only that the state should to play a central role in development, but also on the nature of the state that will be well-positioned to spearhead development in Africa. This consensus is building upon the rise of 'new institutionalism,' the lessons gained from the rise of Asian Tigers, and the recent capitalist crisis, which has raised the possibility of pursuing autonomous development paths in the peripheries of the world economy.⁷⁷

The nature of this consensus is well captured in Pita Agbese and George Kieh's argument that the state does not need to retreat, but rather needs to be reconstituted.⁷⁸ Africa actually needs strong, democratic, and pro-people states that can provide for the basic needs of the people, respect and defend the African people's fundamental individual and group rights, promote gender equality, champion peaceful coexistence among various ethnic groups and religions, and defend citizens against exploitation and other vagaries of international finance capital.⁷⁹

Yet how to practically and fundamentally restructure and reconstitute the postcolonial state and reposition its missions and institutions to serve the ordinary African people remains a big challenge. Agbese and Kieh Jr provide four models. The first is the institutional reform model which advocates eliminating inefficient state institutions; rebuilding the social contract between leaders and citizens, establishing an independent judiciary, and reinforcing accountability and transparency. The problem with this model is that it reads like a wish-list informed by neo-liberal

⁷⁶ Mignolo, *The Dark Side of Western Modernity*, 35-37

⁷⁷ Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros, "The Fall and Rise of the National Question," in *Reclaiming the Nation*, eds., Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros (NY: Polity Press, 2011).

⁷⁸ Pita Agbese and George Kieh, "Introduction: Democratizing States and State Reconstitution in Africa," in *Reconstituting the State in Africa*, eds., Pita Agbese and George Kieh (New York: Palgrave, 2007).

⁷⁹ Agbese and Kieh, "Introduction," 15.

reformism and does not address the structural problem of coloniality of power presently in place.⁸⁰

The second model is the power-sharing arrangement. This model is premised on the understanding that elite political antagonisms and conflicts over political power and control of the state have resulted in the destruction of the state—if not its privatisation in the service of cliques, cronies and clients of the dominant elites.⁸¹ Elite unity is seen as a fulcrum for a stable state. A number of problems are identifiable with this arrangement. First, its focus is to unite elites rather than the ordinary people who are yet to enjoy the fruits of decolonisation.

At another level, power-sharing has proven to act as a mere armistice (for five years if not less), rather than a resolution of elite conflicts. The examples of Zimbabwe and Kenya indicate the fragility of this model, and the pervasive fear of elections as a moment for the renewal of intra- and inter-elite struggles that provoke communal violence that consumes the lives of ordinary citizens. Also of concern is that democratic principles are often sacrificed for the sake of reaching a power-sharing deal in situations where entrenched but unpopular elites refuse to leave power after losing elections.⁸²

The third model is the constitutional reform model, which speaks to the need for good governance and strict adherence to constitutionalism. New people-driven constitutions are seen as providing a framework for resolving political conflicts and addressing people's welfare.⁸³ However again, case studies of countries like Zimbabwe have revealed that without a change of heart on behalf of the elites and a political paradigm shift, the constitution-making process can be nothing but a fig-leaf covering the nakedness of the authoritarianism of entrenched elites. For constitutionalism to work; it must be a product of genuine and active participation of the people and elites need to commit to upholding it, within a dispensation that is democratic and underpinned by an independent judiciary.

⁸⁰ Agbese and Kieh, "Introduction: Democratizing States," 15-20.

⁸¹ Nic Cheeseman and Blessing-Miles Tendi, "Power-Sharing in Comparative Perspective: The Dynamics of 'Unity Government' in Kenya and Zimbabwe," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 48:2 (2010), 203-229.

⁸² Cheeseman and Tendi, "Power-Sharing in Comparative Perspective," 203-206.

⁸³ Agbese and Kieh, "Introduction: Democratizing States," 17-21.

The fourth model is that of state deconstruction, which calls for a fundamental transformation of the neo-colonial state, including redirecting its proclivity to serve the interests of international capital toward serving the ordinary people of Africa. Mueni wa Muiu and Martin have proposed what they term 'Fundi wa Africa' as a basis for the radical deconstruction and reconstruction of the state. 'Fundi wa Africa' is a Swahili word referring to the tailoring of Africa. Here state-builders are seen as tailors engaged in tailoring the state to suit African needs and demands.⁸⁴ But this state reconstitution must be a holistic, rather than superficial reformist, process. Mueni wa Muiu and Martin prescribe re-anchoring the state in African history, African values and traditions, and indigenous political systems as part of its reconstitution.⁸⁵

The logic is to try and link the state and society through a new social contract. This cannot happen without full decolonisation of the state and a thorough decolonisation of African minds such that they may begin to imagine alternatives. A number of revolutions predicated on popular social movements need to take place to achieve this. At one level, there is need for an epistemological revolution to deal with mental colonisation. A generational revolution is already underway, as symbolised by the Arab Spring which aims at translating juridical decolonisation into popular freedom. Progressive leaders are needed to engage the Euro-American world and open spaces for African voices in global governance.

Conclusion

The current economic crisis raises anxieties, as well as opportunities to reflect and imagine alternative development paths. What is clear is that there is a crisis of thought when it comes to devising alternative development paths. The leftists are trying to take advantage of the capitalist crisis to rehabilitate discredited socialist ideas. This is not new thought. Scholars who still believe in the redemptive and liberating potential of African nationalism are calling for the revival of the African national project as an anchor for development and for the purposes of answering the unresolved national question. This too is not new thought. Liberals still hold strong beliefs as to the durability, suitability and viability of the capitalist system, and already regard the system as having survived the credit crunch. Then there are the postmodern cosmopolitanists who believe that Africa is weighed down by neuroses of

⁸⁴ Mueni wa Muiu and Guy Martin, *A New Paradigm of the State* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 265.

⁸⁵ Mueni wa Muiu and Martin, *A New Paradigm*, 120.

victimhood which make it fail to take advantage of the fruits of globalisation and further the development agenda.

This study deployed the concept of coloniality of power to critically assess the discourse of development in Africa. Its conclusion is that, while Africa and Africans have been worked over by coloniality of power since the first colonial encounters, a way out of the snare of colonial matrices of power is to work through them in a creative, vigilant and innovative way rather than dreaming of an impossible return to the pre-colonial past. Strengthening South-South cooperation is one way to put the African agenda on the table of global governance and to directly confront the coloniality of power hidden in institutions like the IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization.

Deepening regional integration and pan-African unity is another way of minimising the force of coloniality of power over the continent. At the local level, local epistemologies and knowledges reflecting the particularities of different African societies must be mobilised, concurrently with initiatives at the state, regional, continental and global levels that unleash the African imagination creativity and innovation—turning ‘ordinary’ Africans into drivers of development rather than its object. In short, the way out of coloniality of power is to engage at various levels and to expose its limiting effects while devising ways of circumventing it as it becomes better understood.

A decolonial turn predicated on making visible the global imperial designs that work to keep Africa in a subordinate position is the beginning of thinking of another world of equality. A decolonial turn promotes a shift away from the delusions of a world naturalised by global imperial designs. It marks the definitive entry of Global South subjectivities into the realm of thinking and imagining another world. This involves pushing forward the frontiers of the distorted and unfinished democratic project of modernity, simultaneously with the unfinished project of decolonisation. A world of equality, development and freedom, as well as global democracy, can only be the product of actions deployed by and from the Global South as a primary epistemic site of struggle.

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