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# ***Shifting Paradigms of Theorising Africa in International Development Discourse: What Lessons for Survival?***

**Solomon Tai Okajare**

Department of History  
Obafemi Awolowo University  
Email: [sokajare@oauife.edu.ng](mailto:sokajare@oauife.edu.ng)

## **Abstract**

*This study examines four theories (modernization, dependency, neo-liberalism, and post-neoliberalism) of international development to achieve two main objectives: to assess the relevance of each theory to the quest for, and reality of, African development; and to establish a balanced perspective of the African development reality. Relying on extant literature, the study adopts narrative-descriptive method to extract the basics of each theory's views about international development vis-a-vis Africa's position within the global political economy. It found that African development history parades three intellectual paradigms. One, Western theorists (of Europe and North America) wrote (and continue to write) to stereotype Africa within a pigeonhole of convenience for domination and exploitation. Two, African(ist) scholars theorised to condemn colonisation as purveyor of African dependency and under-development, and to express confidence in the assurance of African postcolonial development. Third, postcolonial development writers have thrown up a new paradigm, which is largely a binary struggle between the former two. The study also found that each theoretical paradigm significantly shapes up a specific perspective about Africa, thus creating a shifting trajectory. It concludes with some recommendations for African survival in the complex whirlpool of international development.*

**Keywords:** Africa, Development, International Development, Domination, Survival

## **1. Introduction**

Intellectual discourse on development and underdevelopment of states in the global system has a longue durée. This history began from the days of the founding fathers of development economics like Adam Smith (1776, 1811), Thomas Malthus (1798) and Ricardo (1817, 1911). It continued with their most inveterate critics; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848, Marx, 1867). Both studied poverty in societies and the forces that determined the wealth of nations. However, the paradigm shifted in 1945 to a more embracing perspective when the intellectual movement of development started going through the shifting sand of epistemology. This shift encompassed the conception of development, thoughts and understanding of what it is, what it should be, and how to achieve it. Shortly after the Second World War, philosophers and others scholars competed to produce theoretical perspectives that were not eternally consistent or discursively stable. From the Cold War to the unforeseen, yet incredible, transformation of some East Asian countries events in reality have contributed to create palpable atmosphere of unease and deregulated what hitherto stood firm of unassailable



theoretical underpinnings of development. This was in spite of the East Asian countries' non-subscription to Western models of economic development as vigorously canvassed in the Washington Consensus.

The debate centers around the trajectories of relationship among countries. How and why are some countries developed and others are not? What went right for some that did not go right for others? Verifiable historical proofs have shown that the world has been characterised by inequality triggered by domination and subordination. The dominant countries, now known as Global North, have, for a long time, successfully shaped the others, Global South, into subordinate existence in the global power dynamics. The North has repeatedly used the debate to cover up their socio-economic stranglehold on the South, and blamed the latter for its underdevelopment. This not only stifles that truth, it has resisted the emergence of alternative narrative about international development. This is particularly instructive for Africa, which was almost entirely under colonial bondage until their symbolic independence in the late 1950s, 1960s and beyond. For noting, Ethiopia, Liberia, Egypt, and South Africa had their unique, distinct but equally undemocratic and exceedingly repressive experiences of Western domination (Meredith, 2011:10). These are well known and bear no repeating here.

Against that backdrop, this study is a conceptual article mainly set to cover the above gap in international development body of literature by focusing on refining extant (largely Western) theoretical frameworks about Africa in international development discourse. The study does not seek to test new hypothesis with data. Instead, it seeks to delve into the theoretical underpinnings of international development as applicable to Africa by thoroughly reviewing four theories, unveil their gaps and propose new ways of understanding the African reality within the global development matrix. It is hoped that the study will provide necessary vista for future empirical research on the African space in international development through its clear theoretical framework and implicitly suggested research questions. Towards this end, the study specifically examines the shifting paradigms of African development through the lenses of modernization, dependency, neoliberalism, and post-neoliberalism theories. The methodological framework for the study is integrative of the four identified theories and their prior postulations ultimately to build a clear and coherent argument. These four theories are discussed in turn in the study to understand the trajectory of African development. The study offers a critique of the theories by highlighting the gaps identified in them, presents some thoughts on Africa to fill those gaps and provides a concluding remark with suggestions for a new perspective to understand the African reality. To begin with, the study traces the evolution of development theories, introduces Africa's position in the global power system; and establish the theoretical scope and rationale for the study.

## 2. Evolution of Development Theories

International development theories generally offer diverse perspectives on the processes of development and underdevelopment in the global political economy and particularly on the Global South development experience. Significantly, while the theories reflect changing global dynamics and a better understanding of development processes, they have evolved in three phases: classical, economic growth, and post-war reconstruction (Willis, 2011:36-70). Also,



their evolution has triggered the cultivation of development ideas and policies across economic, political, social, environmental, and spatial dimensions (Radhika, 2009:45-60), thus providing a wider context for exploring the subject matter. The foundation of development theories was rooted in the classical theories of Adam Smith, David Ricardo and other European scholars whose works had laid out patterns of discussion from economic, political and sociological perspectives. Essentially, international development theories did not merge out of intellectual vacuum (Martinussen, 1997: Chapter 2). For instance, Adam Smith (1777) had provided a robust intellectual response to the mercantile (trade) focus of economic policy at that time in Western Europe. As Willis (2011: 36-37) observes,

*In the eighteenth century, it was trade which was the major force for economic growth; merchants, and particularly the large trading companies (such as the East India Company), had great power in relation to national governments. In order to safeguard their interests, merchants supported 2 protectionist measures which allowed them to carry out their activities without what they saw as unnecessary competition. Protectionism included high import tariffs for goods produced outside a country. This made it cheaper for customers to buy domestically-produced goods.*

Adam Smith perceived that the form of regulation provided by the merchant class was harmful and dangerous for sustainable national and individual citizen's economic progress and that it was too elitist and beneficial only to members of the merchant class. He advocated for greater wholesale attention to production rather than the reductionistic preference for trade as major driver of economic development. In addition, he called for divisions of labour to stimulate improved productivity, which would, in turn, trigger economic growth and wealth creation. Smith confidently assured that his proposed system would be regulated by the 'invisible hand of the market' rather than by the state (Willis, 2011:37).

David Ricardo (1817, 1911) made a significant contribution to the body of theories on development. He was famous for propounding the theory of comparative advantage in which he argued free trade and global division of labour. His main thesis was that countries should concentrate on producing and then selling the goods that they had an advantage in producing because of their assets, such as land, mineral resource, labour, technical or scientific expertise. Ricardo emphasized that more sense for countries to specialize in this way, rather than trying to produce everything, because through specializing, production would be more efficient, there would be greater capacity for growth and scarce resources could be used more effectively (Willis, 2011:37).

The second (economic growth) phase of the evolution of international development theories began with the 1929 Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression of the 1930s in the USA. These twin events challenged the validity of classical theorists' shared postulation that market was a mechanism for maximizing efficient resource use and human well-being. The main theorist of this stage was the famous British Economist; John Maynard Keynes who promoted the idea that, rather than free market, real investment in new infrastructure was the major key to development. He argued that such investment would positively impact job creation and further generate wealth, through the multiplier effect. He called for Government's intervention



either by tax or monetary policy, adjusting interest rates, or direct funding of building infrastructure, which would ultimately generate multiplier effects on many stakeholders. In the context of the Keynesian theory, a government-funded rural electrification project, for example, will generate income for the contracting company, suppliers of electricity materials and accessories, and site workers. While the company makes profit that can be ploughed back to further investment, suppliers will make profit to expand their business and workers will spend their earnings for upkeep and other purposes. Thus, there is an expansive net of profit and benefits which makes Government's direct funding of infrastructure a 'taming crises' strategy (Preston, 1996:157).

However, new thoughts and contexts gained traction from the mid-1940s after the World War II. This phase is the post-war reconstruction stage. International development theories have evolved significantly over time, with sustained change-and-continuity in global dynamics and academic perspectives on societal progress and global economy. The first of this phase is the linear stage theory otherwise known as Modernisation theory. This theory was dominant in the 1940-1960 decades with focus on a linear development track for all nations, and emphasis on Western models of development. Dependency theory was evolved in the next decade to substantially debunk modernisation theory by arguing that underdevelopment was not a stage but a function of the historical and contemporary exploitations of the weak states of the world by more powerful and developed ones. In the 1980s, there was a paradigm shift to neo-liberalism, which upheld free market, deregulation and privatization as cardinal purveyors of development. Along the neo-liberal theory since the 1980s is globalization theory which popularizes the increasing interconnectedness of the world complex elements of cultures, political systems, economies and so on, thus stimulating their interplay as critical to international development. Post-neoliberalism has also emerged to present good governance as key to international development. It highlights human rights, democratic power through credible electoral process, the enhancement and deepening democracy through social empowerment of citizens and the civil society, and subordination of state political and economic powers to the social power of civil society as core fundamental elements of development. These theories, at different times, provided the intellectual bases for what Thurbecke (2006: 3-32) calls development doctrines.

In all of these theories, there are five important issues to guide any scholar working on international development. These include nature of development; developed and developing states' relationship, role of the state in national development, role and importance of local content, context and agency, and sustainability of development. Essentially, international development theories keep evolving as more global challenges are emerging. This sustained evolution is an indicator of the need for international development scholars to continue learning, critiquing and adapting new perspectives and paradigms as may be convincingly found necessary.





### 3. Africa in Global Power System – An Overview

A major aspect of Africa's contemporary history is the complexity of its stance in the extant global power system. Although, the continent has played many defining roles in global power structures throughout history, transitioning from a cradle of civilization and a major player in early trade networks to a continent largely shaped by colonialism and its aftermath, yet it continues to struggle for self-determination and genuine sovereignty in its postcolonial history, and swim against the tide of limited representation in global institutions. This has forced Africa to persistently hunt for greater agency and influence in global affairs. That this pursuit has yielded no tangible result is a truism as better captured by in the Namibia-Amani Africa Panel Report (2024:39) that;

*The multilateral peace and security architecture, with the UN Security Council (UNSC) as its primary forum for the maintenance of international peace and security, remains largely based on its 1945 Post-World War II power configuration when the UN was created. One feature of the flaw of this configuration of the UNSC is the injustice of the exclusion particularly of Africa from membership in the UNSC from the start.*

While pre-colonial Africa boasted powerful kingdoms and extensive trade routes, its position was significantly altered by European colonization, which led to political fragmentation, economic exploitation, and the imposition of external power structures. In its post-independence, Africa has navigated a complex landscape of neo-colonialism, loss of linguistic and cultural sovereignty and highly skewed and hybridized international identity. This is why the continent continues to demand for reform of the global power structure particularly within the United Nations. The Namibia-Amani Africa Panel Report (2024:42) underscores the African sustained demand thus,

*The Global South in general, and Africa in particular, have been demanding for the fundamental reform of the UNSC, not only to establish seats at the table but to also ensure that they are able to influence the decision-making processes within the Council. For the African continent, this is particularly important not only for reasons of justice but also because it has been on the receiving end of the injunctions of the Council without having any effective say.*

Beyond the much-documented economic, political and socio-cultural losses of Africa in the global power system through European imperialism ((Awolowo 1977: 28–29; Rodney 2009: 108–161), the continent has suffered a huge dose of intellectual imperialism over the ages such that Western scholars have sustainably and deliberately attempted to reject alternative perspectives from Africa and, instead, pigeonholed the continent to the narrow confines of their ethno-centric warped lens. Intellectual imperialism is a shared problem of peoples under colonial bondage and beyond in which the imperialists chose to ignore alternative perspectives, theories and methodologies (Jussim, 2002:18) in preference for their home-grown pedagogies imposed on Africa through Christianity in the name of Western education (Faleye, 2014:82-83). Over time, this has remained a potent instrument in the hands of the imperialists in the colonial days and neo-imperialists today to obfuscate Africa's drive towards



mental and intellectual emancipation. The immediate result is binary. One, intellectual imperialism served as the strong base for other branches of European domination including cultural, economic and political imperialism. For one, it helped the Europeans to seamlessly imposed their culture via languages (English and French) and religion, on Africa. Two, intellectual imperialism has provided the sluice gate for Western neo-imperialism in Africa. It is case that, although Africa gained independence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, today it continues on the throes of foreign (Euro-American) domination in critical levers of development.

The deployment of some theories of international development as considered in this study is yet another strategy of intellectual neo-imperialism by some Western scholars to keep Africa perpetually within the periphery bounds where it will be fitting only for illustration of poverty, war, and other human-created tragedies. This reality is the immediate spark that triggered this study as a modest response to explore the inadequacies of some of the theories of international development as misapplied to Africa. This concurs significantly with the remarks of Her Excellency, Honourable Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah (2023) that;

*While many challenges [that we face today] are not new, it is clear that they are bigger in scale, unfolding in the same timeline and tend to reinforce each other. They are also taking place at a time of major global power shifts and worrying geopolitical rivalries not only along old ideological divides but also rivalries pitting old against new powers and major powers against middle powers.... For the continent of Africa, this would mean that our collective effort should go beyond presenting a good case for securing the interest of Africa. It should also include articulating proposals on how to reform the multilateral system in a way that also meets the just expectations and needs of the whole of humanity.*

While it is not necessarily an advocacy paper, but a conceptual article, this study represents one of such proposals to be articulated for the need to reform the global power system in a way that is just, fair, equitable and transparent for the African interest and aligns with global best standard for the overall benefit of humanity. In all, the study seeks to contribute to the extant body of literature on international development as applicable to Africa with sufficient clarity that will enlighten the world further about Africa. The four theories considered in the study include modernization, dependency, neoliberalism, and post-neoliberalism. They are discussed in turn below.

### **3.1 Modernization Theory**

Modernization theory of development is anchored on the intellectual philosophy that economic development of societies and their cultural and political changes grow in a synchronized, coherent and predictable trend. As such, the theory suggests that the wealth of rich nations is attributable to how they were able to develop correct economic practices, cultural beliefs and political values. In sum, their wealth is a product of a correct culture that stimulates trade and industrialization for sustainable economic growth. Relying on the dual society concept, Campbell (2013) theorises that “Poor countries are undeveloped or underdeveloped because of their archaic traditional social, political and economic structures. In order to develop, these countries have to industrialize, and so must also urbanize. Before



they can industrialize, though, they must overcome their traditional structures by shifting from traditional values to ones more congenial". Also, they must adopt the Western model of development, which encompasses industrialization; identify and uproot internal forces in their system (outside international political economy) that are purveyors of their underdevelopment; understand the nexus between political and economic developments; and needfully democratize to fulfill the political requirements of development. These conditions re-echo Rostow's (1960) and Organski's (1966) earlier postulations, which share the view that development is a gradual and transitional process whereby countries move from agricultural underdevelopment to mature and sustainable industrialization.

Rostow (1960) particularly highlights five key economic development stages of modern Western nations in the 19th and 20th centuries as follows: traditional society, which was primarily agricultural, subsistent and static; preconditions of take-off stage, which was marked by the beginning of scientific inquiry, increased agricultural productivity and infant industrialization; take-off stage, which was marked by boom in technological advancement and surge in internal investments, and consequent economic growth and development of social overhead capital; drive-to-maturity stage, which entailed economic boom because growth and investment had become critical elements of the economic system, thus lifting industries from primary producers to secondary producers; and, high mass consumption stage when there is huge production and consumption of goods and services. This Rostow's five-stage thesis is a generalized application of the Western industrialization experience across the entire human society. Samuel Huntington (1968) provides strong political fiber to the modernization paradigm with his three-point requirement, which are: structural differentiation within the society; subsystem autonomy; and secularization of culture. In other words, change in societal values must precede development.

In all, the intellectual thoughts that underlain slave trade, imperialism, colonization and neo-imperialism are well calibrated in modernization theory. Put differently, thoughts later embedded in modernization theory to promote capitalism in its tone and content, were principal intellectual tool of slave dealers and colonizers. These thoughts were galvanized in the heavily jaundiced intellectual views and propaganda shared by some European scholars about Africa's alleged inferiority and backwardness, with a view to providing justification for European domination schemes in Africa. The two main perspectives of these Euro-centric views are that Africans had no significant historical sense or experience across ages, and two, Africans made no major contribution to human civilization. For example, Hegel (1956) posits that Africa was unhistorical or no historical part of the world, or better still akin to an undeveloped spirit – still involved in the conditions of mere nature; devoid of morality, religions and political constitution. He sees Egypt and the northern tip of Africa as parts of the Mediterranean and of Asian continent. Thus, according to Hegel, this state of Africa's unconsciousness and incapacity justified Europe's enslavement and eventual colonization of the continent. He holds that slavery marked the beginning of human feeling among Negroes (Kuykendall 1993: 572).

The famous three Cs - Civilization, Christianity and Commerce - of colonization followed later, validating what became the concept of 'White Man's Burden', which had been





developed by Rudyard Kipling (1899) in a poem. Also, Nott (1851) defiantly declared that “There Africa stands with her fifty millions (sic) of blacks, and there she has stood for the last five thousand years, with this people occupying the same countries, without one step towards civilizations; and all the experiments in the United States, the West Indies, &c., have failed”. Hugh Trevor-Roper was more frontal in his 1963 Eurocentric view that Africa had no history before its contact with Europe. He argued, “There is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. Perhaps in the future, there will be some African history to teach but for now the rest is darkness, and darkness is not a subject of history”. He added that African history constituted “only the unedifying and unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe” (1965).

From the above, it is discernible that modernization theory evolved later to merely announce a well-scripted agenda of European domination of Africa and other regions of the Global South. Also, it is more or less an epistemological counterforce against the Marxist tendencies of the 1960s, thus serving as the handmaiden of the American foreign policy drive of the Cold War period strategically emplaced to counter Marxism and its communist/socialist orientations. Note that some East and West African leaders at independence, including Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Leopold Senghor, Ahmed Sekou Toure, Modibo Keita, Saidou Momoh and Siaka Stevens, Luis Cabral, and François Tombalbaye, embraced the communist/socialist drive of the old Soviet Union. It was indeed an intellectual contest against Marxism over Africa and other parts of the Global South during and after colonization.

### 3.2 Dependency Theory

Broadly defined, dependency theory explains the economic and development-centric relationships between ex-colonies and their colonial masters from the Marxian perspective with the core argument that the backwardness of these ex-colonies is a product of their continuous exploitation by their former masters who exploit them still. The second core argument is that the ex-colonies are in a state of permanent economic dependency on their former colonizers which are capitalist states. Resonating in anticapitalism and anti-imperialism sentiments with a prominent reification of unevenness (‘we’ versus ‘them’, ‘centre’ versus ‘periphery’), dependency theory alleges that multi-national corporations (MNCs) are major purveyors of economic inequality through their strong support for liberal economic policies, and unbridled exploitation of poor countries’ resources. By this, the MNCs perpetuate the dependency of the poor countries (of Global South) on the rich countries (of Global North). This carries the message that “The distribution of international and economic power must radically change...if the disadvantaged position of underdeveloped countries is to be altered” (Mingst 1999: 201). Therefore, if they are genuinely interested in development, the ex-colonies should sever relationship with their former masters. This is in sync with the clarification of Tony Smith (1979:248) that “dependency theory's most distinctive point is its insistence that the logic of contemporary southern development can only be grasped by placing this process firmly within a globally defined historical context. That is, contemporary political and economic change in the South must be understood as aspects of imperialism today and yesterday. From this perspective alone - from the standpoint of local histories globally understood - can the logic of the development process be comprehended correctly”.



Dependency theory emerged in the 1960s to promote precepts of Marxism and repudiate modernization theory that was becoming quite dominant in academic and government circles particularly in the West. While modernization theory favored a unilineal and progressive approach to development through industrialization patterned after the Western economic model, dependency theory emphasizes that development is neither unidirectional or unilineal, nor would unguarded adoption of the economic growth model of developed countries automatically translate to the development of less developed ones. Instead, underdevelopment results from obstacles created by 'core nations' through their integration of 'peripheral nations' into the world capitalist system for their enlightened self-interest, thus configuring the peripheral nations to remain perpetually poor, capability-deprived, open to inequality (Amartya, 1999) and dependent on the core nations. From its dominance in supplying the intellectual nuances and contours of development between the 1960s and 1980s, dependency theory further helped to lay the foundation for post-colonial economic policies that would reinforce the sovereignty and independence of African states. It provided for the African peoples the historical context for their unwholesome experiences in the track of survival in the emerging global system from slave trade to colonisation and beyond.

Although, it declined in the mid-1980s due to the rise of neoclassical economics and its inability to explain some unforeseen changes in the international political economy structure, particularly the phenomenal economic success of the newly industrializing East Asian countries (Kvangraven, 2021), dependency theory continues to provide intellectual fibers for philosophical thoughts and sentiments around leadership recruitment in Africa to date. However, the persistence of uneven development and increasing poverty trends has led to the re-interrogation of the relevance of dependency theory in explaining today's world inequalities. Neoliberalism soon became the new sing-song.

### 3.3 Neoliberalism

With its ideological foundation firmly laid in the famous Adam Smith's (1910) *Wealth of Nations*, first published in 1776, neoliberalism presupposes that state's firm control of the economic system is antithetical to sound development. Thus, the reduction of state interventions in economic and social activities and the deregulation of labour markets, financial systems, trade and investments, have set the enormous potential of capitalism free to create an unprecedented era of social well-being and phenomenal rise in the citizens' living standards in the world's leading economies. Smith had posited in his seminal work that free exchange was a transaction from which both parties necessarily benefited, since nobody would voluntarily engage in an exchange from which they would emerge worse off. The core principles of Smith's thesis are: the expansion of the market permitted increasing specialization and so the development of the division of labour; the advantages gained through exchange were not advantages gained by one party at the expense of another; exchange was the means by which the advantages gained through the increased division of labour were shared between the two parties to the exchange. This implies, as Clarke (2005:50) argues, that any barriers or impediments imposed by state or any other structure/system to free trade limit the development of the division of labour, which would result in crippling the growth of the wealth of the nation and the prosperity of each and every



In essence, neoliberalism rests on the 'elementary proposition that both parties to an economic transaction benefit from it, provided the transaction is bilaterally voluntary and informed'(Friedman,1962). Therefore, any restrictions (by the state) on free trade would shrink social and economic welfare as individuals would be denied the freedom to invest and self-generate income for their well-being. This laid the foundation of the 'Washington Consensus' which leading economies of the Western world promoted through the Bretton Woods twin-institutions (World Bank and IMF) in the 1980s. However, the sudden rise of countries like Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, and later Singapore (Asian Tigers), and Japan to the circle of stable and strong economies equivalent to the Western economies without having to adopt the latter's model was a major, perhaps natural, repudiation of the essence and veracity of neoliberalism. Also, the failure of the Washington Consensus model to address the economic challenges of the Latin American and African countries that adopted its structural adjustment program in the 1980s and beyond combined with the Asian Tigers' 'miracle' to show that, indeed, the intellectual movement for understanding development in its complexities is still traveling on a progressive, even if shifting, paradigm.

### 3.4 Post-neoliberalism

The above scenario of questioning the reliability of neoliberalism culminated in expansion of intellectual engagements on development particularly since the beginning of the new millennium. From Foucault (2008) to others (Burgin, 2012; Stedman Jones, 2012; Mirowski, 2013, Slobodian, 2018; Whyte, 2019), scholars have had to trace the roots and trajectories of modern neoliberalism far back beyond the era of Thatcherism of the 1980-90 decade or the post-war economic crisis of 'stagflation' which the Keynesian economics failed to address even up to the 1970s, to the inter-war decades of 1920s and 1930s. It is not clear that post-neoliberalism is a distinct theory existing in its own exclusive shell away from neoliberalism. Scholars have labelled it in different ways as post-neoliberalism, 'still neoliberalism', 'mutant neoliberalism' and so on. What it means, as Davies and Gane (2021: 4) argue, is that "For over a decade, therefore, we have benefited from an ever-more fine-grained 'history of the present', while at the same time becoming less sure whether this really is still our 'present' condition". However, for the present purpose, post-neoliberalism can be seen as a summation of a new order that emerged after the apparent failure (perhaps, challenge) of neoliberalism, in which some post-neoliberal leaders who rose to political ascendancy in countries, for example, in Latin America where the Washington Consensus had prevailed without good benefits, sought to ingrain a radical change in the role of state in the economic process by way of renewed nationalization policy especially in key sectors like oil and gas, mining and banking. The main kernel was that government would have to show more profound interest and involvement as well as provide upper-ceiling control as a means to stabilize the economy. This was to be a middle-line position between free exchange and state control predicated on good governance.

To the extent that it is an alternative to neoliberalism, post-neoliberalism presupposes that the goal of development should not only be on how to improve citizens' living conditions, it should



also necessarily be on how to advance human rights, democratic power through credible electoral process, enhancing and deepening democracy through social empowerment of citizens and the civil society, and subordination of state political and economic powers to the social power of civil society (Wright, 2013). In essence, good governance is key to the new post-neoliberal order in which the state is made to be democratically accountable to the citizen (Powell, 2009:57), towards guaranteeing citizens' central involvement in the design and implementation of state policies and provisions geared toward collective welfare. In this new order, civil society organizations are to be brought in as active participants in the social transformation and political democratization process. As Burawoy (2015) notes, since neoliberalism involves a process of global scale marketization, the need for a global civil society asserting human rights is compelling for some measure of moderation and civil populace's representation.

The foregoing implies that while they are related, neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism entail distinct approaches to development. Neoliberalism underscores free markets, deregulation, and privatization, with a limited role for government intervention. On the other hand, post-neoliberalism assesses neoliberalism and promotes policies that prioritize social equity, environmental sustainability, and stronger state-society relations. The core principles of neoliberalism include free markets, deregulation, privatization, reduced government spending, and promotion of individual economic freedom. But post-neoliberalism is anchored on (national) development through active role for the state in advancing social and economic challenges. This state involvement is expected to promote social and environmental justice, equitable distribution of resources, and strengthened state-society relations.

#### **4. Africa in the Temple of International Development Theories – A Critique**

While the relevance, applicability and positive implications of the above four theories are firmly located within the historical contexts of Western economies, their explications and descriptions of development and underdevelopment situate Africa only as Western Powers' field of exploitation considered fitting for illustration of poverty and underdevelopment. For example, from Rostow (1960) to Organski (1966) and Campbell (2013), poor regions of the world (as typified by Africa) were poor only because of their allegedly archaic structure, and could free themselves from poverty only by adopting the Western political-economic models of democracy and industrialization. Apparently, these Western intellectual positions did not consider the unforeseen emergence of the East Asian nations rise from poverty to prosperity without necessarily adopting the Western models of development. Modernization theory is largely a counterforce against Marxism and reinforcement of the West's unbridled subscription to capitalism.

Again, dependency theory is apt to describe Africa's underdevelopment in the context of its historical and contemporary political-economic reality of sustained but unrewarding dependence on the former colonial masters. True, the colonizers exploited Africa and continue to do so after independence by the manipulative machinations of neo-imperial economic policies of foreign direct investments which are largely cloaked as beneficial interventions for the receiving countries. In reality, foreign direct investment particularly



anchored on skewed international trade relations is antithetical to African development. This strengthens the shared Smith's and other dependency theorists' suggestive position that imperialism and neo-imperialism are responsible for the underdevelopment of former colonies (Rodney, 2009:108-161). However, it is illogical that such position offers the only perspective from which the underdevelopment of poor regions of the world e.g. Africa, can be correctly unpacked and understood, as it provides the leeway and undesirable coverage for African leaders who provided poor leadership laced in inexplicable corruption, unbridled wealth accumulation for personal aggrandizement, and crass obsession for power without rule of law. In essence, dependency theory is partly, even substantially, (but not totally) relevant to interrogate Africa's development malaise.

Neoliberalism rests on the intellectual plank that state control of the levers of (economic) development would stifle development and that liberalizing the system would guarantee steady progress and sustained development. Adam Smith particularly, but erroneously, assumed that deregulation of labour market, financial transactions, trade and investment promises a new, good economic and social life for countries and citizens in the leading economies of the world. Therefore, deregulation and liberalization of the key levers of economic transactions become more imperative. Friedman (1982) strengthened this position with the conditional conclusion that if international interaction is "bilaterally voluntary and informed", all parties would reap huge benefits. However, these pro-neoliberalism theoretical postulations worked because of Global North's strong hold on the global capitalism with Global South countries (especially in Africa) as the pawns in the chess, thus making them continuously dependent as peripheral states. They ensured that only the Western socio-political culture as promoted through globalization and democracy continue to gain momentum globally. Indeed, the Africa-West's economic relationship, for instance, is not bilaterally voluntary and informed, but in most cases, African countries are conditioned, configured and re-configured to accept terms and conditions willy-nilly as imposed through the Bretton Woods institutions by the leading economies of the world. Again, the East Asian Tigers' rise readily come to mind as to the partial applicability of neoliberalism as an international development theory. Also, the obvious failure of the Washington Consensus principles to rescue Africa from underdevelopment in the late 1980s and subsequent decades further indicates that neoliberalism might be region-specific (not global) in its relevance.

The extent to which post-neoliberalism is an outright repudiation of neoliberalism is not clear. It is fundamentally an important intellectual symbol which was a response predicated on the concept of good governance by leaders of Latin America particularly where the Washington Consensus experiment was an abysmal failure. It revolves around core elements of good governance, which would, in turn serve as the cornerstone of sustainable development, as government would be more accountable to the citizens. While these are persuasive, they are still fermented end-products of Western intellectual thoughts with little or no consideration for the African peculiarities and extant indigenous social culture. Obviously, an African model of democracy and good governance anchored on the basics of African established ethos would be more sustainable. A global civil society established without reasonable quantum of African inputs, but that seeks to promote human rights in Africa, is akin to playing to the gallery.





## 5. Some Thoughts and Explanations of African Underdevelopment

Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972, 2009) is a seminal contribution to the dependency theory's body of knowledge as applicable to Africa. Also, Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1980) is a revolutionary masterpiece on the contours and nuances of Africans' experience under colonial rule, and the attendant anticolonial movements in Africa and Asia, with particular focus on the Algerian revolution. The author condemned imperialism and advocated for a mix of violent revolution and socialism as the way solution to the African liberation challenges. These book remains timeless classics for any African leader today! Decker (2016) throws more light on dependency theory by suggesting that dependency is a situation of subjugation of one country's (economic) development by another. As he argues, "In essence, it is a condition where a country's economy is reliant, influenced and affected by the dynamics in the economy of another. In the context of global political economy, economic dependency presupposes a situation whereby poor nations provide natural resources, cheap labour, destination for obsolete technology, and market for the automated economies, without which people living in such (advanced economy) cannot enjoy an acceptable living standards" (sic). This is broadly captured about Africa by Rodney (2009).

Samir Amin (1997, 2014) explains Africa's underdevelopment as a product of global capitalism and its attendant destructive consequences. Conceiving capitalism as encompassing power relations that conveys a logic of class struggles over political power among states, Amir sees capitalism as a "regime in which the world economy functions in a hierarchical, unequal and exploitative way; where "first world" countries dominate and have developed at the cost of the Third World countries". Put differently, countries of the North continue to deploy manipulative mechanisms of imperialist control over countries of the South, thus culminating in what Samir calls "permanent phase of capitalism". This reinforces the view that capitalism victimizes the Global South (periphery) by imposing the Global North's (core states') direct control on their production system. Thus, African countries do not progress sufficiently, their survival prospects are whittled as their wellbeing ... remains weak and fragile (Gumede, 2023).

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations: What Lessons for Survival in the Whirlpool?

What this study has done is unpacking the deficiencies (and strength if any) of four international development theories in explaining the Africa's position in the global economy. The study found that while they all accept poverty as the core challenge of development largely against Africa, thus making the international political-economic environment a complex whirlpool, all of the theories, especially modernization, have some fundamental flaws in enhancing the understanding of Africa. Collective efforts against poverty grew from the 19th century to the early decades of the last century when modernization and dependency theoretical paradigms were predominant in the philosophical thought base of development, and followed later by neoliberalism in the latter half of the last century. Ravallion (2016:80) argues, "While there have been calls to end extreme poverty at various times during the last century or so, they are more credible now than ever". It can therefore



be concluded that the intellectual movement for understanding development in its complexities has been progressive since the era of modernization theory. However, Africa's page in this body of knowledge has been filled with half-truths and outright falsehood thus necessitating a new paradigm that will blend Africa's true historical realities with its contemporary experiences and potentials for defining the thrust of international development. It must be such new paradigm that will recognise Africa as a major player in the chess of global political economy, not one that is doomed to the periphery. In view of the fact that Africa still remains enmeshed in the whirlpool, African scholars must provide the intellectual backing for its leaders to build a synergy capable of identifying lessons accruable from the theoretical discourse outlined below as elements for quick refinement of Africa's survival strategies.

One, African leaders and peoples should note that moralizing inter-state relations bears no reward. Realism is key. Basically, for the most part, many Western countries from the slave trade era, through colonization to the present have not, for once, released the levers of their economic stranglehold firmly tightened on Africa. That explains the sustained adoption of using corporate bodies like trading, chartered or multinational companies as instrument of economic domination in Africa. Even in the contemporary postcolonial setting, many former colonists of Africa still control the important sectors of African countries' economies such that poverty continues to grow and provides the compelling excuse and justification for African leaders' continuous request for foreign direct investment in a manner that suggests pleas for assistance. This is particularly manifest on former French colonies in Africa. Thus, Africa is left with making policy-decisions oscillating around decolonizing knowledge of poverty and international development, on the one hand, and shifting development-enhancing strategies on the other.

Two and directly linked with the above, Africans across board must accept that decolonization goes beyond the struggle for and attainment of independence, and that it necessarily embraces continuous efforts at totally liberating the continent from all pangs of foreign domination as still being witnessed in many fora and strata of international engagements today. Western States' wrong perceptions of Africa and its people have not changed significantly. It is important that the African countries domesticate thorough reform starting with the masses resisting every form of neo-colonial tendencies from local leaders and global friends. The masses should be more concerned with the process of leadership recruitment; eschew corruption in elective process, keep leaders accountable, and embrace positive, truly nationalistic orientations towards their nations and fellow citizens. Conscious efforts must be made to remove every vestige of colonial mentality and orientation in public governance and private conduct. Leaders at all levels must demonstrate integrity in leadership and be truly accountable to the people at all times. Citizens/masses must replicate this positive trait in their lower-rung operations as a new-found orientation. The depth of poverty and intensity of suffering in Africa make this quick reform more compelling.

Three, the need for hybridizing African development matrix by eschewing the prejudiced perspective of Western culture, but cautiously accommodating what is essentially positive in West's capitalistic-democratic orientations, has become more compelling. Yet, such



hybridization should be heavily subsumed within the framework of African social milieus and indigenous reality of drawing ethos, customs, traditions and other ancestral wisdom platforms as guiding principles of development. This proposition departs partially from Amin's suggestion of periphery's delinking with the core states (Amin, 1990: Chapter 2). While it is true that poor countries can experience economic progress without necessarily adopting rich countries' production system approaches, this study submits that such delinking is only possible in a country already in autarky (state of self-sufficiency). In reality, no African country has such status today. So, a cautious hybridization of development agenda will suffice more. In this regard, African scholars should, as a matter of urgency, rise beyond empty rhetorics and syntactic finesse, and work in patriotic tandem with leaders and civil societies across the continent to provide a sustainable development architecture. Associated with this is Africa's loss of linguistic sovereignty whereby two European languages (English and French) were, and still are, dominant in Africa. This loss is admittedly eternal, without any hope of recovery. However, the unbridled use of these foreign languages as major vehicle of communication, education and business needs urgent review with a view to designing a sustainable alternative as Africa's primary symbol of identity in the global system. Niger Republic has adopted Hausa as their national language (Sahara Reporters, 2025). The diplomatic implication of that is that any Western Power that is interested in trading in lithium, gold and other resources with Niger must be ready to provide manuals and other snippets of information in Hausa (primarily) and English or French as working languages. This promises huge benefit for the country, all other things being equal.

Four, it is a truism that these Western countries obviously need African resources. African leaders must ensure that their negotiation strength is enhanced by all means possible. The civil society organisations in Africa must mobilise the masses and enlighten them into the (immediate) painful but (long-term) rewarding impact of the new African revolution as a once and for all strategy to fully liberate Africa. The ruling class must deliberately review the governance style inherited from colonial masters. It is paradoxical and contradictory for Africans to condemn colonial rule on the one hand and continue with their style of governance on the other. This study suggests people-centric, culture-shaped, and genuinely pan-African governance anchored on proper integration of the traditional institutions into the mainstream of governance, given that the traditional chiefs remain the bearers and custodians of the African cultures and traditions across board.

Five, on globalization, African leaders and peoples' main challenge is on whether they can open up profitably to the externally-imposed liberalization process (Khor 2003: 99). In concurrence with Khor, this study calls for the need to embrace globalization with utmost caution. While it is proper and fitting to attract foreign investors, African leaders should know that, like leopards, former colonial masters, now Western friends, would not necessarily change their colours. But African leaders and people must leverage by balancing the challenges with the benefits and profitably explore the binary advantages of internal self-development by way of growing local industries based on home-grown skills through training and retention of young Africans in Africa, and attracting foreign direct investments on the pedestal of equal partnership anchored on mutual respect, devoid of inferiority/superiority complex entombed in skewed political and socio-economic relationship. Local markets



should be opened cautiously and primarily to benefit indigenous operators and stakeholders while accommodating foreign investors to make reasonable profits for their investments. Intra-African trade and economic development architectures like African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and New Partnership for African Development (now known as AUDA-NEPAD) must be cleaned up and strengthened as the continent's platforms for scientific, fool-proof, and productive engagements with the investing world. It is only when Africans and their leaders decisively take their destiny in their hands without falling to the deception of foreign powers' interest in the continent's rise that Che Guevara's 1964 speech "The final hour of colonialism has struck, and millions of inhabitants of Africa, Asia and Latin America rise to meet a new life and demand their unrestricted right to self-determination and to the independent development of their nations" will be meaningfully fulfilled.

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