



# **Conflicting Perspectives of Socioeconomic Change and the Pan - Africanist Ideal of Self-Determination, 1912 - 2002**

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# **CONFLICTING PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIOECONOMIC CHANGE AND THE PAN-AFRICANIST IDEAL OF SELF DETERMINATION, 1912-2002**

## **Abstract**

This dissertation interrogates the debate on socioeconomic change in Africa post 1912. It examines the leading currents of thought on what is now popularly termed as development, starting with New Institutional Economics (NIE). Focusing on NIE, it contrasts recent policy implications maintained in the work of Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson (AJR) with that of earlier dependency and modernization perspectives. At the same time it sets these intellectual traditions against what is defined as the Pan-Africanist ideal of self-determination. The rationale behind such a reverse chronological presentation is to enable the reader to travel back in time, and see how socioeconomic thinking about Africa has undoubtedly changed, but, also retained some theoretical misconceptions about the continent and its people. The ideal of self-determination is described as the intellectual tradition of insisting that Africans should ensure that they cultivate the capacity to formulate autonomous ideas, first and foremost, on the type of values and ethics, institutional framework, and notion of progress best suited to their socioeconomic needs and environment.

By means of this contrast of ideas, the dissertation suggests that even though more contemporary perspectives such as those embodied in NIE can be seen as an attempt to converge divergent streams of thought from the earlier dependency and modernization traditions, some of its most popular policy implications, such as the transference of good colonial property rights institutions to regions that have suffered a ‘reversal of fortune’ stand in stark opposition to the Pan-Africanist ideal of self-determination.

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## Introduction

This dissertation identifies and contrasts conflicting theoretical perspectives of socioeconomic change with the Pan-Africanist ideal of self-determination. The historical narrative is set in the period 1912-2002, straddling the colonial and post-colonial eras. The familiar notion of a “post – colony” immediately presents itself as an innocent effort at chronological arrangement but of course, it is much more. It calls upon us to differentiate between successive moments, to trace a process of change from inception to maturity and possibly on to decline; and introduces the complicated problem of narrating the dynamic relations between culturally unique, but also, universally human populations. Without such a distinction, we are faced with an ambiguity that makes understanding socioeconomic change impossible.

The effort to distinguish stages in a larger movement is a tendency perhaps nowhere more apparent than in historical studies. History is a subject which because of its political vitality, and role in inter-generational political conscientization, has been described by historian, Pieter Geyl, as akin to the art of myth-making. He writes that:

It is difficult, to distinguish between a myth - the past arranged without any hampering inhibition, so as to suit the prejudice of its adherents, their national, religious loyalty, their party feeling or intolerance, and history - the interpretation of the past which makes a bold claim on absolute truth and objectivity.<sup>1</sup>

Reminding us of the difficulty of drawing a simple contrast, Geyl further suggests that “although it has always been the ideal of historians to separate the two, and they have attempted to make their narratives conform to demonstrable, the palpable truth is they are inextricably linked”.<sup>2</sup> From Geyl, it can be deduced that the sensing of the past is necessarily subjective. The narrative formulated by a historian will always be dependent on his/her present conditioning. The historian’s sociological situation, his/her psychology and political ideology, indeed his/her entire being, not only dictates the choice of references but also, the ensuing analyses as well as the bias of the narrative.

It is not only Geyl who has concerned himself with the inevitability of subjectivity in historical work. Kwesi Kwaa Prah has also made a similar observation:

As a global community of scholars, we see the world from our historical, social, cultural and mythological assumptions and positioning without us always realizing

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<sup>1</sup> Pieter Geyl, *Use and Abuse of History* (New Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1970), 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

this. I do not agree with the notion of a value-free social science; some sort of chaste, ideologically sanitized science, free of foibles, prejudices and social conditioning of time. I cannot buy into the notion of academic objectivity in circumstances and about matters on which we can at best only profess informed opinion. I think our biases can or may be mitigated, but not eliminated. It is therefore methodologically better to work from the understanding that one carries historical and cultural baggage in social analysis than to assume that one's view stands outside the constraints and markings of historical equipage and conditioning.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to state at the outset that like most historical research, the work undertaken in the dissertation can be criticised for its subjectivity. Nowhere do I claim that the narrative presented is the absolute truth or the presentation is free from bias.

There exists a rich and vibrant tradition of ideas on socioeconomic change, noticeable in some of the debates among the African petty bourgeoisie, as well as between them, colonial governors and administrators. These debates gathered momentum in the interwar years (1918 – 1939) and were concerned primarily with indirect rule and its underlying assumptions about African societies and how they were changing as a result of the colonial situation.<sup>4</sup> Around the same time, Pan-Africanist and decolonization movements were mushrooming in the diaspora, emerging from a twenty-year period of dormancy. After the Pan-African Conference organized by Trinidadian, Henry Sylvester Williams in London in 1900, there were a succession of congresses, the first in 1919 (Paris), the second and third, 1921 and 1923 (both in London), the fourth in 1927 (New York) and the fifth in 1945 (Manchester).<sup>5</sup>

The free movement and association of people of African descent in parts of Europe, as well as the United States, served as a crucible for political conscientization. In fact, it can be deduced that the confluence of ideas between 1900 and 1945 springing out of the cultural crises attendant with the colonial situation, and the debates it fostered among Africans as well as between them and European colonialists, coupled with the free movement of Africans in the diaspora played an important role in the declaration of 1960-1970 as a 'development decade'

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<sup>3</sup> Kwesi Kwaa Prah, *Soundings, Studies on African Transformation* (Cape Town: Centre for Advanced Studies in African Society, CASAS, 2010), viii.

<sup>4</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject, Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1996), 38-61.

<sup>5</sup> Prah, *Tracings, Pan Africanism and the Challenges of Global African Unity* (Cape Town: Centre for Advanced Studies in African Society, CASAS, 2014), 8-10.

by the humanitarian governing body, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).<sup>6</sup>

It is possible to sketch the evolution of Pan-Africanism in four broad historical stages, the first runs roughly from the end of the eighteenth to the closing decades of the nineteenth century. This era was marked by the abolishment of slavery in Europe and in the United States of America. The second stage continues from the *fin de siècle* period to 1945. This era was marked by a general change in political and social attitudes as well as ethics. Perhaps this change was a direct result of the material destruction unleashed by World War I and II. It may also have been encouraged by the critical debates about the future of humanity fostered by these inter-imperial wars. The third stage is a relatively short era. It begins in 1945 and ends in 1963 with the foundation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). During the third period (1945-63), Africans entered an era which UNICEF labelled as a development decade, within which two-thirds of colonial territories attained political independence.<sup>7</sup>

From the first to the third stage in the evolution of Pan-Africanism, there is a clear movement from the articulation of demands to the realisation of demands chronicled by the abolishment of slavery (end of nineteenth century) and the attainment of political independence (mid-twentieth century). In the fourth and final stage, beginning in the 1970s, there has been some level of disenchantment with achievements in the previous eras and a general assertion that the destination reached was neo-colonial, and independence, only partial. This latter period, accounting for neo-colonial social relations in the international socioeconomic order continues to the present.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, the above periodization is hardly precise and there are considerable overlaps. Nonetheless, the evolution of Pan-Africanism can be viewed alongside the transformation of socioeconomic thought about Africa. There is a clear movement it seems, from paternalistic ideas about civilizing the heathen races and modernizing the colony to more democratic concepts captured in the idea of developing (in contrast to civilizing and modernizing) a nation which allow for more autonomous African agency.

The historical transition from a paternalistic civilizing mission to a more humanitarian and democratic development mission has generated a number of reactions and opinions, as well as,

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<sup>6</sup> UNICEF Briefing Document, "The 1960s: Decade of Development", UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, <http://www.unicef.org/sowc96/1960s.htm>), accessed 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2016

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Prah, *Tracings*, 8-57.

helpful theoretical perspectives and intellectual traditions in Africa and beyond. These include modernization, dependency and NIE, as well as radical and conservative Pan-Africanist positions. It is important to state at the outset that these theoretical perspectives offer interesting, but often radically divergent hypothesis and explanations of socioeconomic change, progress and policy implications.

The primary goal of this dissertation is to present the aforementioned intellectual traditions and provide some critical commentary on them. A secondary goal of the dissertation is to compare and contrast the policy implications of these divergent traditions in their different historical contexts against the seemingly consistent desire for autonomy and intellectual independence expressed by groups of Africans (intellectual, petite bourgeoisie) since at least the beginning of the twentieth century - which I have identified and labelled as the Pan-Africanist ideal of self-determination.

### Plan of Study and Research Objectives

Research on global comparative development published by Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson (henceforth AJR), between 2000 and 2003, has made a tremendous impact on contemporary perspectives of socioeconomic change in Africa - starting a chain of historical investigations, as well as inciting criticism from econometricians and economic historians alike.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, their work provides a theoretical and quantitative validation of NIE and its historical approach to socioeconomic change. NIE, by the way, is an intellectual tradition which has been touted by Robin Matthews as ‘one of the liveliest areas’ in the discipline of economics; as a ‘boiling cauldron of influential ideas’ by Oliver Williamson; and as a specialized tradition ‘very much influenced by history’ according to Mary Shirley.<sup>10</sup>

In the ensuing discussion, I will propose that NIE as illustrated by the 2002 reversal of fortune thesis of AJR, although congenial to historians, is not entirely unique, neither does it represent

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<sup>9</sup> Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson. “The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation”, *American Economic Review* 91, no 1 (2003), 1369-1401; See also, “Reversal of Fortune: Geography and Institutions in the Making of the Modern World Income Distribution”, *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117 no 1 (2002) 1231-1294; and “Institutional Causes, Macroeconomic Symptoms: Volatility, Crises, and Growth”, *Journal of Monetary Economics* 50 no 1 (2003), 49-123 by the same authors.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Shirley, Ronald Coase Institute Working Paper Series, *Institutions and Development* (2003); Robin Matthews, “The Economics of Institutions and the Sources of Growth”, *The Economic Journal* 96, no 1 (1986) 903-918; Oliver Williamson, “The New Institutional Economics: Taking Stock, Looking Ahead”, *Journal of Economic Literature* 38, no 3 (2000), 595-613.

a complete Foucauldian change in episteme, or a total Kuhnian shift in paradigm.<sup>11</sup> I will suggest that to varying degrees, NIE by virtue of its popularity in the recent past (2000s decade) can be related to two of the earlier perspectives on socioeconomic change – i.e. dependency (1970s decade) and modernization (1950s decade). Through this contrast, I will argue that although NIE comprises of an attempt at developing a theoretical framework distinct from modernization and dependency, it nonetheless has inherited some theoretical misconceptions and false assumptions about socioeconomic change and the notion of progress which can be found in some of the debates concerning these earlier perspectives.<sup>12</sup>

The dissertation is not organised chronologically, rather, it is structured in a manner which serves to substantiate my argument about the theoretical misconceptions of NIE. It is an exercise in what I call historical inductive reasoning - in the sense that, the narrative aims to make sense of the direction and policy implication of NIE research in the contemporary moment. Especially, perspectives such as the reversal of fortune (RF thesis) of AJR, which in my reading, advance questionable assumptions about socioeconomic change, the nature of African institutions and whether they are suitable for socioeconomic progress in the long run or not.

The intellectual exercise undertaken is historical because the theoretical misconceptions of NIE which are identified, in my reading, have in the past been singled out by various authors of Africa within the Dependency tradition such as Samir Amin, Walter Rodney and Ali Mazrui, to name a few. Furthermore, such assumptions, I argue, are formulated on an ideological, political and ethical basis which is moot, and in my reading, was contested in the early twentieth century by Pan-Africanist intellectuals such as Edward Blyden, Marcus Garvey and Kobina Sekyi among many others in their grappling with the colonial situation. And so, the dissertation begins from the present context (2002) with a criticism of NIE (as proxied by the RF thesis of AJR) after which, I work towards the past, tracing a genealogy of sorts, by way of the Dependency tradition (1970). It concludes with a case study of the ideological assumptions underpinning the modernizing mission in the Gold Coast through the documented observations of Cape Coast intellectual, Kobina Sekyi (1912).

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<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, Routledge, 1989) and Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>12</sup> I have not come across any work in the NIE tradition which directly acknowledges dependency or modernization as a theoretical departure point. Nonetheless, it is my contention (which of course is debatable) that theoretical perspectives tend to accumulate in time, and are often synthesized, rather than replace each other even after their explanatory power has been lost or fallen out of favour.

**Chapter 1** is a criticism of contemporary research on socioeconomic change and comparative development, which for over two decades has been characterized by NIE. Notable in this period is the work of AJR which I suggest, appropriates elements of both dependency and modernization theory, however, it ignores the Pan-Africanist ideal of self-determination in a selective process of convergence. Specifically, I argue that the 2002 reversal of fortune (henceforth RF) hypothesis of AJR, not only denies Africa historical agency and compresses history as economic historian, Gareth Austin, has pointed out, but, it also depicts by way of a policy recommendation, two fundamental, oft-criticized assumptions underpinning the modernization perspective. First, there is the false, unilinear and ahistorical idea that progress, and so economic growth, runs in one direction, that taken by Western Europe (or the United States of America), and secondly, the mechanistic assumption that if other countries or regions follow in such a path, it will necessarily lead to progress.<sup>13</sup>

While AJR attribute the reversal of fortune of African economies to the form of European colonialism (settler or non-settler), instead of internal socioeconomic inadequacies (such as the lack of achievement motivation or civilizational inadequacy), the RF thesis is unilinear to the extent that it implies that socioeconomic progress is a function of good colonial, ‘European style’ property rights institutions. Furthermore, it implies that such an institution is a panacea for economic growth. My position is that this conclusion and invocation of ‘good’ colonial institutions is debatable from a Pan-Africanist point of view, especially in regards to intellectual autonomy and the ideal of self-determination. I echo Christopher Bayly’s observation that, “it could be taken to imply that development agencies must find ways of implanting these institutions in societies that Victorians would have considered backward, but are said now to have suffered a reversal of fortune”.<sup>14</sup>

But what is meant by a Pan-Africanist point of view? Given that the work of AJR is popular and almost emblematic of NIE, it seems to me that there is still prevalent a naïve assumption that all knowledge, wherever it is produced and in whatever social context it is wrought, is sociologically transferable and adaptable without criticism and reinterpretation. Moreover, there is also the assumption that the universality of knowledge is such that African scholarship has no self-consciously fostered need for an intellectual tradition and philosophical framework

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<sup>13</sup> Gareth Austin. “The ‘Reversal of Fortune’ Thesis and the Compression of History: Perspectives from African and Comparative Economic History”, *Journal of International Development* 20, no 1 (2008): 996 – 1027

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Bayly, “Indigenous and Colonial Origins of Comparative Economic Development: the Case of Colonial India and Africa” in V. Rao, S. Szreter, and M. Woolcock (eds.), *History, Historians and Development Policy, a Necessary Dialogue* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011) 40.

of its own. In practice these assumptions, I argue, implicitly accept Western cultural and intellectual hegemony. A Pan-Africanist point of view is a philosophical framework of analysis which makes allowances for intellectual autonomy and expression of African values in theory and praxis.

In no way am I suggesting that socioeconomic analysis through an African perspective offers the only valid way of understanding African economic history. Indeed not even all Africans can have or need to have the same view on African matters. The point can further be made that no product of scholarship dictates an identical reading on all interpreters of its meaning. Rather, my position on the matter is that as Africans we cannot expect Chinese, European, Arab or Indian scholars from their historically different intellectual traditions, concerns and interests to view Africa from a Pan-African vantage point or from some putative homogenous or universal standpoint. African scholars need to take active steps and appropriate centre-stage in the production and reproduction of knowledge about African society and history. Every time we fall back on Western-generated epistemology such as the RF thesis of AJR, we need to revise and rehash such episteme and establish African centred relations between the facts and the data we borrow or use.<sup>15</sup>

From its policy implication, the RF thesis must be considered critically by students of African economic history. Its framework is not accommodative of the development of alternative pathways and policy strategies which are divergent from the Western status quo (i.e. European and American model of socioeconomic progress). Furthermore, by implying that good colonial property rights institutions are a panacea of progress, it can be argued that it is based on a narrow, unilinear, as well as a mechanistic reading of history which has imperial antecedents. One way of understanding the policy implications of the RF thesis is to look back and examine some of the earlier ideas of socioeconomic change and their related criticisms. This is what I do in the second and third chapters.

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<sup>15</sup> This theoretical position is in fact an old one, and has figured in debates between Western and African scholars since at least the 1960s. This study was partly inspired by a need to rehash the importance of such a theory and bring the Pan-Africanist assertion of placing 'Africa at the centre' into wider circulation and discourse in the economic history debate. Writings on African economic history in the past two decades, especially in NIE, I have found, tend to oscillate between the slippery poles of excessive empiricism and grand generalization. Sometimes the two dovetail into each other, as generalizations are based on one or two case studies. This study critiques the current orthodoxies in NIE about the nature of development of African societies by underlining the need to constantly engage theories from an African perspective and for Africans to judge the validity of theoretical paradigms by their power to explain concrete historical processes. Unravelling generalizations, myths and stereotypes about Africa, its institutions and people, I believe, is an indispensable first step towards a better understanding of our world. For a summary, see Thandika Mkandawire, "The Social Sciences in Africa: Breaking Local Barriers and Negotiating International Presence", *African Studies Review* 40, no 2 (1997), 15-36.

**Chapter 2** is an attempt to answer the following questions on the dependency tradition: what historical context, theoretical heritage, and assumptions characterized the emergence of dependency? And how has dependency been contested or appropriated by African intellectuals? In conclusion, I will discuss the relationship of dependency to the Pan-Africanist ideal of self-determination.

In **Chapter 3**, I ask the following concerning modernization theory: what historical context, theoretical heritage, and assumptions characterized the emergence of modernization? And how has modernization theory been contested or appropriated by African intellectuals? Finally, I will discuss the relationship of modernization theory to the Pan-Africanist ideal of self-determination.

There are at least five ways of treating a theory. One is to consider it as a form of intellectual exercise, pure and simple – an adventure in abstraction to sharpen the mind. Another is to go through it, seeking a personal practical philosophy for oneself. A third is to distil the history out of the theory- examine what light the theory can throw on the age from which it emerged. A fourth is also to treat the theory as a source of historical data, but not in the sense in which a river may conceivably be a source of some dissolved substance from the silt it carries, but in the sense in which a river may be a source of water. In this latter sense a theory is not distilled to yield history. It is itself part of the flow of history.

A fifth way may involve tearing the theory out of its historical context altogether, and bringing the logic of all or some of its ideas to bear on a specific situation in perhaps one's own time – the object of the exercise being to determine whether the ideas scattered within the theory help in the understanding of a present situation, on the one hand, and on the other, whether the situation can lend a new depth to a theory or perhaps expose an old shallowness within it. This latter approach is what is adopted in this dissertation. It admittedly contains the bias of creating the impression that a definite typology exists, and that later theoretical traditions such as NIE have replaced earlier ones. This is simply not the case. What can be taken for granted is that no idea is hermetically sealed, and similar ideas can be expressed in disparate theories as long as they are systematically referred to one situation after another. To change the metaphor, if an idea is fertile, it may well conceive a different kind of child if it is mated to a different kind of historical situation. There is always the possibility, however, that it may produce nothing new, but the cross breeding of ideas is a real historical phenomenon.

The following years have been identified as periods in which intellectual traditions discussed in this dissertation were influential: 1912 (modernization), 1970 (Dependency) and 2002 (NIE). Such a periodization scheme is hardly precise, thematically and historically, there is considerable overlap and there is a real possibility of plural existence. Moreover, although I view NIE as an intellectual tradition of socioeconomic change in the present era, I also view it as an attempt to synthesize, even if not explicitly, some old ideas about socioeconomic change from dependency and modernization. Such a perspective is similar to the view of Björn Hettne, on the plurality of theoretical points of view (paradigms). Hettne notes that:

In the social sciences, ‘paradigms’ tend to accumulate, rather than replace each other, one reason being that they may fulfil ideological purposes, even after their explanatory power, if there ever was one, has been lost.<sup>16</sup>

Given the enormity of literature on socioeconomic change, especially for such a wide chronological arc such as 1912 – 2002, my reading was necessarily selective. Needless to say, even with the abstraction of theory into three intellectual traditions of NIE, dependency and modernization, I looked at a relatively small portion of the debate. Specialists may find that disconcerting and confirm their conviction that academic athleticism is a treacherous pursuit. But my aim was not to be comprehensive, but to indicate that great advances have been made in the past two decades in how we think about socioeconomic change. These advances are undoubtedly reflected in intellectual traditions such as NIE, however, there continues to remain at least from a Pan-African philosophical disposition, the indispensable first step of unravelling generalizations, myths and stereotypes of African society and institutions when we engage with these traditions.

Although Frederick Cooper and Dudley Seers do not discuss NIE specifically (their focus is on Development Economics), it is possible to relate the criticism of NIE presented in this dissertation within the literature discussing competing theories of socioeconomic change in Africa. Furthermore, the discussion on the Pan-African ideal of self-determination and its relationship to socioeconomic theory as advanced in this dissertation can be related to Kofi Tetteh’s account of Pan-Africanism.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Björn Hettne, *Development Theory and the Three Worlds* (Essex: Longman Publishing, 1992), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Kofi, Tetteh. “The Need for and Principles of a Pan-African Economic Ideology.” *Civilisations* 26, no 4 (1976), 205-231; Frederick, Cooper. “Africa and the World Economy”. *African Studies Review* 24, no 3 (1981), 1-86; Dudley, Seers. “The Birth, Life and Death of Development Economics.” *Development and Change* 10, no 2 (1979).

Concretely stated, the research objectives are as follows:

- (1) To show that popular theoretical perspectives of socioeconomic change have different and sometimes contradictory policy implications.
- (2) To indicate how previously contested assumptions of modernization theory live on in the policy implications of AJR's RF thesis and how this negates the Pan-Africanist ideal of self-determination.

By interrogating these questions, the dissertation presents contemporary objections to the RF thesis. Furthermore, it suggests that the objections presented share certain similarities with the previous criticisms raised by dependency theorists reacting to modernization, as well as, Pan-Africanist critics of the cultural arrogance and racist assumptions implicit in the ideology and spirit of the civilizing mission and colonial rule.

## Theoretical Discussion

### 1. Self-Determination and Autonomous Agency

The notion of self-determination is an emergent, if not already existing, perspective of socioeconomic change in Africa. In fact, I have found evidence for the latter - from the mid-nineteenth century, there is a copious amount of written material which depicts the diverse ways in which certain groups of Africans exercised their agency in the political arena. The intellectual classes across sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, were very active and vocal in forging new conceptions of community, and in reshaping public debates about the goals of human progress, not only within the continent but in the international environment as well. Some of these African intellectuals also sought self-determination and autonomy as a solution to African scientific, and technological backwardness.<sup>18</sup>

In 1908 for instance, Edward Blyden argued for a more critical analysis of the role of indigenous institutions and values in the quest for modernity, as opposed to what he regarded as the uncritical acceptance of supposedly “superior” European institutions and values. Blyden was obsessed with the challenge of African advancement, which he saw as the acquisition and use of Western technique and rationality. However, he was also suspicious of indiscriminate borrowings and acquisitions. Regarding this, he observed that:

The same disasters which the competitive or egoistic system produces in England and throughout Christendom, it produces in Africa even on the small scale on which it has hitherto been able to operate – happily only in the coast settlements. ... There was a time when the *native African, brought up on European lines* (emphasis added), looked upon everything European as absolutely superior, and as alone indispensable to the attainment of man’s highest happiness and usefulness in this world, and even to salvation beyond the grave. ... But a vast, a sad, an increasing experience has proved to him, so far as happiness for himself or success for his posterity is concerned, that these things are but ‘broken cisterns that can hold no water’.<sup>19</sup>

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Blyden, it cannot be denied that he was pointing towards a type of critical African agency, which, would emanate from a psychological balance which would be flexible enough to enable the African to acquire some degree of Western technique and rationality, but was simultaneously rigid enough to allow the African to question the most

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<sup>18</sup> See Ayodele Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa, 1850-1970: Documents on Modern African Political Thought from the Colonial Times to the Present*, (London: Rex Collings, 1979).

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation*, 28.

fundamental assumptions and implications of such institutions and exercise the right of refusal of adopting them if need be.

Shifting our discussion to the decade before independence became an Africa wide phenomenon (1950s), the nature of agency and choice in Africa's relationship with the external world is easy to discern. It may be suggested for instance, that there were at least three ways of disentangling the contradictions of colonial policies and the changes in values, institutions and aspirations which accompanied it. One way is to revise radically the socioeconomic, political structure and the form of government inherited from colonialism and try to make it more consistent with the realities and traditions of the region. Another is to stamp out ruthlessly those indigenous institutions which were inconsistent with aspirations, institutions and values implied in the new colonial order. A third would be to combine the other two.

Self-determination may be viewed as fitting of any of the three scenarios described above. From such a perspective, the idea would simply amount to a replacement of colonial administrators with Africans. The character of agency would not matter – be it a radical revision of the socioeconomic and political structures, a continuation of the existing structures, or a combination of the two. Such an interpretation, however, is not what is meant by self-determination in this dissertation.

The notion of self-determination as used in this dissertation places an emphasis on a type of critical agency (or rather a psychic state), as well as, an ability to make autonomous choices untainted by a feeling of inferiority or the illusion that all European institutions, because they are European, and possibly represent the status quo, are universal. It would apply to a radical revision of the inherited order or a selective process of indigenization, but not a wholesale continuation, even in the case of a change in personnel. Be that as it may, in as far as replacing colonial personnel represents the ascendancy of previously deprived groups, interests and aspirations, it represents progress; but limited progress which needs to be recognized for what it is. This view builds on the observation of Prah, when he states that:

Progress, that is, the body of ideas which aspire to the emancipation and development of mass society is not achieved by the mere replacement of white faces by black ones. If this was the case development would have come to Africa soon after the end of colonialism and it would not be a matter of public concern and opinion, nor a matter of concern for African intellectuals, politicians, economic historians and economists. For practically the whole African continent, with the exception of parts of North Africa where over the centuries Arabization has replaced the Amazigh and Old Coptic

cultures, everywhere the overwhelming cultural and linguistic base of people (80 percent or more in all instances) is African. For the development of mass society, the centering of African culture at the heart of the development endeavour is crucial. This latter I describe as Africanism. This means that progress for the overwhelming majority can only be viably constructed on their inherited cultural foundations as is the case for all developing societies in Asia and indeed Europe.<sup>20</sup>

In the above, besides the assertion that progress can only be constructed on inherited cultural foundations, what Prah is also suggesting is that the replacement of white faces with black faces does not necessarily result in progress. I find such a perspective agreeable. Furthermore, he distinguishes between Africanism and Africanization (the replacement of colonial personnel with African personnel) and their respective relationships to progress, broadly defined, when he notes that:

Africanism requires Africanization, but Africanization in itself without cultural reinforcement would not, on the strength of the evidence of the African post-colonial record produce sustained progress, which enlists the creativity of the broader sections of the population. Indeed, “Africanization without Africanism, in as far as the post-colonial record demonstrates, leads in all spheres of social life into a deeper multi-dimensional dependency or engendered cultural forms derived from the metropolitan centres of culture and power in the contemporary world”. Throughout Africa, in the past half century of post-colonialism, the elites which inherited the post-colonial states have by and large extended the lease on life of the inherited colonial culture. It is these elites which have been responsible for the entrenchment of the deeper multi-dimensional dependency or engendered cultural forms derived from the metropolitan centres of culture and power in the contemporary world that I have referred to.<sup>21</sup>

Prah’s observations have to be located in a reflection on the broader ideals of modernity, secularism, tolerance and democracy, which, of course straddle both material and immaterial dimensions of historical analysis. For our immediate purposes, what is important is his view on Africanization and its relationship to the African elite. Taking Prah’s observations into consideration, self-determination as used in this dissertation is a marker of an intellectual

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<sup>20</sup> Prah. “Has Rhodes Fallen? Decolonizing the Humanities in Africa and Constructing Intellectual Sovereignty”, Inaugural Humanities Lecture, The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAF), HSRC, Pretoria, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016.

<http://www.hsrc.ac.za/uploads/pageContent/7901/Has%20Rhodes%20Fallen.docx%20ASSAF%20Address%2015.2.2017.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

tradition which sees beyond a mere change in representation (or Africanization as it is sometimes called) of existing socio-economic structures and institutions.<sup>22</sup>

The idea of self-determination may be abstracted by analogy, however, it cannot be appreciated fully without a discussion of the historical processes of imperialism and colonialism, as well as the continued attempts by Africans to decolonize their societies. I discuss these concepts briefly below, after which I provide a precise definition of what is meant by self-determination in this dissertation. Imperialism has long been a framework for thinking about socioeconomic change in Africa. The word imperialism, like capitalism or mercantilism, refers to a historical process and so implies the need to move beyond fragmentary epistemological thinking towards a more holistic framework which combines historical methods of inquiry with social, political and economic analysis. Imperialism, therefore, can be viewed as a trans-disciplinary concept which helps one understand how hegemony has been exercised in a global historical context. From such a perspective, Michael Barratt Brown observes that:

Imperialism has been used to describe the outward drive of certain peoples to build empires – both formal colonies and privileged positions in markets, protect sources of wealth and extend opportunities for profitable employment of labour. The concept has thus been associated with an unequal economic relationship between states, not simply the inequality of large and small, rich and poor trading partners, but the inequality of power in political relations and economic dependence of the latter on the former.<sup>23</sup>

There is no denying that imperialism and the capitalist mode of production are inherently related. The connection between the two is hardly debatable. In fact, it has been noted by various scholars that, imperialism and its economic dynamo, the capitalist mode of production, at least from the mid-nineteenth century, generated conflicts of interest among Europeans and Africans as well as between them.<sup>24</sup> The outcome of these conflicts was shaped not only by material factors which the different social groups could marshal in support of their political and economic interests but also by immaterial (psychological) factors manifest in the terms in which the various social actors understood their interests and how they expressed them. This

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<sup>22</sup> See Prah, “Africanism and Africanization: Do They Mean the Same Thing?” in Siphon Seepe (ed.), *Towards an African Identity of Higher Education* (Pretoria: Vista University and Scotaville Media, 2004). Also see Ivan Potekhin, “Pan-Africanism and the Struggle of the Two Ideologies,” *The African Communist* 19, no 4 (1964); Micah Tsomondo, “From Pan-Africanism to Socialism: The Modernization of an African Liberation Ideology”, *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 5, no 4 (1975).

<sup>23</sup> Michael Barratt Brown, *The Economics of Imperialism* (London: Penguin Books, 1974), 22.

<sup>24</sup> See J. A Hobson, *Capitalism and Imperialism in South Africa* (London: Tucker Publishing Company, 1900); Vladimir I. Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism: a Popular Outline* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963); Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press 1965).

latter point is crucial for a holistic account of the effects of imperialism on African agency and is a point of emphasis in this dissertation.

It is important to emphasize the fact that Frantz Fanon and Blyden occupy very different political positions and socio-historical contexts. This is so even if we group them both under the same umbrella of Pan-Africanism. That said, it is my contention that the position Fanon takes in his influential and diagnostic work on post-colonial Africa is reminiscent of Blyden's observations about 'broken cisterns that can hold no water'. Furthermore, like Blyden, Fanon places and emphasis on the immaterial (psychological) effect when he suggests that the experience of colonialism has left Africans with an inferiority complex and the colonizing powers, a superiority complex in socioeconomic relations; an overall deterministic situation which necessarily has to be transcended if Africans are to fully exercise their agency autonomously in economic and political affairs. And so, from a Fanonian perspective, it can be said that imperialism as a historical process, not only altered the material organisation of African life, particularly the mode of production and accumulation, but it also affected African psychologies and identities. In an abstract sense, the aftermath of imperialism: economic differentiation, specialization and integration into the global economic order may be viewed as a historically insistent and progressive phenomena, but the seeming universality of this movement should not prevent the student of African economic history from asking questions about power relations, whose efforts, for whose benefit, and at whose expense such historical processes took place. I would add that imperialism had an effect on the formation of the type of critical agency envisioned by intellectuals such as Blyden.<sup>25</sup> Notwithstanding the observations of Fanon and Blyden, it is important also to recognize other perspectives on the colonial situation and the effects of imperialism which are of a less deterministic nature and do not emphasize the immaterial.

In her account of the dynamics of agrarian change in sub-Saharan Africa, Sara Berry argues that colonial rule, although hegemonic in the region, was not free to act without constraints. The constraints were as a result of the economic imperatives of capitalist accumulation as well as varying degrees of African resistance to foreign rule. Colonial administrators struggled to maintain effective control of the colony with limited financial resources. A scarcity of financial capital as well as manpower, not only obliged administrators to practice "indirect rule" but also limited their ability to absolutely and unilaterally direct the course of political and

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<sup>25</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 61-82.

socioeconomic change in the colonies.<sup>26</sup> Berry's observation of the character of power and hegemony brings into question the superior-inferior dynamic of socioeconomic relations between Europeans and Africans in the colonial moment and provides a nuanced reading of a rather complex history. It is however not a unique nor isolated reading of the colonial situation. In general, accounts such as that of Berry forms a part of the critique against structuralist and dependency perspectives.

A typical example of the criticism against structuralism in the literature on socioeconomic change is provided by Jean-Francois Bayart, who provides a reflection and commentary on the work of Pan-Africanist and Marxist scholar, Walter Rodney.<sup>27</sup> While Bayart does not fully reject Rodney's structuralist thesis, he suggests that such a perspective denies Africa historical agency, stripping away responsibility and placing agency squarely in the hands of superior European colonizers. For example, he has even argued that the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which is often cited by many Pan-Africanists as having had a severe impact on African economies was a voluntary rather than a forced outcome, very much under the influence of African agents pursuing their interests.<sup>28</sup> In retrospect it is curious to note that, both Bayart and Rodney emphasize the effect of social relations on socioeconomic change - whereas Rodney focuses on the structural relations of unequal exchange and unfair terms of trade as a cause of Africa's underdevelopment, Bayart turns this thesis on its head by arguing that Africa was not a victim of history or structure, but that elite groups of Africans were active and willing participants in the underdevelopment of the region. Bayart's emphasis on internal social relations and how elite groups of Africans are equally culpable of Africa's underdevelopment is an important contribution to the discourse on socioeconomic change, but whether the active involvement of Africans in the process of underdevelopment negates Rodney's structuralist thesis is debatable. Commenting on Bayart's use of agency, Mamdani points out the narrowness of such thinking:

It is one thing to argue that nothing short of death can extinguish human initiative and creativity, but quite another to see in every such gesture evidence of a historical initiative. "Even the inmates of a concentration camp are able, in this sense, to live by their own cultural logic,"...but one may be forgiven for doubting that they are therefore making 'making their own history'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sara Berry, *No Condition is Permanent*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 24-28.

<sup>27</sup> See Jean-Francois Bayart, "Africa in the World: A history of Extraversion", *African Affairs* 99, no 1 (2000); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Bogle L'Ouverture Publications, London, 1973).

<sup>28</sup> Bayart, "Africa in the World" 220.

<sup>29</sup> Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 10.

To an extent, I agree with Berry and Bayart, and the efforts of other Africanist historians to emphasize “African activity” and initiatives in their historical narratives. Mamdani’s remarks, however, raise two important questions - is all agency the same? And does uncovering the internal dynamics of African society necessarily negate broader, structuralist perspectives such as Rodney’s thesis on underdevelopment? It also allows us to reflect on the immaterial, via Blyden’s observations about Africans brought up on European lines, as well as, Fanon’s psychological diagnosis of the post-colony.

Like Rodney, in this dissertation, I advance a structuralist view that historical change in Africa cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration the effect of external socioeconomic relations. However, in this discussion, my primary focus is on the immaterial, through which I emphasize the importance of agency. I am of the opinion that agency in Africa must, by all means, be understood within the point of view of Fanon’s diagnosis of the psychological effects of imperialism on post-colonial Africa. This perspective, however, does not imply that culture is static or hermetically sealed, rather it is meant to highlight what I have found to be missing from sampled literature on socioeconomic change – the neglect of the immaterial effects of imperialism on previous subject peoples.

The power dynamics inherent in imperialism, its complex relationship to African cultures, values, institutions and its knock on effect on continuing socioeconomic relations such as in the formulation of the terms of trade between Africa and the rest of the world is largely underemphasized in the literature on socioeconomic change. However, there is a special horror and sadism in this form of violence which is aptly depicted by Fanon which exist with us even today – it is evident in common practices such as skin whitening/bleaching and the wearing of Peruvian, Brazilian and Malaysian hair performed by many Africans as acts of progress.<sup>30</sup> Distinctions between positive and negative agency, therefore, need to be made and put in the context of the dynamic changes which took place and continue to take place in African societies as a result of the colonial situation.<sup>31</sup>

Why, however, one may ask, is there a neglect of the immaterial in the discourse on socioeconomic change? Moreover, why is it that in matters of society and economy, we pretend as if societies can be analysed from some sort of putative and homogenous material perspective? Some years ago, Richard Whitley effectively interrogated the underlying

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<sup>30</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 61-81, 109-162.

<sup>31</sup> Francis, Nyamanjoh and Divine Fuh. “Africans Consuming Hair, Africans Consumed by Hair”, *Africa Insight* 44, no.1 (2014), 52-68.

assumptions of academic discussions which have “traditionally assumed that scientific knowledge was essentially unitary” and which “regarded the development of scientific knowledge as an epistemologically rational process which was not contingent upon the social conditions of its production and assessment” and found such assumptions to be false.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, David Thomson observed that “Diplomatic history, the study of international relations, and much that is written about international organisation, peace-making or war making, are inevitably national in basis even when multinational in scope”.<sup>33</sup> Dialectically, the analysis of social conditioning of knowledge production can be examined in two contrastive ways. The first concentrates on how the social location of individuals and groups influences and orders their acquisition of knowledge and its production. Secondly, the analytical process can be turned the other way round emphasizing the kinds of social organization which make the ordering of varieties of knowledge possible. The former focuses on the differing social locations (material) and interests (immaterial) of individuals or groups while the latter emphasizes socio-structural and organizational forms which permit or facilitate the production and reproduction of knowledge. Either way, my contention is that knowledge and the process of knowledge production are in themselves shaped and influenced to varying degrees by material and immaterial forces in the social and historical contexts in which they are fashioned. Given the social conditioning of knowledge production, it is not surprising that the immaterial effects of imperialism are neglected in the discourse on socioeconomic change. Furthermore the point can be made that it is only through a grounding in a Pan-Africanist inspirational and philosophical disposition of knowledge production that the immaterial effects of imperialism on Africans may be brought under a scientific microscope.

And so, in as much as I agree with Berry and Bayart that the colonizer was constrained in various ways to absolutely and unilaterally direct the course of socioeconomic change in Africa, I find it also necessary to emphasize the aforementioned neglected effect: that is, the assumed civilizing mission of the colonial conquest, the ‘superior’ position of the colonizer and his institutions and the ‘inferior’ position of the native and his institutions.<sup>34</sup> The primacy of this neglected immaterial effect in historical social relations of power has also been noted

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Whitley, *The Intellectual and Social Organization of the Sciences* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 11.

<sup>33</sup> David Thomson, “Must History Stay Nationalist? The Prison of Closed Intellectual Frontiers”, *Encounter* 30, no. 6, (1968), 23.

<sup>34</sup> See also Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism, Modernity, Religion and Democracy: A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011), 149-205.

by Issa Shivji when he observes that the colour line determined the material conditions of living on the colonial frontier:

The racist ideology of the White Self (master) and the Black Other (slave) came in handy in the creation of colonies. It was reinforced in religion and anthropology and literature as droves of missionaries preceded and anthropologists followed armed soldiers, to pacify the soulless, indolent native. The Self was now the White colonist and the other was the native. The colour line thus constructed had its own internal logic and drive – it determined the very life-conditions of the colonist/settler and the native.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, Emery Hunt and Mark Lautzenheiser, from a rather economic perspective observe that:

When productive capacity grew faster than consumer demand, there was very soon an excess of this capacity and hence, there were few profitable domestic investment outlets. Foreign investment was the only answer. But, insofar as the same problem existed in every industrialized capitalist country, such foreign investment was possible only if non-capitalist countries could be "civilized", "Christianized", and "uplifted" — that is, if their traditional institutions could be forcefully destroyed, and the people coercively brought under the domain of the "invisible hand" of market capitalism. So, imperialism was the only answer.<sup>36</sup>

For Shivji, Hunt, and Lautzenheiser, imperialism had both material and immaterial motives as well as effects on non-capitalist societies. I find such a perspective agreeable, and, in line with the general thrust of the argument presented in this dissertation. Whether the experience of imperialism completely destroyed traditional institutions is a moot point. But it is clear that it had a transformative effect on African institutions, culture and most importantly the nature and evolving character of post-colonial agency.

What, however, one may ask, was the nature of this underemphasized immaterial effect on African societies from an economic perspective? It is worthy to note that profits under the colonial situation depended upon ready access to ‘cheap’ African labour in relation to ‘expensive’ European labour. This was an enterprise which could only be maintained if Africans were in turn hard pressed to meet their needs, desires and aspirations independent of trade with or employment by European capital. In this sense, African economic prosperity and

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<sup>35</sup> Issa Shivji. “The Struggle to Convert Nationalism to Pan-Africanism: Taking Stock of 50 Years of African Independence”, *Keynote Address, 4<sup>th</sup> European Conference on African Studies*, Uppsala, June 15-18, 2011. <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/75620>.

<sup>36</sup> Emery Hunt and Mark Lautzenheiser, *History of Economic Thought: A Critical Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 355.

autonomy (from a wage labour economy) was a direct threat to the functioning of the colonial economy. Berry has observed that:

Colonial officials did not want to stifle the flow of cheap African labour, produce and tax revenues on which the fiscal health of the colony depended, but they were equally anxious to minimize the cost of African labour and produce, and to minimize African ability to influence the *terms of exchange* (emphasis added).<sup>37</sup>

The keyword in the above is the terms of exchange. Colonial administrators faced two options which were not necessarily mutually exclusive. On the one hand, Africans were encouraged to become involved in the economy as wage labourers, as well as, in the commodity markets as consumers, but, it was also not in the interest of the colonial administrators that Africans become economically independent enough to ignore the opportunities afforded by European controlled markets and jobs.<sup>38</sup>

This is an important historical observation to dwell upon. Were the effects of Imperialism, both material and immaterial, such that it fostered the kind of critical agency which allowed for equal bargaining power in establishing the terms of exchange between Africa and the rest of the world? In my interpretation, this latter point has also been raised by Rodney, in his much celebrated and criticised structuralist thesis of African underdevelopment. In a nutshell, his historical narrative leaves the reader wondering whether Africa, at least from the sixteenth century, has had an equal bargaining voice in establishing the terms of trade in its socio-economic and commerce relations with Europe in particular.<sup>39</sup>

In this dissertation, I recognize in the ongoing debate about equal exchange and socioeconomic change, that Imperialism did not only have material effects, but it also had an effect on the immaterial. Most importantly, I acknowledge that this effect impacted the nature of agency formed during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Furthermore, a distinction is made between what I call positive agency and negative agency. In the colonial situation, although certain types of agency were manifest and even encouraged among dominant classes of Africans (negative agency), the type of critical agency (positive agency), which would increase the ability to influence the terms of exchange or ignore European controlled markets and jobs failed to autonomously evolve, rather a dependency was fostered as a consequence of the historical process.

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<sup>37</sup> Berry, *No Condition is Permanent*, 26.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>39</sup> Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

## 2. Colonialism, Coloniality and Decolonization

The dynamics of power revolving around limited colonial financial resources, the relative lack of colonial manpower, a superior-inferior racist logic, a desire to keep the cost of African labour low, as well as, the Africans ability to influence the terms of exchange at a minimum, is the perfect entry point for the idea of decolonization. Decolonization, in brief, is the comprehensive historical process that seeks to dismantle the socioeconomic relations of what has come to be termed as coloniality, which give one group of people an advantage over another, in different situations – including international trade, economic relations, politics, social relations, epistemology etc.

The term ‘coloniality of being’ is indebted to cultural theorist, Nelson Maldonado-Torres who has observed that:

Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day.<sup>40</sup>

Maldonado-Torres further suggests that the coloniality he is talking about emerged in a particular social historical setting, that of the discovery and conquest of the Americas. Moreover, he advances the argument that coloniality is not simply the aftermath or the residual form of any given form of colonial relation, but that it has its particularities and historical markers.<sup>41</sup> However, it is important also to point out that Torres is nonetheless quick to suggest a historical relationship between colonialism and the capitalist mode of production. He writes that:

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<sup>40</sup> Nelson, Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 3 (2007), 243. Torres acknowledges Walter Mignolo as having developed and used the concept in 1995.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*,

Capitalism, an already existing form of economic relation, became tied with forms of domination and subordination that were central to maintaining colonial control first in the Americas, and then elsewhere.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps it needs to be emphasized that colonialism did not only have local significance. This is an important point which is taken for granted in an era like ours which places premium on narrow specialization. Syntheses of theories or cross contextual transfers are suspect as indulgences of naïve or retiring scholars, purveyors of simplistic models or grand theories. Nonetheless, given the inescapable relation of coloniality to world capitalism, global models of power as well as systems of domination, I find it necessary to historicize socioeconomic change in Africa using coloniality as a theoretical framework. This will leave open the question about the exact extent of achievements or failures of socioeconomic change and allow one to isolate decolonization as a historical process and ideal.

Viewed from such a perspective, decolonization does not simply refer to the task of building an alternative world, and simply falling back into the many ideas, values, practices and institutions that are now regarded, even if problematically as premodern or inferior. Neither does it refer to the replacement of colonial personnel with Africans. Decolonization, undoubtedly is based on the recognition of conflict between the colonized and the colonizer, however, it is not only conflict as an expression of reality, but also conflict as a bearer of positive, liberating advances. This political culture has been crystallized from the history of modern Africa and its people, punctuated by a succession of historical traumas and progressions, including: slave labour, the internationalisation of anti-slavery sentiment, the abolishment of slavery, the introduction of hut taxes and wage labour, the internationalisation of anti-colonialism, and the attainment of political independence among others.

Most importantly in this dissertation, decolonization does not only refer to the recognition that society is traversed by fundamental socioeconomic contradictions, but it also refers to the intellectual capacity and sovereignty to construct a new horizon of meaning which includes new conceptions about the human being as well as material relations that do not conform to coloniality or the dictatorship of capital. And so, the type of agency, coloniality, and decolonization, serves as a backdrop to the idea of self-determination presented in this dissertation.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*,

In brief, self-determination may be said to imply that the future of Africa must lie in the hands of Africans, however, it is crucial to note that this assertion is by all means not restricted to Africanization. Africanization may be a necessary condition, but it is in itself not sufficient for self-determination. The doctrine of self-determination has existed and influenced the outlook of the more radical African nationalists, intellectuals and historians. We see the doctrine, for instance appearing in a response to the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in 1999. In the response, it appears as the informed response of a group of African economists and intellectuals to the externally enforced SAPs. The following position was put forth as a consensus view among African scholars concerned with socioeconomic progress on the continent:

Even if the external factors were to blame, it will primarily be the responsibility of Africans to devise policies to reduce the vulnerability of their economies to such exogenous factors. If the factors are internal, it is again Africans who will have to devise and implement the necessary policy changes. This is particularly true in the highly unlikely event that others will so adjust the external environment as to facilitate Africa's economic policies or will have the wisdom and competence to introduce on our behalf, policies that will make our economies develop.<sup>43</sup>

The above emphasis on Africans being ultimately responsible for the type of socioeconomic change on the continent is indeed an aspect of self-determination, however, it is important to keep in mind our earlier observation that Africanization is a necessary but not sufficient condition for self-determination. The work of South African philosopher, Mogobe Ramose, on the theoretical paradigm of *ubuntu* enables us to look beyond the narrow confines of Africanization in his commentary on the SAPs. He writes that:

It would seem that the point of departure of SAPs is that the economic structure devised and adhered to by the West is to be unchanged because of its inherent correctness. The structure is thus considered to be necessary and sufficient for any economy wherever that might be. Consequently, all economic systems must submit to only one law; the law of "adjustment" to an infallible and immutable economic structure. Suffice it to state that the implicit epistemological claim that there can neither be any economic knowledge nor truth outside and beyond the dominant western economic paradigm is philosophically untenable. Seen from this perspective,

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<sup>43</sup> Thandika Mkandawire and Chukwuma Soludo, *Our Continent, Our Future: African Perspectives on Structural Adjustment*. (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1999), xiii.

the SAPs, are the reaffirmation of the putative right of the west to primacy in the struggle for reason.<sup>44</sup>

Ramose provides a criticism of SAPs based on the social conditioning of knowledge and knowledge production, as well as, the dominance of one group over another in the struggle for reason. I find such a perspective agreeable, because, a conflict about “reason” is fundamentally steeped in the immaterial, although it undoubtedly has an effect on the material. Mkandawire and Soludo, on the other hand, emphasize responsibility and agency, by urging Africans to become more fundamentally involved in policy making - by developing the capacity to forge the direction of their own future and through actualizing a path which will address both their internal and external challenges. They advocate such a perspective, because, according to them Africans, in a homogenous sense, cannot expect ‘others’ to seek out their socioeconomic interests for them. The perspectives of Mkandawire, Soludo, and Ramose, in my opinion, advocate two polarities of self-determination; Africanization and a type of critical agency which is capable of exercising intellectual autonomy in matters of society and policy.

It is important to stress that the idea of self-determination has itself taken on different hues and characteristics as it straddles these two polarities. It has also responded to changing material and immaterial (psychology- aspirations, desires) circumstances in different historical periods. There is a clear movement from the desire to have slavery abolished, to - the desire for political independence, to, the present context, where there are assertions about the need for economic and intellectual independence in what is regarded by many Pan-Africanists as a neo-colonial moment. That said, it will be useful to have a simple definition of which the meaning is definite and clear. Self-determination, as used in this dissertation is defined as “the intellectual tradition of insisting that Africans should ensure that they cultivate the capacity to formulate their own ideas on the type of ethics and values, notion of progress, development and institutional framework best suited to their needs and environment”.

### 3. Three Dominant Perspectives of Socioeconomic Change

Perspectives about socioeconomic change in Africa, between 1912 and 2002, have been characterised by theoretical contradictions as well as ideological polarizations. The constitutive ideas and policy implications of the various perspectives will be discussed at a later stage, only

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<sup>44</sup> Mogobe Ramose, *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*, (Harare: Monds Books Publishers, 2005), 5.

a few basic points regarding the phased transition of socioeconomic thinking in the aforementioned period will be discussed in this introductory section.

From the mid-nineteenth century, and peaking in the 1960s, the modernization perspective, heavily influenced by, racist notions of superiority, Victorian evolutionary theory, and the functionalist approach of Talcott Parsons (prominent from 1935-1960), looked upon modernity as incompatible with African cultures and indigenous institutions.<sup>45</sup> More importantly, it was given a practical, and policy-oriented dimension, as it was in various guises propagated by colonial administrators, historians, and anthropologists.

Using the South African genesis of indirect rule and segregation as a case study, Mamdani writes of the practical and policy orientation of modernization in the colonial context that:

The colonial secretary directed that within the “locations” customary law would hold provided it was not “repugnant to the general principles of humanity, recognized throughout the whole civilized world”. Because the colonial power held itself to be the representative of the “civilized” world and custodian of “general principles of humanity,” this proclamation – reproduced in some form in every colonial context – underlined the legitimacy of its claim to modify and even remake the customary.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, witness the French colonial administrator Albert Sarraut’s argument that:

Without us, without our intervention...these indigenous heathens would still be abandoned to misery and abjection; epidemics, massive endemic diseases, and famine would continue to decimate them; infant mortality would still wipe out half of their offspring; petty kings and corrupt chiefs would still sacrifice them to various caprice; their minds would still be degraded by the practice of base superstition and barbarous custom; and they would perish from misery in the midst of unexploited wealth.<sup>47</sup>

In the above, Sarraut may be making a valid observation about colonialism and its possible effects on African societies, however, his comments are also symptomatic of a type of paternalistic view on socioeconomic change and history. He sees everything through the framework of the colonial encounter, and by implication suggests that, Africa on its own has no history worth the word except that which is born out of the colonial experience. Consider also Hugh Trevor-Roper’s infamous 1965 statement that:

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<sup>45</sup> Martin Fichman, *Evolutionary Theory and Victorian Culture*, (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002). Talcott Parsons served on the faculty at Harvard University from 1927 to 1970. In 1930 he was among the first Professors in the newly created Sociology department.

<sup>46</sup> Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 63.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Prah, *Soundings*, 8.

Undergraduates, seduced, as always, by the changing breath of journalistic fashion, demand that they should be taught the history of black Africa. Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness. And darkness is not a subject for history... Please do not misunderstand me. I do not deny that men existed even in dark countries and dark centuries, nor that they had political life and culture, interesting to sociologists and anthropologists; but history, I believe, is essentially a form of movement, and purposive movement too. It is not a mere phantasmagoria of changing shapes and costumes, of battles and conquests, dynasties and usurpations, social forms and social disintegration... If all history is equal, as some now believe, there is no reason why we should study one section of it rather than another; for certainly we cannot study it all. Then indeed we may neglect our own history and amuse ourselves with the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe: tribes whose chief function in history, in my opinion, is to show to the present an image of the past from which, by history, it has escaped; or shall I seek to avoid the indignation of the medievalists by saying, from which it has changed?<sup>48</sup>

The remarks of Sarraut and Trevor-Roper, constitute the reflections of an unabashed and unremitting Eurocentric mind whose sense of effortless superiority clouds historical judgement and lays the basis for the acceptance of a history of darkness. This then becomes an ideological justification for suggesting that Africans have been extricated out of darkness and barbarism by the colonialists. This Eurocentrism, in my opinion, underpins what Mamdani has identified as the colonizers need to view themselves as representatives of the “civilized” world and custodian of “general principles of humanity”.

Naturally, the more popular perspectives of socioeconomic change from the mid-nineteenth century, including - responses by colonial administrators and missionaries to the native question, as well as, indirect rule - was rooted in Eurocentrism, European economic history and the rise of the West. In this era, the socioeconomic trajectory of Africa was viewed generally as an opportunistic adjunct of European history and socioeconomic realities. Consequently, after World War II, and continuing into the 1960s, many American researchers of the “Third World” associated with the modernization perspective, including Seymour Martin Lipset, Samuel Huntington and Walt Rostow, advocated explicitly and implicitly that in order for regions such as Africa to modernize, Africans would have to copy Western values and

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Prah, *Soundings*, 15. See also Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1966).

institutions, and jettison their poorly suited traditional, backward and anachronistic institutions.<sup>49</sup>

An intellectual revolution, however, occurred in the mid-1960s and the modernization perspective was challenged primarily by Third World (Latin American as well as African intellectuals) and “a theory dealing specifically with the problems of these regions and what was termed as ‘underdevelopment’ rather than a natural history of socioeconomic change based on the rise of the West and superiority of Eurocentric institutions was born”.<sup>50</sup> This body of ideas is what has come to be known as dependency.

If the modernization perspective is regarded as a Eurocentric product, then the dependency perspective is its antithesis, because it has its roots in the non-Western world. Drawing heavily on radical neo-Marxism, dependency offered a criticism of what was perceived as Eurocentric assumptions of the modernization intellectual tradition; which very often identified intrinsic civilizational inadequacies such as ‘backward’ culture, indigenous institutions and values as constraints to socioeconomic progress. Moreover, the notion of self-determination was a major influence on the dependency perspective. Regarding this, witness Hettne’s observation that:

Closely linked to the criticism of modernization by dependency was the idea that the intellectual understanding of socioeconomic change had been distorted by Eurocentric academic colonialism and that economic self-reliance implied the indigenization of socioeconomic thinking.<sup>51</sup>

Dependency, however, not only detailed a position of self-determination, it also conceptualized the linkages between Western and Third World countries in the context of social and commercial relations of power. These linkages became a set of externally imposed, exploitative, dependent economic relationships between the core (metropole) and the periphery (colony). A lack of socioeconomic progress was viewed as a result of these exploitative external linkages - which furthered a historical process of ‘underdevelopment’- rather than intrinsic civilizational and cultural inadequacies as the modernization perspective seemed to suggest.

The third and final perspective of socioeconomic change which I discuss in this dissertation is New Institutional Economics (NIE). NIE began to gain intellectual prominence in the 1980s, a

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<sup>49</sup>Ambe Njoh, *Tradition, Culture and Development in Africa: Historical Lessons for Modern Development Planning*. (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 17.

<sup>50</sup> Hettne, *Development Theory*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*,

period in which modernization and dependency perspectives were losing a bit of intellectual traction. John Toye likens NIE to Leon Walras' celebration of Neoclassical Economics. According to Walras:

There are today heaven knows how many schools of political economy...for my part, I recognise only two: the school of those who do not demonstrate; and the school, which I hope to see founded, of those who do demonstrate their conclusions. By demonstrating rigorously first the elementary theorems of geometry and algebra, and then the resulting theorems of the Calculus and Mechanics, in order to apply them to experimental data, we have achieved the marvels of modern industry. Let us follow the same procedure in Economics, and, without doubt, we shall eventually succeed in having the same control over the nature of things in the economic and social order as we already have in the physical and industrial order.<sup>52</sup>

Neoclassical economics, as aptly described by Walras, is an intellectual tradition characterised by a narrow focus on empiricism and a commitment to mathematisation, which in the words of Toye, “all but monopolised twentieth century economic theorising, taking from it the political economy approach of nineteenth century intellectuals such as Karl Marx and J. S Mill”.<sup>53</sup> NIE is *new* because it starts from puzzles which the watertight neoclassical orthodoxy developed by Walras (later by Kenneth Arrow and Gerrard Debreu) could not solve. John Martinussen has made the following basic distinction between neoclassical economics and NIE:

In neoclassical economics, households are assumed to maximize utility and firms are assumed to maximize profits. The market is the only determinant of economic behaviour. NIE adherents are different from neoclassical economists in that they do not view the market as the only determinant of economic behaviour. The market is only one aspect of a more comprehensive tapestry of incentive structures in society, which includes institutions.<sup>54</sup>

For economic historian, Anthony Hopkins, the new institutionalists are a group of scholars critical of orthodox economic theory, who are attempting to introduce themes into the discourse of socioeconomic change that has received little attention in the conventional approach. He notes for instance that “the perspective” is “evidently one that, in principle, is congenial to

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted in John Toye. “The New institutional Economics and its Implications for Development Theory” in *New Institutional Economics and Development Theory* (ed.) John Martinussen, Occasional paper no 6 , International Development Studies, (Roskilde: Roskilde University Press Denmark, 1993), 34.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>54</sup> John Martinussen, *New Institutional Economics and Development Theory*. Occasional Paper no 6, International Development Studies (Roskilde, Denmark: Roskilde University Press), 6.

historians because it extends beyond the narrow focus of any single sub-branch of the subject”.<sup>55</sup>

I shall provide a detailed definition of the term ‘institution’ in the next chapter. What is important to note at this introductory stage is that the approach of NIE looks past the narrow neoclassical notion of a market with freely competing and equilibrating forces of demand and supply towards a much broader perspective, within which a diverse body of institutional factors explain market behaviour and socioeconomic change.<sup>56</sup>

Does the NIE approach allow us to provide a different explanation of the complex problems of socioeconomic change in Africa distinct from the earlier modernization and dependency perspectives? Exciting possibilities abound, however it is important also that we recognize that as a body of theory, NIE is not sacrosanct, neither is it free from weaknesses or biases. Moreover, intellectual traditions and schools of thought by their very nature, conceptually and methodologically intersect. And so, NIE must by all means, remain open-ended, and, its assumptions, flexible and not rigid, to allow for improvements in perspective and analysis when needed.

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<sup>55</sup> Anthony Hopkins, “The New Economic History of Africa”, *The Journal of African History* 50, no 1 (2009), 160.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*,

## Chapter 1: A Critique of Reversal of Fortune Thesis

It has been proposed by Geoffrey Hodgson that the term “institutions” should be traced back at least to Giambattista Vico in his *Scienza Nuova* published in 1725. Even so, after almost three centuries and widespread usage of the concept in the social sciences, economics and in particular, NIE, there is today still no unanimity in the definition of the concept.<sup>57</sup> According to one of the foremost proponents of NIE over the past thirty years, Douglass North, “Institutions are the humanly devised constraints that structure social, political and economic interaction”.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, institutions matter because they determine the underlying “incentive space and structure in societies, and so define the choice matrix available to various social actors at any point in time”.<sup>59</sup>

The above, emphasizing the role of institutions in specifying incentives, choice and agency can be taken as the general definition of the concept as it has been used in NIE and as it is deployed in this dissertation. Institutions also, according to North, and accepted by other scholars such as Avner Greif, Masahiko Aoki, Gerard Roland and Lee Alston, can be distinguished as either formal or informal.<sup>60</sup> We find Douglass North writing that:

They are made up of formal constraints (e.g., rules, laws, and constitutions), informal constraints (e.g., norms of behaviour, beliefs, social conventions, and self-imposed codes of conduct) and their enforcement characteristics. Together, they define the incentive structure of societies and specify the economy. Conventions, codes of conduct, norms of behaviour, culture, and belief systems are endogenous. These endogenous “rules of the game” are thought to be complemented by exogenous formal rules and constraints, which include a wide variety of instruments - constitutions, laws and contracts.<sup>61</sup>

Of particular importance is that in the above, institutions are of a constraining nature and as a result have an effect on incentives, agency and choice in the socioeconomic environment.

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<sup>57</sup> Geoffrey Hodgson, “What are Institutions?” *Journal of Economic Issues* 40, no 1 (2006) 2; “Reclaiming Habit for Institutional Economics”, *Journal of Economic Psychology* 25, no 5 (2004), 651-660 and *Economics and Institutions: A Manifesto for a Modern Institutional Economics* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988).

<sup>58</sup> Douglass, North. “Institutions” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5, no 4 (1991): 99

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*; see also North, “Institutional Change and Economic growth.” *Journal of Economic History* 31, no 1 (1971), 118-125.

<sup>60</sup> Avner Greif. “Cultural Beliefs and the Organization of Society: A Historical and Theoretical Reflection on Collectivist and Individualist Societies.” *Journal of Political Economy* 102, no 5 (1994), 912-50; Lee Alston “New Institutional Economics.” In *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, edited by Steven N Durlauf and Lawrence Blume, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Masahiko Aoki, “Towards a Comparative Institutional Analysis: Motivations and Some Tentative Theorizing,” *The Japanese Economic Review* 47, no 3 (1996), 1-19; Gerard Roland. “Understanding Institutional Change: Fast-Moving and Slow-Moving Institutions.” *Studies in Comparative Industrial Development* 28, no 3 (2004), 109-131.

<sup>61</sup> North “Economic Performance Through Time,” *American Economic Review* 84, no 3 (1994), 360-61.

Furthermore, they are characterised as dualistic - informal or formal (and both). The formal set of institutions refer to the constraints on human incentives, agency, and exchange which can be readily enforced by a perceived authority such as the judiciary or the police. In contemporary NIE research, such institutions have been associated with enforceable rules that specify modes of production such as the type of property rights present within any given society. Informal Institutions, on the other hand, are more subtle, are embedded and implied in social relations, and are assumed a priori, not to be readily enforceable by a perceived authority. They are implicit in our behaviours as well as attitudes, and are manifest in human interaction, as well as exchange, by way of culture, habits, norms, and beliefs. They include market-related beliefs such as the division of labour, the value (monetary or otherwise) attached to the different types of labours in society, usury (interest rates), as well as non-market related beliefs - such as the meaning of progress, religious morality, ethics as well as table manners. They also include perfectly ordinary beliefs and sensibilities such as table manners, and standards of representation and beauty, of which it is generally difficult to attach a monetary price.<sup>62</sup>

The role of power (i.e. military, class, economic, political, and epistemic) in framing the status quo - i.e. the law, popular habits, aspirations, incentive structure, socioeconomic relations and in the transformation, as well as, transfer of formal and informal institutions, from one region to another, is a crucial point to be emphasized in the discourse about institutions and socioeconomic change in Africa. This becomes especially obvious when the general definition of institutions is contrasted with the previously discussed, immaterial effect of imperialism and colonialism on African societies.

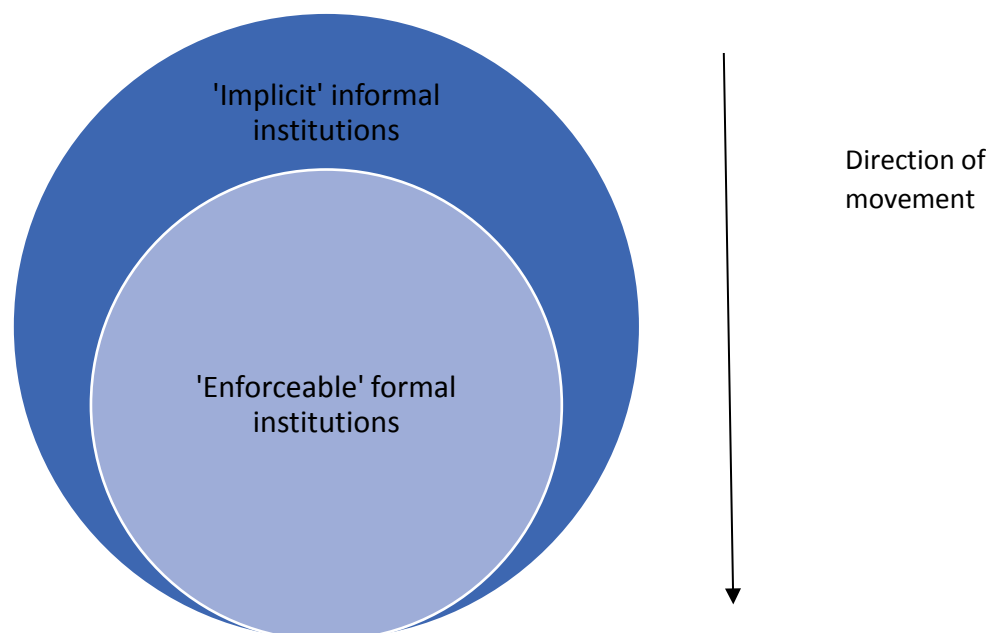
Institutions, both formal and informal, it is necessary to emphasize, provide a rich perspective on socioeconomic change. Moreover, the perspective they provide implies a holistic analysis and reading, in particular, of power and its impact on socioeconomic relations. It provides a rich foment which enables one to potentially explain the historical role of bargaining power in establishing the terms of exchange between Africa and the rest of the world. The concept also enables one to think refreshingly about the contemporary moment and the nature of formal and informal institutions, as well as, constraints, on choice and agency. That said, it is curious that unlike formal institutions which have been the focal point of contemporary NIE research, informal institutions have been relatively neglected in the discourse on institutional transformation and socioeconomic change. Informal institutions, though underemphasized, are

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<sup>62</sup> Hodgson, "Reclaiming Habit", 654.

nevertheless important – because the set of institutions which we have hitherto categorized as formal are essentially derived from informal institutions. Put differently, formal institutions are informal institutions which have been enforced, that is, made ‘universal’ arbiters of behaviours, habits, interactions, exchanges and transactions in any given economy. The transformation of an informal institution to a formal institution is primarily a historical process. Such historical processes may include the effectiveness of the institution itself, morality and ethics, or the most important factor, in my opinion, relations of power and hegemony in institutional transformation and transfer - whereby the institutions of a dominant group are accepted uncritically by a dominated group as superior or civilizing institutions, with or without physical force.

The figure below depicts the overlapping relationship between formal and informal institutions. As illustrated with the downward vertical movement, it is my contention that formal institutions are embedded within the much broader set of informal institutions.



Every culture, although dynamic and necessarily fluid, has its own set of institutions at a specified time. These institutions stem from a unique set of normative attitudes particular to the cultural grouping. However, it is only a select number of institutions which are accorded the privileged status of being enforceable.

Consider the economic effect of the religious inspired usury laws (the prohibition of interest) in medieval Europe, which are believed to have constrained the development of the interest based banking system, as well as, corporate finance and investment. Subsequently, beliefs

about usury had a marked effect on the development of the capitalist mode of production in Europe and the rest of the world. Regarding this, Kaelber Lutz has observed that usury played an important role in Max Weber's theoretical attempt to relate informal institutions (medieval religious beliefs and practices) to economic practice.<sup>63</sup> He writes that:

Usury was not a peripheral topic in Weber's writings. The topic emerged in Weber's dissertation and gradually came to constitute a part of Weber's inquiries into the salvation economy of medieval Christianity....Drawing parallels between medieval guild members and modern stockbrokers, who found innovative ways to cope with the moral regulation of economic affairs and ultimately render them ineffective, Weber questioned the validity of Werner Sombart's materialist interpretation of the role of ethics in economic development. Had religion been merely the reflection of material conditions in the transition from a feudal to a capitalist economy, Weber argued, religious authorities would not have expressed heightened concern regarding usury in times of economic expansion.<sup>64</sup>

While a discussion of the merit of Weber's thesis on usury is beyond the purview of this dissertation, his conclusion endeavours some thoughts that may influence current scholarly debates concerning the role of an informal institution (the prohibition of interest on loans) on the economy.

Another example of the historical role of informal institutions on the economy can be identified in a discussion of the evolution of wage labour society in many parts of Africa. It has been suggested by some historians that complex institutional arrangements involving groups of Africans and Europeans underpinned the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Paul Lovejoy and David Richardson for instance observe that cultural practices in West Africa, including pawning and panyarring, of which the former was in practice long before exchange activity between Europeans and Africans on the coast, allowed for the institution of slavery to be formed between the peoples on the West African "slave coast" and European merchants who demanded slave labour.<sup>65</sup>

Given these examples on the role of informal institutions on the economy, one can pose a tentative answer to S. E Ogude, when he asks that "for over three centuries, we find that almost every European country supported the capture, purchase, and enslavement of Africans without

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<sup>63</sup> Kaelber, Lutz, "Max Weber on Usury and Medieval Capitalism: From the History of Commercial Partnerships to the Protestant Ethic" *Max Weber Studies* 4, no. 1 (2004), 51-75.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Lovejoy and David Richardson, "The Business of Slaving: Pawnship in Western Africa, 1600-1800," *Journal of African History* 42, no 1 (2001), 67-89.

compassion and compunction. How do we explain the brutalities unleashed, without mercy, without fear of a restraining force or law, on a people whose only crime was that in addition to being brown, they had no weapons to defend themselves?”<sup>66</sup>

From an institutional perspective, the answer to the question Ogude is asking is simple and straight forward. In the particular historical context, the informal institutions embedded in the socioeconomic, as well as political relations between Africans and Europeans, permitted the manifestation of the formal institution of slavery. As Nederveen Pieterse has suggested, racist logic was normalised and justified by the scientific advancements of the time. We find that most Europeans in the period concerned rarely regarded, much less accepted, Africans as human beings purvey to the same rights as a European.<sup>67</sup>

Thus the human rights injustices of the trans-Atlantic slavery from an institutional perspective can be explained away as the formal and practical demonstration of one group’s reluctance to recognise the shared similarity (in this case, humanity) of another group. This reluctance to recognise the humanity of the other, it is important to emphasize, is a normative attitude best described as an informal institution. It is also a historical phenomenon and takes on varied hues and modes as the historical context itself changes. Although this particular informal institution was later to be transformed with the abolishment of slavery in the mid-nineteenth century, it is disingenuous to ignore the fact that an informal institution upheld what is now viewed retrospectively as an inhumane and unethical exchange between peoples of Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Slavery because it describes a condition of exchanged labour is best defined as an economic system. The practice of slavery was upheld for over three centuries until concerns of morality and ethics altered the informal institutional matrix, structure and incentives available to socioeconomic agents. Of course, there were a myriad set of both formal and informal institutional factors which contributed to the abolition of slavery, granted. But I do not buy the economic argument that the abolishment of slavery was a direct result of a change in material interests or that it was purely as a result of resistance from the slaves. In my view, it was as much a change in material interests (formal institutions such as constitutions and property rights) as a change in the immaterial (informal institutions such as beliefs about democracy and non-racialism).

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<sup>66</sup> S. E Ogude, Introduction, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by himself.* (1789) 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Longman Publishers, 2006), vii – xxvii.

<sup>67</sup> Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 30-51.

The two examples of the religious inspired beliefs about usury and the role of ethics in the abolishment of slavery, constitute the theoretical basis for my argument that in general, the formal set of institutions are derived from the informal set.

### Formal Institutions Bias in NIE

The policy implication of the RF thesis is largely focused on formal institutions (i.e. property rights), whilst simultaneously neglecting informal institutions. There is a tendency it seems of NIE scholars such as AJR to pay lip service to the informal institutions at work in society and then proceed to ignore these forces. Perhaps one reason why scholars have shied away from a theoretical emphasis on informal institutions is because economics, in general, is still in the grip of a general distrust of ideology, culture, belief, a system of values, or any other informal institution as the determinant of socioeconomic behaviour and change. The illusion of objectivity in economics and history, and most importantly, the cult of the ‘end of ideology’ has spilled over and tended to include the end of informal institutions, too, as a factor of economic and historical importance. Yet students of the developing areas have been inclined to believe that traditional institutions – belief systems, culture and values were, on the whole, dysfunctional in the pursuit of progress. If informal institutions are important enough to serve as a constraint in the pursuit of progress (defined narrowly as economic growth), it cannot at the same time be disregarded as a determining factor.

Thus the neglect of informal institutions in NIE is, in my perspective, disingenuous, because it leads to a narrow and mechanistic interpretation of the historical relations of cause and effect between institutions and socioeconomic change. Furthermore, from a Pan-Africanist philosophical disposition, it ignores the diagnostic literature on the immaterial effects of imperialism – which in essence, emphasize informal institutions – including the role of social relations, the impact of political, military, cultural and epistemic power, in international relations, economic practice and exchange, as well as its evolving character.

What, however, is the Pan-Africanist diagnosis of imperialism? It has been noted in an earlier chapter that some African intellectuals have emphasized the immaterial effect of colonialism on African peoples. The emphasis on the immaterial we have argued, is evident in the observations and sentiments of intellectuals such as Edward Blyden and Frantz Fanon, both of whom have identified an assumed superiority of western institutions by certain groups of Africans in different social and historical contexts. This assumed superiority, it is believed,

specifies the incentive and choice matrix available to Africans and has a marked effect on the nature of African agency.

The diagnostic effect of colonial conquest on previous subject peoples has been echoed most recently by Maldonado-Torres, in the concept, coloniality of being.

The concept, coloniality of being, refers to long-standing patterns of power that have emerged in reality as a result of colonialism, and which define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production *well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations* (emphasis added). Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day.<sup>68</sup>

The above is a description of what according to Maldonado-Torres is the modern situation in previous colonies. If we look back retrospectively, it can be deduced that coloniality, as distinct from direct and indirect rule, was an informal institutional means by which the colonial status quo was maintained. In turn, coloniality diffuses through time, from the past to the present; influencing language, the structure of thought and the very constitution of logic, meaning and action in previously colonized societies. In NIE, this is what is referred to by scholars such as North as the effect of institutions on the “incentive space, structure and specification of the economy”. Although the passage from Maldonado-Torres, quoted above, was written in 2007, it is for similar reasons, I suspect, that Pan-African intellectuals, Olalekan Oyedemi and Kofi Tetteh, proposed that there was an urgent need for a Pan-African economic ideology independent of what they regarded as Eurocentric logic and academic hegemony.<sup>69</sup>

Coloniality as described by Maldonado-Torres, when viewed within the context of NIE, is an informal institution because it is primarily concerned with long-standing socioeconomic relations of power which are embedded in norms, beliefs, habits, codes of conduct and knowledge production. Socioeconomic change and its associated normative processes and aspirations such as the desire/need to civilise, modernize or develop, have not been outstandingly altruistic. In fact, since they can be linked to notions of superiority of certain cultures and identities over others, it is possible for one to make the following proposition concerning socioeconomic change in Africa: concerns about socioeconomic transformation

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<sup>68</sup> Maldonado-Torres, “Coloniality of Being”, 243.

<sup>69</sup> Olalekan Oyedemi, “Intellectual Origins of Pan-Africanism and Black Studies as a Crucial Step Towards Its Realization.” *Pan-African Journal* 7, no 1 (1974), 29-38; and Tetteh “Pan-African Economic Ideology”.

which have preoccupied African ideologues at least since the mid nineteenth century have been primarily about the changing nature of institutions. Specifically, it can be suggested that for almost two centuries, members of the intellectual classes across Africa have been concerned with the varied effects of imperialism on informal and formal institutions, and the relationship between informal and the formal. Regarding this proposition, consider the debate outlined below, between contemporaries, Edward Blyden (1832-1912) and Rev. Alexander Crummell (1819-1898) concerning the issue of culture (language) and its relationship to progress (or alternatively the direction of socioeconomic change) in mid nineteenth century Liberia.<sup>70</sup>

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, 1860, Crummell, Afro American by birth, Liberian by adoption, an Episcopalian priest with a University of Cambridge education, addressed the citizens of Maryland County, Cape Palmas. Though Liberia was not to be recognized by the United States for another two years, the occasion was, by Crummell's reckoning, the thirteenth anniversary of Liberia's independence. According to philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, it is "particularly striking that his (Crummell's) title on such an occasion was 'The English Language in Liberia' and his theme that Africans exiled in slavery to the New World had been given by divine providence 'at least this one item of compensation, namely, the possession of the Anglo-Saxon tongue'".<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Langley observes that Crummell argued in his speech that the English language was the "enshrinement of those great charters of liberty and civic duty". For Crummell, all the indigenous African languages were harsh and crude; were characterised by a lowness of ideas; showed a marked "absence of clear ideas of justice, law, human rights and governmental order"; and were devoid of Christian concepts. For him, Liberia at thirteen years, was already, by God's providence, a nation; all that was required was to educate the youth in civic duty, encourage the growth of manners and spread the beneficent and liberating influence of the English language and Christianity to integrate and civilize the indigenous populations.<sup>72</sup> Reflecting on the implications of Crummell's speech, Appiah writes that:

Crummell, who is widely regarded *as one of the fathers of African Nationalism* (emphasis added), had not the slightest doubt that English Language was superior as a language to the "various tongues and dialects" of the indigenous African

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<sup>70</sup> Liberia is a colony which was founded in 1921 by the USA for the purposes of repatriation or sending Black Americans back to Africa. The repatriation of Black Americans to the African region raised issues of class conflict between Indigenous ethnic groups and the repatriated groups.

<sup>71</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Alexander Crummell and the Invention of Africa." *The Massachusetts Review* 31, no. 3 (1990), 385.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation*, 26.

populations; superior in its euphony, its conceptual resources and its capacity to express the “supernatural truths” of Christianity. Now, over a century later, more than half the population of black Africa lives in countries where English is an official language. And the same providence has also decreed that almost all the rest of Africa should be governed in French or Arabic or Portuguese.<sup>73</sup>

What is interesting is that although Crummell is often described as an African nationalist and viewed perhaps as a proponent of self-determination, he did not think that African languages, and to a great extent culture, was a progressive force in the future of Africa. The question then arises that what kind of nationalist was he? Moreover, is African nationalism a homogenous concept? Far too often, the label of an African nationalist is accorded to an individual simply because they are black or African without an interrogation of their ideology or interest position in the class structure. Crummell is a typical example. He may be described as an African nationalist intellectual because he was black, however, Africanization, it is important to reiterate, might be necessary, but it is not in itself sufficient for progress. Thus it is important to look beyond race in the labelling of who or who is not an African nationalist. Crummell’s view of the English language is representative of the views and opinions of a group of individuals in Liberia that Pan-Africanist intellectual historian, Hollis Lynch, has described as the “Westernized Americo-Liberians”. According to Lynch, these groups of intellectuals, mostly black immigrants from the United States, were proud of their western cultural mores, their “civilization,” and felt it distinguished them from indigenous Africans who they viewed as inferior to them.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, Blyden, another adopted Liberian from the West Indies, provides a counter to the Americo-Liberian perspective. In a speech entitled *Liberia as a Means, Not an End* (1867), Blyden sought a kind of cultural revival as the way forward for Liberia and advocated for the use of the indigenous languages and customs as the only viable vehicle for socioeconomic progress. Independence without an African cultural foundation according to him was worthless.

His intellectual thesis, dealt primarily with what he saw as the essence and mission of African culture. Blyden insisted on the equality and the uniqueness of African people. He felt they should not waste time mimicking Europeans or competing with them in the areas of science or politics, but that Africans should concentrate on perfecting their

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<sup>73</sup> Appiah, “Alexander Crummell,” 385.

<sup>74</sup> Hollis Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 140-172.

special gifts in the fields of morality and social organization. Many of the disputes between Blyden and the Americo-Liberians centered on their relations with the much larger African nations that inhabited most of Liberia. The Americo-Liberians foresaw a slow acculturation of the indigenous African to their superior western culture and institutions, whereas Blyden felt that the Americo-Liberians had to amalgamate with the indigenous Africans if Liberia was ever to amount to anything.<sup>75</sup>

Langley asserts that Blyden's *African Life and Customs*, published in 1908, was "the first important attempt at a historical sociological analysis of African society as a whole" as well as his greatest single effort at unfolding what he referred to as the African personality through a careful study of the customs of his fathers and mothers. Langley goes on to write that much of the "ideological retraditionalisation of African socialism as undertaken by later intellectuals in the twentieth century such as Cheikh Anta Diop and Julius Nyerere can be traced to some of the earlier ideas expressed by Blyden".<sup>76</sup>

Generalizing the debate between Crummell and Blyden and its implications for African nationalism, Judson Lyon writes that:

In Liberia, the debate between Blyden and the Americo-Liberians such as Crummell, suggests a turning point in the evolution of African nationalism...broad concerns for African culture were being replaced by a class struggle...*Blyden was really more of a culturalist than a nationalist* (emphasis added). By the time of his death in 1912, concern with independence of a Liberia nation, whatever its colonial character, had replaced the concern with culture as the dominant force in the African peoples' drive to reassert their own identity.<sup>77</sup>

In the above, Lyon has attempted to infix the debate between Blyden and Crummell in the broader framework of nationalism in Africa. This is more than a fitting of a part into the whole. Some rather serious theoretical problems are involved, and though national struggle falls outside the purview of this dissertation, something will have to be said about these problems before we turn to the main task at hand.

One of these is the view that nationalism is at root an idea, a European idea, which diffused outwards from north-western Europe or North America to the colonial world, through repatriated, de-tribalized, western educated natives or colonial administrators. The implication of which is that national liberation movements do not, therefore, reflect the colonial people's

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<sup>75</sup> Judson, Lyon. "Edward Blyden: Liberian Independence and African Nationalism, 1903-1909." *Phylon* 41, no. 1 (1980), 36.

<sup>76</sup> Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation*, 34.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 38

broad response to colonialism, but simply reflect the spread to and through the colonies of a supposedly enlightening European idea, the 'idea of the nation state', or the 'idea of freedom'. The second problem is the thesis that national struggles are inherently bourgeois, the preserve of the newly emerged African intellectual class; that they emerged with the rise of the European bourgeoisie and later appeared elsewhere as some form of belated bourgeois revolution.

What emerges out of these two theoretical problems is that the colonial situation makes much use as it can of division between groups. Perhaps more typically, there is no deliberate plan to set groups against one another; there is instead, one or another pressure on a large population such that the effect is, so to speak, a breaking of the population along cultural cleavage planes. Conflicts arise between the differentiated groups, conflicts which represent a transmission of class struggle. The overall structure of struggle, observable in Blyden and Crummell's Liberia, and described in the most general terms, would involve what James Blaut has called "ethno-class communities". As the term suggests, there are two elements: first economic exploitation which produces class divisions, and second, the stable, large, consequential groupings of human beings, the cultures. "Neither explains the other. Class struggle explains the *fact* of national struggle. Cultural and other cleavage planes explain many things about the *form* of national struggle".<sup>78</sup>

Similarly, in the Gold Coast, Mensah Sarbah's *Fanti Customary Law*, first published in 1897, was a protest against indirect rule and the confused relation between culture and what he regarded as the process of modernization. Like Blyden's view on the importance of culture, Sarbah's view was that what was needed was an adaptation of traditional forms of representative institutions to modern ones, not the imposition of new ones, including direct taxes, without reference to traditional practice. Even though the British colonial authority in this period aimed to protect what it defined as customary laws, Sarbah still did not believe that they were going about it the right way. "Today" he complained of the colonial situation, "we are being ruled as if we had no indigenous institutions, no language, no national characteristics, and no homes".<sup>79</sup>

From the above examples, one may reach a tentative conclusion which substantiates our earlier proposition that the changes to formal and informal institutions and the relationship between

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<sup>78</sup> James Blaut, *The National Question: Decolonising the Theory of Nationalism* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 202-204.

<sup>79</sup> John Mensah Sarbah, *Fanti Customary Laws, with a new introduction by Hollis Lynch* (London: CASS, 1968), 31.

the two, have been the concern of African intellectuals from at least the mid nineteenth century. The intellectuals may have belonged to a narrow stratum of educated and detribalized natives, and like Crummell they may have promoted the interests of one group over the others, but on the whole, there is no denying of the proposition. Given such empirical evidence, it is curious that there is a lack of emphasis on the role of informal institutions in the NIE literature.

The essence of the colonial experience in my reading, is the calling into question the humanity of Africans. This according to Fanon, solidified into a deeply embedded intergenerational psychological injury having two abiding and complementary fulcra: to denigrate the indigenous African and keep him in a condition of permanent humiliation and to expropriate, disseize, disown and de-educate the indigenous African people of their land and possessions and a forcible entry into the money economy, through persuasion and, at times, the religiously inspired use of armed force.<sup>80</sup> It is my contention that the acknowledgement of this psychological injury and so immaterial effect of colonial conquest, ought to be the pre-eminent point of departure of post-colonial African history in its proper and fundamental signification. Proceeding from this starting point, my argument is that the character of European colonisation of Africa was the urge to impose a Eurocentric worldview upon the peoples of Africa. By this statement, I do not mean that there is nothing to be borrowed from Europe or that there are no universal elements in Eurocentrism. Rather, what I mean is that European colonisation was intent upon establishing and maintaining in Africa, a Eurocentric conception of reality, knowledge, and truth.

Mamdani explains that the change in governance policy from direct to indirect rule as a result of the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny in India by the British colonial authority, though accommodative to indigenous agency, and so, historically progressive, was nonetheless underpinned by the urge to maintain Eurocentrism. The policy of indirect rule was more than a magnanimous protection of social groups and custom. Its underlying purpose was “to remake subjectivities so as to realign its bearers. This was no longer just divide and rule. It was define and rule”. In this way, the doctrine of protecting native custom and law under indirect rule soon turned into a license for confident, unfettered interference in native affairs as the colonial authority assumed the responsibility for specifying what was custom and what was not.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press: 2004), 97-145.

<sup>81</sup> Mamdani, *Define and Rule* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 42.

So called customary law mistakenly thought of as geographical and unchanging, has rather been in a constant state of adaptation. Many of these laws were not based solely on African footing, as they were shaped by the colonial administrators to suit the colonial agenda, and as a consequence of indirect rule. Under indirect rule, colonial officials negotiated access to land dependent on social identity. The constant renegotiation of rights to access and control have affected market transactions, agriculture, farmer's investment, mineral beneficiation as well as economic output in post-colonial Africa. Up until political independence, there were, in many countries, debates and disputes around identity and access stemming from the specification of what was custom and not custom during the colonial situation.<sup>82</sup>

The urge of colonialism to impose Eurocentric world views on African societies is a theoretical notion I share with South African philosopher, Ramose. Ramose has suggested that the Southern African metaphysical principle of *ubuntu* has been condemned to an unbroken silence in spite of decolonisation:

The European colonial enterprise was a philosophical urge to impose and universalise Europe. Whatever existed or was practised by other human beings in the colonised world could not be regarded as meaningful unless it was modified and changed to become the same as the European *conception of reality, knowledge and truth* (emphasis added). This philosophical standpoint of colonisation was translated into practice. In its endeavour to realise this standpoint concretely, Europe pursued two paths, namely, the path of persuasion and the path of coercion or the use of armed force.<sup>83</sup>

In the critique of the policy implication of RF thesis provided in this chapter, I will argue that the premise upon which AJR discuss socioeconomic change is symptomatic of Eurocentrism. Furthermore, it is questionable in so far as it restricts its institutional analysis to formal institutions, as well as in its imposition of good colonial institutions (private property rights) as a policy recommendation.

### A Summary of the RF Thesis

The focus of AJR has been to examine the following key research questions on global comparative development: (1) what are the factors that have promoted development across time? And (2) what historical lessons can be learnt from it? By way of an answer, they highlight

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<sup>82</sup> Berry, *Hegemony on a Shoestring*, 343-347.

<sup>83</sup> Ramose, *African Philosophy*, 33.

a statistically significant correlation between European settler colonialism and economic growth for the period, 1500-1995 which serves as evidence for their theoretical hypothesis. In particular, they propose a “colonial origins” (CO) and reversal of fortunes (RF) hypothesis, according to which regions of the world which were poor prior to colonial expansion, beginning 1500, are the richest today, whereas, the poorest regions today on aggregate, were relatively prosperous before 1500. The lack of economic growth in the poor regions, according to AJR, is a function of colonial conquest. This is the first layer of their argument, the colonial origins hypothesis.<sup>84</sup>

The CO hypothesis is built on the idea that European colonizers established rent ‘extractive’ institutions in some regions (non-settler economies) and growth ‘enhancing’ institutions in others (settler economies); of which there were stringent path dependent outcomes. It is interesting to note that AJR view the colonizer as having the absolute right of conquest to create their choice of institutions without much resistance, coercion or adaptation. Secondly, although AJR identify the external pressure of colonialism as a critical juncture and in fact anchor their theoretical discussion on the colonial extraction of surplus, the second layer of their argument (RF) and policy implication is largely focused on the internal (i.e. property rights). For AJR, the causal mechanism for this growth divergence is European, private property rights institutions, and where they were established or not established.

What accounts for the establishment of European style property rights in some continents but not in others? AJR’s answer is that Europeans settled where they could live the longest; and where they settled in large numbers, they introduced the same kind of institutions that they lived with in Europe, ones which essentially promoted economic growth. Conversely, where they did not settle, the Europeans were content with exploitation rather than development: to use or adapt indigenous institutions to capture unproductive economic ‘rents’.<sup>85</sup>

Undoubtedly, capitalist accumulation has been greatly influenced by European imperialist expansion and so the CO hypothesis may hold. I do not dispute this.<sup>86</sup> In fact, I will illustrate

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<sup>84</sup> See Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson. “The Colonial Origins”.

<sup>85</sup> See Austin, “The ‘Reversal of Fortune’ Thesis”, 1000.

<sup>86</sup> I am aware, however, that this interpretation of history is not free from Eurocentrism. We understand the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production quite well. Likewise the socialist mode, or the socialist transition. We know relatively little about pre-capitalist modes of production (anywhere) and about pre-capitalist forms of the class struggle. This is not simply a lack of empirical, factual knowledge. We suffer from historical tunnel vision about pre-capitalist modes of production. We see the sequence of modes in the historical space-time column which embraces Europe and the Near East, but, failing to have adequate understanding of the modes of production in other parts of the world at given historical times, and failing even to have an adequate methodology for

in chapter two that this is an idea which AJR share with most dependency theorists. Where I find fault with AJR is when they attempt to single out a causal mechanism.

I propose that the causal mechanism which AJR provide - good colonial, private property rights institutions - is debatable. Such an explanation, fails to consider the role of African agency in socioeconomic transformation. By ignoring the involvement and participation of the target community, which may very well have a different sense of property rights other than private property rights, the RF thesis implies as a policy recommendation, the marginalization of their commitment and creativity for socioeconomic progress, but, rather arrogantly advocates external intervention strategies. The intervention strategy becomes an imposed strategy on the target community by an external society. Furthermore, in an African context, AJR's thesis undermines Pan-Africanist notions of the constraints on progressive socioeconomic change such as neo-colonialism, the material and immaterial effect of imperialism on the previous subject peoples as well as the role of power in establishing the terms of exchange.

The hegemony underpinning this kind of reasoning needs no special pleading. AJR's glorification and absolutisation of the European institutions is not historically or philosophically justified. For one, they suffer from historical tunnel vision and so read history unilinearly; this is contrary to the multiplicity and pluriformity of history. Their view of history is one in which history, has an order which is established and fixed for all time. There is, for example, no *a priori* reason why history should move only in one, unilinear direction. This view of history is supported perhaps by the commonly held supposition that Europe is at the topmost end of the imaginary ladder of civilization (also read as modernization and development).

By suggesting that economic growth, at least when viewed from a historical perspective, is driven by a type of European property rights institution, AJR contribute to the unilinear conception of world history and the corresponding idea that socioeconomic progress simply means imitation of those who have already ascended to higher rungs of the fictitious ladder of world history. Their view is one which establishes a historical hierocracy in which Europe is the lord and master of all. This leads them to make false causal generalizations because they only look down, so to speak, the European tunnel of time, and fail to consider extra-European historical events both as data for historical or evolutionary generalization and as possible causes

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comparison across areas and cultures, we cannot successfully establish some of the most crucial causal generalizations.

of events known to have occurred in Europe. This habit of mind assumes that the only historically efficacious events, those which are innovative and have evolutionary consequences occur within Europe and then diffuse outwards to the rest of the world.

Moreover, their conclusion is not only audacious and bold, it also represents a mechanistic and deterministic conception of history. By reducing a complex, flowing, perpetually moving, dialectical history with so many unquantifiable, interpenetrating and intermingling factors to a kind of physics with a unilinear formula - where the determinant of economic growth and socioeconomic progress are European private property rights institutions. Indeed, it is not surprising that scholars such as AJR advocate such views. Rodney, raised similar concerns of the narrow viewpoints of 'bourgeois' scholars when he observed in 1972 that:

It is useful to recognize how inadequate the explanations which are provided by bourgeois scholars are. They very seldom try to grapple with the issue in its totality, but rather concentrate attention narrowly on economic development. As defined by the average bourgeois economist, development becomes simply a matter of the combination of given factors of production: namely land, population, capital, technology, specialization and large-scale production. Those factors are indeed relevant, as is implied in the analysis so far; but omissions from the list of what bourgeois scholars think relevant are really overwhelming. No mention is made of the exploitation of the majority which underlay all development prior to capitalism. No mention is made of the social relations of production or of classes. No mention is made of the way that the factors and relations of production combine to form a distinctive system or mode of production, varying from one historical epoch to another. No mention is made of imperialism as a logical phase of capitalism.<sup>87</sup>

Although Rodney's criticism was directed at those he called "bourgeois scholars", it remains relevant in discussions about the work of AJR. In short (and as I illustrate later on in this section), AJR, in their narrow focus on socioeconomic change implicitly advocate the view that one set of institutions, the Eurocentric type, are the panacea for socioeconomic progress in all contexts.

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<sup>87</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, transcript from 6<sup>th</sup> reprint, 1983; transcribed by Joaquin Arriola, 22. <http://abahlali.org/files/3295358-walter-rodney.pdf>. This is the transcribed version of the original, found on the internet.

### Lack of Criticism on the Logic of RF Thesis

Any attempt to understand socioeconomic change in Africa, in the context of wider social processes and institutions is complicated less by the diversity of Africa and its peoples, and more by the methodological diversity and approaches within the literature – particularly the conceptual differences between quantitative oriented economic historians such as AJR on the one hand, and qualitative minded economic historians, anthropologists and sociologists on the other.

As a result of these conceptual and methodological differences, I find it important to state at the outset that I am not sympathetic to the econometric criticism of AJR popular in the NIE literature - because regardless of whether the choice of variable ‘x’ is objectionable, and even if variable ‘y’ or ‘z’ is preferred for econometric analysis or another statistical treatment of the data besides correlation or regression is preferred, it is always from a theoretical hypothesis that empirical and statistical research is undertaken. Without theories, economists and economic historians would find it impossible to carry out empirical research, just as a painter would find it impossible to paint without a background. Thus a critical interrogation of the logic underpinning the development of theoretical hypothesis (for statistical testing) is not only fundamental but necessary in economics and economic history.<sup>88</sup>

A similar point has been made by Alvin So when he observes that:

Economists use theories to help them define what needs to be studied, and to guide them in sharpening research questions and in deciding what evidence is necessary to support their arguments. In this respect theories are very powerful research tools. In addition, theories lead researchers to adopt certain methodologies, attract them to examine certain data sets and influence them to draw certain conclusions and policy implications...For these reasons theories demand loyalty. When researchers have immersed themselves in a particular theoretical perspective, they tend to develop an “ethnocentric” outlook, thinking that their own theoretical perspective is the very best in the field.<sup>89</sup>

Theories do not only attempt to explain, but they also define and shape economic reality. Likewise, it is on the back of a theoretical hypothesis that AJR proceeded with their statistical tests and arrived at their policy recommendations.

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<sup>88</sup> Bernhard Kittel, “A Crazy Methodology? On the Limits of Macro-Quantitative Social Science Research”, *International Sociology* 21, no 5, (2006), 647–677.

<sup>89</sup> Alvin So, *Social Change and Development*, (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 11.

Gareth Austin, in his criticism of AJR, has noted that the majority of the critics of the RF thesis adopted the macro-econometric approach of the original authors. In the critique I provide below, I do not criticise the RF thesis on quantitative grounds. Rather, I focus on the logic of the hypothesis itself, and, attempt to identify some of the assumptions which underpin its policy implications.<sup>90</sup> Particularly, I interrogate the objectiveness of their policy recommendations and the origins of historical progress, which they assume to be European or to reflect a reaction to some impact, some diffusion, from Europe. I find it necessary to take such a direction because although there exists some quantitative criticism of the RF thesis, there is in my view, a relative lack of criticism on the logic and policy implication of the thesis itself.

### Some Criticisms of the RF Thesis

It is important to recognize that the first layer of AJR's argument, the CO thesis; by anchoring socioeconomic progress in colonialism, is externalist in focus, and so, is in this regard similar to the dependency position (discussed in chapter 2). On the other hand, the second layer of their argument, forcefully underlined in the policy implication of the RF thesis; attributes economic growth to European property rights institutions – this is not only a unilinear and mechanistic reading of history, it is also internalist, and in my opinion, shares a lot in common with previously criticised assumptions of the modernization perspective (discussed in chapter 3). The criticism which I offer in this section has more to do with the latter part of their argument (property rights) than the former (colonial origins).

#### 1. “Eurocentric Diffusionism” and Progress

Between 1950 and the early 60s, the modernization perspective offered numerous hypotheses on the supposed traditional-modern nexus between Third World and Western countries. The commonly upheld view was that in order for Third World regions to progress socioeconomically, they necessarily had to follow in the footsteps of the West – because, the relative material success, as well as the technological achievements of the West, proved the inherent correctness of taking such a direction. There was no room for an alternative direction independent of the path taken by the West, which became the universal. Suggestions of alternative modes or notions of socioeconomic progress in this period were typically viewed as irrational and constraining. Moreover, there was silence on the role of imperialism, power,

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<sup>90</sup> Austin, “The ‘Reversal of Fortune’ Thesis”, 1003.

and the negative effects of the external environment and relationships on socioeconomic progress. The positive effects of external relationships was however emphasized.

The modernization perspective considered socioeconomic transformation in Africa from a Western gaze. It was dominated, to a large extent, by American intellectuals, who regarded traditional values, institutions, and beliefs of Third World societies as constraining factors, and as “cultural blockages” in the progress endeavour. This habit of mind is what Blaut has termed as “Eurocentric diffusionism”. According to him:

Eurocentric diffusionism is the explicit or implicit view that social evolution in general occurs first in Europe, or western Europe, or the West, and then diffuses outwards to the rest of the world. .Eurocentric diffusionism is a crucial, central part of mainstream capitalist thought; it is the basic rationale for colonialism and neo-colonialism. The foundation of capitalist ideology is the set of beliefs which rationalizes capitalist class relations and the exploitation of labour, and diffusionism is the first ideological storey built upon this foundation: it rationalizes the external portion of capitalism, the political and intellectual dominance of Third World areas and the super exploitation of Third World labour.<sup>91</sup>

Consequently, some of these intellectuals sought to promote economic growth and socioeconomic progress by discouraging Africans from maintaining such blockages, or conversely, by offering various proofs that the Western path was the only rational choice available to an independent Africa.<sup>92</sup> The point has been made that the modernisation perspective was closely related to the geo-political thinking of the West, particularly American intellectuals, especially, during the period of the Cold War (1947-1990). Prah has, for example, made the point that:

A not so subliminal subtext of modernization theory was to present a paradigm of development that is opposed to the socialist model of development that some post-colonial African countries were attracted to. Whether individual researchers were aware of this political agenda or not is not the issue here. The issue is a larger one. Anyone, who reads one of these works carefully whether it is about the lack of ‘achievement need’, ‘profit motivation’, or ‘modern and universalism’ as opposed to ‘traditional particularism’ or formalized and impersonal rules of governance’ in the

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<sup>91</sup> Blaut, *The National Question*, 30.

<sup>92</sup> With regards to regions in Asia and in the Middle East, in particular, Edward Said, in his path-breaking book has exposed the mode and record of Eurocentric diffusionism and othering. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

traditional societies will know that the only kind of modernization these folk were talking about is Western capitalist modernization.<sup>93</sup>

Thus one can observe proponents of the modernization perspective such as Walt Rostow, explicitly promoting a non-communist viewpoint of progress and societal development. Other proponents of modernization, including David McClelland and Simon Lipset proposed that Third World countries eschew their traditional values and indigenous institutions for Western ones, which were in any case, historically and empirically proven, to be more suited for progress. We observe McClelland for instance, advocating for the injection of ‘Western achievement values’ as a means of promoting entrepreneurship, capitalist development and so socioeconomic progress, while Lipset suggests that Third World countries need to follow in the political direction of the West (the USA in particular), establishing identical political institutions, before the ideals of secularism and democracy (which were also Western, by the way) could be considered sustainable for these regions.<sup>94</sup> Upon reflection, the aforementioned conclusions of McClelland and Lipset are little different from the policy implication of AJRs 2002 RF thesis, which makes the proposal that European private property rights institutions are responsible for socioeconomic progress across time and space.

It is almost an impossible task to dispose of Eurocentric diffusionism, one of the deepest, most pervasive and most crucial habits of mind in contemporary socioeconomic thought. Thus I have had to content myself with a more accessible target: AJR’s presentation of socioeconomic progress as the diffusion of European private property rights institutions in their RF thesis.

Is the RF thesis similar to the modernization perspective? How so? And does it uphold the same assumptions about Third World societies as described above? Furthermore, does it by way of a policy recommendation, promote European private property rights institutions as a panacea? Or am I misreading the AJR study? That said, the question of how – whether or not, the RF thesis shares underlying assumptions with the modernization perspective can be answered in two ways, one can either perform a close contextual analysis of AJR’s work or better yet, one may simply look at some of the reactions to their study. I opt for the latter way

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<sup>93</sup> Prah, “Catch as Catch Can: Obstacles to Sustainable Development in Africa” in Osita Afoaku and Okechukwu Ukaga (eds.), *Sustainable Development in Africa: A Multifaceted Challenge*. (Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>94</sup> Walt Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: a non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: University Press, 1960), David McClelland, “Business Drive and National Achievement” in Amitai Etzioni and Eva Etzioni (eds.), *Social Change: Sources, Patterns and Consequences* (New York: Basic Books Publishers, 1964), 165-178, and Seymour Lipset, *Political Man: the Social Bases of Politics* (New York: Double Day, 1963), 27-63.

out, for it is straight forward and also provides the reader with multiple perspectives on the impact of the RF thesis in scholarly circles.

At least two academic articles, one by Austin and the other, by David Albouy, interpret the RF thesis as a policy recommendation promoting European private property rights institutions. Albouy in his criticism of the RF thesis, notes that:

AJR in a seminal article (2001), have reinvigorated debate over the relationship between property rights and economic growth...AJR endeavours to determine the causal effect of institutions that protect property rights, measured by risk of capital expropriation, on economic performance...this endeavour is complicated by the fact that the correlation between institutional and economic measures may reflect the reverse influence of economic growth on institutions or the simultaneous influence of omitted variables on both economic output and institutions.<sup>95</sup>

In the above, Albouy notes the relationship between economic growth and property rights as a feature of AJR's work. Furthermore, his acknowledgement of a possible omitted variable bias and reverse causality, is not very different from the argument I advance in this dissertation on the neglect and omission of informal institutions by AJR.

Similarly, Austin has observed that:

Their (AJR) use of econometrics to investigate and ultimately support the proposition that the distribution of income among Europe's former colonies is primarily a function of where Europeans were and were not able and willing to settle in sufficient numbers to inscribe their characteristic institutions, *especially regarding property rights* (emphasis added), as opposed to extracting rents from indigenous populations has provoked great interest among economic historians.<sup>96</sup>

In lieu of a detailed contextual analysis, I offer the above two reactions as empirical evidence of the RF policy implication and how it promotes European private property rights institutions as a panacea for economic growth. The RF thesis can be interpreted as upholding a civilising/modernizing mission of Eurocentric theorists. Specifically, it is a theory which is characterised by what Blaut has referred to as "Eurocentric diffusionism". This is particularly evident in its policy implication that Third World regions adopt and copy western institutions to progress. Moreover, AJR erroneously present socioeconomic transformation as a dichotomous, mechanistic, unilinear movement from a backward society to a civilized society

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<sup>95</sup> David Albouy, "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: an Empirical Investigation: Comment", *American Economic Review* 102, no 6 (2012): 3062

<sup>96</sup> Austin, "The 'Reversal of Fortune' Thesis", 998.

by way of a transfer of institutions from a 'superior' to an 'inferior' society, whilst completely disregarding the negative effects of external factors, the social context, as well as, power relations.

## 2. Formal Institution Bias

Consider the following conversation between Tunisian post-Colonial theorist, Albert Memmi, and Walter Rodney. Rodney quotes the passage below from Memmi's seminal work, *The Coloniser and the Colonised*, wherein Memmi discusses the general effect of colonialism on the colonised. Memmi writes that:

The most serious blow suffered by the colonised is being removed from history and from the community. Colonisation usurps any free role in either war or peace, every decision contributing to his destiny and that of the world, and all cultural and social responsibility.<sup>97</sup>

Of which Rodney provides the following as a response:

Sweeping as that statement may initially appear, it is entirely true. The removal from history follows logically from the loss of power which colonialism represented. The power to act independently is the guarantee to participate actively and consciously in history. To be colonised is to be removed from history, except in the most passive sense. A striking illustration of the fact that colonial Africa was a passive object is seen in its attraction for white anthropologists, who came to study 'primitive society'. Colonialism determined that Africans were no more makers of history than were beetles objects to be looked at under a microscope and examined for unusual features....The negative impact of colonialism in political terms was quite dramatic. Overnight, African political states lost their power, independence and meaning — irrespective of whether they were big empires or small polities. Certain traditional rulers were kept in office, and the formal structure of some kingdoms was partially retained, but the substance of political life was quite different. Political power had passed into the hands of foreign overlords. Of course, numerous African states in previous centuries had passed through the cycle of growth and decline. But colonial rule was different.<sup>98</sup>

Whether one agrees with Memmi and Rodney or not, it is obvious from the conversation between them that colonialism had a myriad number of effects on the colonised, especially in

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 353.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*,

the context of power, socioeconomic relations, and agency. In a nutshell, what they emphasize is the informal dimension of institutional change and transformation.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, this emphasis on the informal, as well as the idea of being removed from history and the lack of development of a type of critical agency, resonates strongly with numerous post-colonial, Pan-Africanist literature on the effect of colonialism on African peoples and is a perspective which I follow up and emphasize in this dissertation.<sup>100</sup>

As I have previously noted, despite the acknowledgement of the effect of colonialism on informal institutions, a common trap of contemporary NIE research is that it is biased towards explaining socioeconomic change as solely a function of formal institutions. In this AJR are no exception. Whether the bias is in the quantitative methodology that they adopt, or it is in AJR's own subjectivity is beside the point. The fact is that by explaining away economic growth as a parameter of formal institutions, they omit and disregard the role of informal institutions in institutional change as well as transfer in Africa. Furthermore, what really accounts for the success of European property rights in some regions but not in others? Is it the intrinsic growth enhancing characteristic of private European property rights institutions as AJR suggest? Or does it have to do with some other hitherto unmentioned informal institutional factor? A close reading of AJR's own evidence may reveal other interpretations.

According to AJR, the regions where Europeans settled long enough to inscribe their characteristic property rights institutions are today developed and vice versa. But one can pose the following question: might the presence of European settler populations in a colony such as North America or in Australia, and the informal institutional links, as well as socioeconomic relations of these populations with the colonial centre be a determining factor? Berry has made the following observation about agrarian change in the British colonies which provides some insight:

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<sup>99</sup> The formal dimension, however, is not lost to them. Rodney, further along, notes that: "In the final analysis, perhaps the most important principle of colonial education was that of capitalist individualism... However, the capitalist system then went on to champion and protect the rights of the individual property owners against the rights of the mass of exploited workers and peasants. When capitalism had its impact on Africa in the colonial period, the idea of individualism was already in its reactionary phase. It was no longer serving to liberate the majority but rather to enslave the majority for the benefit of a few".

<sup>100</sup> See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995); Fanon, *Black Skin*; George Panyin Hagan, "Nyim Dze Nsee Dze: Culture Affirmation and Transvaluation of Values", First Kobina Sekyi Memorial Lecture, (Busia Hall, University of Ghana, 14 November, 2009; Amilcar Cabral, "National Culture and liberation", in *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral*, (Africa Information Service, 1973).

The financial viability of a colonial regime was likely to be both threatened and enhanced by African participation in cash cropping and wage employment. European capital accumulation depended on the generation of taxable income and wealth. While Europeans needed to enable Africans to generate wealth to a certain degree so that they were able to be consumers, African prosperity also threatened European profit. Land ownership and cheap labour were the major means of production needed by European capitalists, however, discontent and rebellion within the African population also had to be subdued. The ability of Africans to pay taxes and buy European goods increased with their income, therefore colonial administrators had to walk a straight and narrow path between *encouraging* (emphasis added) Africans to become involved in labour and commodity markets, whilst also trying to keep them from becoming economically independent and autonomous.<sup>101</sup>

And so, from the above passage, it can be inferred that the colonialist sought to keep African labour and produce cheap, as well as minimize the ability of Africans to influence the terms of trade. When contrasting settler and non-settler colonies, it is important to ask the following questions - Did the colonial centre attempt to keep European settler labour and produce cheap? And was there perhaps an attempt to minimize the European settlers' ability to influence the terms of trade in the same manner as the African? What might be the possible effects thereof of such social relations on the historical process of socioeconomic change and capital accumulation on settler and non-settler colonies? Questions such as this can only be answered through an analysis of informal institutions, which AJR unfortunately omit.

Perhaps the historic association of European private property rights institutions with economic growth is less a result of an 'intrinsic growth enhancing characteristic' as AJR attest, but, rather, more a function of the peculiar set of informal institutions and the social relations of production, specifically the role of power and its spheres of influence on the terms of exchange and the valuation of labour and produce in previously colonised societies.

### 3. African Agency and Tunnel History.

Consider the following three criticisms of the RF thesis by Austin:

The first is the quality of the evidence, especially for the baseline of ca.1500. While empirical evidence exists for African economies around that date, it is very limited, and the best of it is not quantitative. ...the second issue is historical agency. On the

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<sup>101</sup> Berry, "Hegemony on a Shoestring: Indirect Rule and Access to Agricultural Land", *Africa* 62, no 3 (1992), 330.

face of it, the ‘reversal of fortune’ thesis runs counter to a central theme of African historiography: the fundamental importance of Africans as makers of African history. ...the third issue is the most far reaching. This is the problem of what might be called ‘the compression of history’.<sup>102</sup>

As Austin makes known, he is primarily concerned with the third criticism, which is to him the most far-reaching, “the compression of history”. And so, he only glosses over the second, and the first, the problem of historical agency and quality of evidence. His only discussion of agency is a brief argument to show that AJR have ignored ‘the repeatedly demonstrated capacity of Africans to contribute crucially to shaping their own economic destinies’.<sup>103</sup> For Austin, AJR effectively deny Africa of historical agency under colonial rule – in their assumption that Europeans could simply impose institutions of their choice (whether private property rights or not), without coercion, compromise or revolt. Thus we observe him writing the following about the RF thesis:

They (AJR) see African institutions as imposed or maintained by the choice of colonial governments. Yet it is possible to read AJRs inverse correlation between European mortality rates and the adoption of ‘European’ institutions in more than one way. As they present it, in densely populated colonies the Europeans chose not to try to impose the kind of institutions they had at home, preferring rent seeking instead...But an alternative interpretation, which also fits their statistics, and fits the case of British West Africa and 19<sup>th</sup> century India, is that colonial rulers initially sought to introduce private property rights, but felt obliged to adapt to the economic and political behaviour of their subjects...In Ghana and Nigeria, indigenous property rights systems proved supportive of economic growth in the context concerned, leading colonial regimes to conclude that economic as well as political efficiency was best served by supporting rather than abolishing existing property rights systems....colonial officials were nervous about this force of change from within the economy, implemented by African agency. Their policies generally sought to slow, but ultimately accommodated it.<sup>104</sup>

It can hardly be denied that European political and economic control spread out over the Americas from the sixteenth to eighteenth century, that most of Asia and Africa were conquered in the nineteenth century, and that this process of colonial and semi-colonial expansion produced not only a flow of wealth inwards, towards Europe, but also a reciprocal flow in the outward direction, a flow of European populations, European colonial political forms,

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<sup>102</sup> Austin, “The ‘Reversal of Fortune’ Thesis”, 1110.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*,

rationalities and European commodities. All of this is real diffusion, in both directions, and it needs to be explained. But the explanation need not invoke some innate progressiveness of European culture, such that it would be considered somehow natural to believe that Europe was more advanced and was progressing more rapidly than the non-European world at each epoch in world history and down to the present.

To an extent, I agree with Austin. But his tone may be taken to imply that the colonial authorities were an altruistic force in their dealings with indigenous peoples. I would like to emphasize, however, that when Austin observes that the colonial administrators “felt obliged to adapt to the economic and political behaviour of their subjects in Ghana and Nigeria and other parts”, it was not because of a sense of altruism, but because it was in line with their own narrow economic interests.<sup>105</sup>

Indirect rule, a system of power and colonial governance, distorted indigenous institutions and created supposedly static, geographically defined “traditional” institutions and customary laws where they were none. Regarding indirect rule, Blaut has remarked that through indirect rule, the importance of private property in land in India, “was a body of fact which the British government and the East India Company deliberately suppressed, because, in essence, non-private land could be aggregated to the Crown and thereafter sold or otherwise used to produce revenue. Much of the same legal trickery was performed in other colonies”.<sup>106</sup>

Mamdani, has exposed the mode and record of indirect rule. African chiefs, for instance, would be appointed by colonial officials to govern communities and recruit labour. This relegation of agency was efficient for political and administrative control of the colony. However, where legitimate chiefs were not willing to collude with colonial interests, others would be put in their place, and in some cases whole tribes were created in service of the colonial project. This was particularly evident in Northern Rhodesia. Out of thirty odd Bemba chiefs scattered across the territory, only four were designated native authorities by British colonial officers, the rest and the significant majority were designated as secondary and trivial to the colonial project. This continent-wide colonial restructuring has been described by Mamdani as “define and rule”.<sup>107</sup>

Indirect rule, particularly the historical process of define and rule, allowed for abuse of power

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<sup>105</sup> For the colonial project to be a success, Europeans needed access to land and cheap African labour. Using many different approaches – first direct rule and then indirect rule, Africans were dispossessed of land, and forced into the money economy as cheap labour. Wages needed to be high enough to enable Africans to consume European goods and pay taxes, whilst low enough to ensure large surplus extraction for Europeans. This was also in colonial interests because it prevented the economic autonomy of Africans.

<sup>106</sup> Blaut, *The National Question*, 173.

<sup>107</sup> Mamdani, *Define and Rule* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

by chiefs in making decisions that affected the entire community without consultation. As a result, chiefs became less accountable to the people they claimed to represent and more accountable to the colonial power. It also provoked much conflict over land rights, jurisdictions, chiefly ranking and succession. Thus, the argument goes, that political and social structures that were once democratic and anarchic began to take on hierarchical and authoritarian characteristics.<sup>108</sup> In a different context and in an earlier publication, Berry has similarly observed that:

Colonial efforts to exercise hegemony on a shoestring did not block the commercialization of agricultural production and resource mobilization in Africa, but did shape the way in which rights of access to land and labour were defined and transacted, and the way people used resources to establish and defend rights of access...as a result, property rights and labour relations were neither transformed according to the English model nor frozen in anachronistic “communal” forms, but instead became subjects of perpetual contest ...Under indirect rule, British officials sought to make rights of access contingent on people’s social identity. At the same time, Africans sought to negotiate new *social identities* (emphasis added) in order to take advantage of commercial or political opportunities. The combined result was a series of ongoing debates about how rules of access were linked to social identity and vice versa.<sup>109</sup>

What I take from the passages by Austin and Berry is that socioeconomic change and the transformations of institutions in Africa, was very much related to social identities, as well as social relations of power under indirect rule. Thus, indirect rule distorted indigenous institutions, both formal and informal, in a myriad number of ways. Much of this distortion was enabling to colonial interests and agendas. And so, we have the interaction between the coloniser and the colonised, on the one side, and on the other, we have a form of class struggle within the colonised groups – usually between colonial appointed chieftains and natives, and, those who were not connected to the colonial administration.

It is important that as economic historians, we recognize in this confluence of socioeconomic relations, evidence of African agency. However, equally important is the identification and differentiation of the types of agency formed by the colonised under indirect rule. Whatever agency historians would like to ascribe to Africans under the colonial situation, it is vital that we show whether it was a form positive or negative agency? Generally speaking, did agency

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<sup>108</sup> Erik Green, “Indirect Rule and Colonial Intervention: Chiefs and Agrarian Change in Nyasaland, ca 1933 to the Early 1950s”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 44, no 2 (2011), 252.

<sup>109</sup> Berry, *No Condition is Permanent*, 40.

under indirect rule suit broader African interests (positive agency), the colonial interest or the interest of a small native minority (negative agency)? And what may have affected the adoption of one type of agency over the other? The RF thesis, in my reading of it, makes no distinction between different types of agency.

Regarding the aforementioned issue of agency and indirect rule, it is important to reflect on the following remarks by Austin:

The frequent complementarity of economic growth and economic rent should perhaps prompt us to greater self-consciousness about the historical specificity of our own time and thinking; and even of its imperial antecedents. AJR's definition of 'good economic institutions' not as those that generate economic growth but as – in effect – the kinds of institutions that they personally like, recalls the Victorian enthusiasm for largely the same institutions (private property rights and limited government), though AJR add 'relatively equal access to economic resources to a broad cross section of society'....While AJR do not espouse the self-confidence of the nineteenth century exponents of British property rights imperialism (Hopkins), many others in our own period do. It is salutary to recall that, only a few generations ago (at most), property rights existed in people as well as things.<sup>110</sup>

That said, it is my contention that AJR find evolutionary causes of historical progress only in the historical space-time column which embraces Europe. Thus, they fail to notice larger processes and fall short of comprehending socioeconomic evolution on a world scale. Therefore, they suffer from a historical tunnel vision or tunnel history. This does not only lead them to ahistorical conclusions, but it is also a real point of controversy in the social sciences and in historical studies.

On this score, my own view is that while progress, broadly defined, is historically insistent, its trajectory is erratic even while it registers cumulatively. Progress thus is uneven and spiral, defying unilinear formulae and preconceptions. Rather, it advances in fits and jerks, sometimes very hastily and sometimes at a slow pace. Over time, it brings that which is new, distinctive and often times contradictory. Sometimes it may resurrect the old for present purposes.

Similar to the proponents of the modernization perspective who succumb to notions of Eurocentric diffusionism, AJR assume that progress is unilinear and that European institutions sit atop the hierarchy of progress. This unidirectional turn in their logic is evident in the policy implication of the RF thesis. Given that they empirically and 'historically prove' that economic

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<sup>110</sup> Austin, "The 'Reversal of Fortune' Thesis", 1020.

growth is a function of good formal colonial institutions, what are historically non-settler economies to do, moving forward, but emulate and adopt Eurocentric property rights institutions? Indeed, it is surprising that despite the fact that some proponents of the dependency perspective (which I discuss in Chapter 2) have previously criticised modernization on the logic of unilinear progress and Eurocentric diffusionism, it seems to be rearing its head again in contemporary studies of socioeconomic transformation.

By restricting progress to Eurocentric institutions, the policy implication of the RF thesis is that it discourages non-western countries with different cultural systems, from proceeding along their own independent line of property rights institutions, even if as yet, undefined.

#### 4. Is Economics an Objective Science?

The RF thesis and the policy implication thereof makes obvious an often marginalized discussion in economics - whether at all the intellectual tradition has the objective characteristic of a science. Regarding this, my view is that economics is by all means not an objective discipline. In my view, its level of scientific objectivity cannot be compared to a subject body such as physics. Moreover, the historical tunnel vision of the RF thesis, in my opinion, is substantive evidence that economics and its associated disciplines are not at all objective. In fact, it is my contention that AJR arrive at their conclusion and policy implication with little critical thought on how it would be interpreted, precisely because of the mistaken view that economics, and its intellectual traditions such as NIE, are scientific disciplines, with a set of objective, politically neutral assumptions, as well as policy recommendations.

Along a similar line of criticism, Susanne Bodenheimer points to the “ideology of developmentalism” that has suffused the literature of economics. According to her, the literature on socioeconomic change has suffered from four epistemological sins: (1) belief in the possibility of an objective social science free of ideology (2) belief in the cumulative quality of knowledge (3) Belief in universal laws of social science (4) the export of these false beliefs to the third world countries. For Bodenheimer, these epistemological sins have led not only to theoretical errors but moral and ethical sins as well. It is her contention that such errors result in the neglect of a crucial element of world history, oppression, foreign domination in international affairs and social relations of which the global economy is at the centre. According to her, while development scholars have focused on internal traits such as traditional values, lack of productive investments and their relations to economic growth, they have failed

to pay attention to the dynamics of social relations such as the history and social impact of colonialism.<sup>111</sup>

Also, Paul Romer, recently pointed out that macroeconomics and development economics, in particular, plagued by mathematics, is failing to progress and contribute meaningfully to the debates about socioeconomic change. Romer compares debates among economists to those between sixteenth century advocates of heliocentrism and geocentrism. Mathematics, he acknowledges, can help economists to clarify their thinking and reasoning. But the ubiquity of mathematical theory in economics also has serious downsides in that, it creates a high barrier to entry for those who want to participate in the professional dialogue; it makes checking someone's work excessively laborious and worst of all is the fact that it imbues economic theory with unearned empirical authority.<sup>112</sup>

Following on from Bodenheimer and Romer, one can ask, is the empirical authority of the RF thesis earned? This may seem like a trivial matter, but it is very meaningful, not in the least because the quality of the empirical data which AJR use is questionable, but more importantly because the RF thesis has wide-reaching implications. Furthermore, it is important because AJR omit informal institutions from their analysis and hold unilinear assumptions about socioeconomic change.

### Conclusion: The RF Thesis, an Instrumental Use of History

The policy implication of the RF thesis can be criticised from various angles. From one angle, it can be seen as being biased towards the formal set of institutions. From another, it may be suggested that it suffers from historical tunnel vision. A consequence of this tunnel history, the argument goes, is that it disregards African agency, as well as, the search for alternative perspectives and frameworks of socioeconomic change by non-Western cultures to the backroom. In my criticism, I have also suggested that confusion arises in economics and its allied traditions, such as NIE, because of illusions of objectivity and ideological neutrality. I have suggested that economics, because it has an ethical and political foundation, it encompasses assumptions which are necessarily more subjective than objective (even if

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<sup>111</sup> Susanne Bodenheimer, "The Ideology of Developmentalism", *Berkley Journal of Sociology* 15, no 3 (1970), 95-137.

<sup>112</sup> Paul Romer, "Mathiness in the Theory of Economic Growth", *American Economic Review* 105, no 5 (2015), 89-93.

economists like to pretend otherwise). From this perspective, liberal Western economic theory might also be considered as an ideology.

The mere fact that something has happened a certain number of times in the past causes one to expect that it will happen again. AJR in their reading of history find an association between what they identify as European private property rights institutions and economic growth. For this reason, they conclude that it is such institutions which are responsible for economic growth across time and space. Even if AJR's claims prove to be true, it is imperative that one distinguishes between the following two notions when thinking about historical causality – the first is the fact that past uniformities cause expectations of the future; and the second is whether there is any reasonable ground for giving weight to past expectations in the present, especially after the question of their validity has been raised?

I would like to suggest that the only reason that AJR conclude that European private property rights institutions are associated with economic growth and so progress, is that according to them, such institutions have operated hitherto, so far as their knowledge of the past enables them to judge. Specifically, such institutions are a past uniformity which they expect to continue into the present and into the future. But the question I am posing, however, is that do any number of cases of a uniformity being fulfilled in the past afford evidence that it will be fulfilled in the future? If not; and particularly, if we notice that the said uniformity has some faulty assumptions - historical tunnel vision, formal institutions bias and that the socioeconomic context itself may have changed - it becomes plain that we have no ground, moving forward, to expect European property rights institutions to be the historical cause of economic growth.

Thus it is to be observed that such expectations are only probable. AJR, it seems to me, are advancing a narrative which is favourable of the view that European private property rights institutions are more probable (relative to other types of institutions) to be associated with economic growth. And so, they offer a historical argument in favour of this view. For them, it is these institutions which are most likely to be associated with socioeconomic progress, so, they propose it as a policy implication in their rendition of history.

The approach AJR take in developing the RF thesis can be described as an instrumental use of history. One cannot fault them, however, for using history instrumentally. History, after all, is an inevitable component of argumentation. Some other term besides 'instrumental use' might prove more convenient later on, but for the moment I want to suggest that it is very difficult, if

not impossible, to open a discussion about anything, without invoking history in some way. A further, more direct point can be made that history is an inevitable component of economic argumentation. I think that this latter point is generalizable, and provides some insight on the RF thesis and how it contrasts with the Pan-Africanist ideal of self-determination.

Since the past provides us with the experience necessary to understand the present, the past necessarily becomes a topic of conversation. In such an instance, history becomes a sort of shadow philosophy; a set of exemplary episodes that demonstrate certain principles, which then can be invoked to discuss current situations – it is my view that this is exactly what AJR do with the RF thesis. Since this kind of history is really more philosophy than it is history, it is less important that the history actually be gotten right (however much it might irk some historians when clichés and myths are repeated *ad nauseam*). Furthermore, all socioeconomic policies (corporate or government), to be legitimate (to shareholders or to constituents), in the present context, must have some rationale as to why they are expected to be effective, which convey certain implicit or explicit principles. What the RF thesis does in this regard is that it provides a rationale as to why the adoption of European private property rights institutions will be effective for economic growth in Africa, and elsewhere, which is viewed as lacking in growth.

It is imperative, however, that the critical reader of AJR note that history, inevitably, has instrumental uses and purposes. That said, the RF thesis in its historical tunnel vision and formal institutional bias, contradicts the pan-Africanist position of self-determination, which is built on a multilinear and pluralistic paradigm. It also neglects, as I have tried to show, a much emphasized constraining effect of colonialism on informal institutions.

My criticism of AJR's RF thesis serves two purposes. The first is to illustrate to the student of African economic history, the need to be aware of the instrumental uses of history and the importance of pruning as well as a redefining historical narratives such as the RF thesis. The second point is that socioeconomic change is linked to both formal and informal institutions, but is not reducible to either. More specifically, the realm of culture and world view is, of course, linked to the economic and the political, but it is not by any means reducible to either. Karl Marx in the 1859 preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, writes that when one studies the transformations wrought by social revolution:

A distinction should always be made between the *material transformation* of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of a

natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in short, *ideological forms* (emphasis added) in which men become conscious of the conflict over production and fight it out.<sup>113</sup>

It is necessary to stress the point that it is through these “ideological forms” that a specific group or class alliance, at certain historical conjunctures, exercises over the whole social formation that more enduring – because less obtrusive – form of authority called “coloniality”. Moreover at the height of the war of national liberation from Portuguese colonialism, Cabral, repeatedly insisted on the intensification of cultural-ideological resistance, contending that success in this realm could ultimately help to reverse defeats in other areas – economic, political or military.<sup>114</sup> The realm of cultural subjectivity is thus critical in the discussion about socioeconomic change because it is where the identity of individuals and groups is at stake, and where the lenses of perception, standards of evaluation, motivation, aspirations, structure of incentives, agency and order in its broadest meaning is formed and contested.

Behind the relegation of informal institutions to insignificance in the RF thesis is an implied assumption that any discourse must be fixated on formal institutions to be considered relevant in the study of socioeconomic change. This is an artificial circumscription of the multiple domains, both formal and informal, material transformation and ideological form (immaterial) that must constitute socioeconomic change. An analysis of formal institutions as such does not and cannot exhaust the implication and meanings of socioeconomic change in Africa. There are other areas worthy of investigation, and they need not be obviously formal or material to be considered relevant. More fundamentally, the assumption that any transformation of an informal institution depends solely on a basic restructuring and change in the associated formal institution can no longer be taken as an absolute.

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<sup>113</sup> Eugene Kamenka, *The Portable Karl Marx* (New York: Penguin, 1983) 160.

<sup>114</sup> Amilcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings*. trans M. Wolfers (London: Heinemann, 1979)

## Chapter 2: Dependency Theory and Self-Determination

The first chapter raises a number of questions concerning NIE, particularly the policy implication of RF thesis. The RF thesis, although not fully representative of NIE, is nevertheless important because of its present popularity, as well as the numerous reactions it has solicited from economic historians and economists alike. Furthermore, it is interesting to study and contrast it with the Pan-Africanist ideal of self-determination because of its debatable policy implication concerning European property rights institutions. It can be added that the RF thesis, simply because it is more recent, is representative of an attempt to synthesize or counter old ideas from dependency and modernization perspectives of socioeconomic change. However, in doing so, it has also inherited some theoretical misconceptions which I highlight in this chapter and the next.

The connection between the RF thesis and earlier perspectives such as dependency and modernization are necessarily complex. Notwithstanding the fact that many old prejudices were transferred and new ones added, the present context is of course radically different. One can, however, interpret the RF thesis as a return to Eurocentric diffusionism, a characteristic which it perhaps shares with modernization theory and its social Darwinist perspective on socioeconomic evolution. At least such an interpretation of the RF thesis is unavoidable from a pan-Africanist philosophical disposition.

That said, the problem of Eurocentric diffusionism in theoretical perspectives of socioeconomic change is not new. In fact, it was a topic of intense and often emotive debate running up to the emergence and popularity of socialism in Africa of the 1960s as well as dependency theory in the 1970s. Tanzanian historian, Arnold Temu, for instance, wrote in 1975 that:

Whether we like it or not social science is value-loaded and so long as Africa continues to rely on foreign social scientists, it will continue to run the risk of unwittingly entrenching the very foreign culture and ideologies which it is seeking to supplant.<sup>115</sup>

Moving beyond the broad area of social science, Temu has also been critical of historical narratives about Africa, and, has even questioned the role of Africanist scholarship in

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<sup>115</sup> Arnold Temu, "Reflections on the Role of Social Scientists in Africa," *International Social Science Journal* XXVII, (1975), 191.

reproducing and entrenching Eurocentrism in African historiography.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, Nigerian political economist, Claude Ake, asked the question more directly in 1979. Although he was writing about Nigeria, it is my contention that the question he posed can be generalised to the rest of Africa:

Why does Nigeria accept or tolerate a social science which is alienated from its environment and all but incapable of scientific development or of advancing significantly the struggle against underdevelopment?<sup>117</sup>

Hettne provides the following as a measured response to Ake, which I find worthwhile to reproduce:

First, the educated higher strata of Nigerian society have internalized the values of Nigeria's colonizers. Second, most Nigerian social scientists and economists alike have been trained in Western social sciences which implies they have a vested interest in the continuation of this type of training and research. Third, in so far as Western social science propagates the value of maintaining the existing social order, it is defended by the ruling class.<sup>118</sup>

If we are to treat Hettne's response to Ake as sacrosanct, the state of knowledge production in Nigeria, at least in the 1970s, was strikingly similar to the social situation which was in place under indirect rule in parts of Africa in the early twentieth century, wherein certain privileged classes of African societies colluded with and maintained coloniality and Western hegemony (recall the debate between Blyden and Crummell in Liberia). Even if Hettne's explanation is questionable, it remains true, none the less, that the division of society into social classes has often been the source of inequality, and not only economic, but, also the intellectual and epistemic dominance of a particular class grouping has very often been the basis of political rule and power.<sup>119</sup>

The statements of Temu and Ake are examples of the general problem of epistemic imperialism and the struggle for intellectual autonomy, which according to Hettne coincided with the

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<sup>116</sup> Arnold Temu and Bonaventure Swai, *Historians and Africanist history: a Critique, Post-Colonial Historiography Examined* (London: Zed Books, 1981).

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Hettne, *Development Theory*, 78.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>119</sup> "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas; hence of the relations which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. Quoted in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 68.

emergence of dependency and the debate on self-reliance among African scholars, since “indigenization of development thinking is an intellectual component of self-reliant development.”<sup>120</sup> We need to remind ourselves of the fact that when we talk of Africanist scholarship, we are in fact referring invariably to Western scholarship, or at least non-African scholarship on Africa. Many western “Africanists” will regard the concerns expressed by Temu and Ake as scholastically separatist and divisive of a constituency which some would like to consider, in terms of preoccupations, activity, and tools of work, homogenous. Needless to say, this is practically homogeneity under western hegemony and coloniality. In reality, from the early beginnings of “African studies” to the present period, Western scholarship has dominated knowledge production and reproduction about Africa. In the enterprise in which both African scholars and Western scholarship on Africa are involved, as Thandika Mkandawire aptly puts it, Africanist scholars are the “gate-keepers”. I would add that Africans in this case, are gate crashers, ironically, into our own backyard.<sup>121</sup>

In this chapter on the dependency perspective of socioeconomic change, I will manoeuvre the impasse between gate-keepers and gate crashers. I provide a historical context, as well as a brief overview of the intellectual heritage of dependency so that it may be juxtaposed with my earlier criticisms of the RF thesis. More specifically, I will discuss how the formulation of dependency in Africa was related to debates about Third World development prospects (particularly, in Latin America); neo-Marxism; and the hitherto defined Pan-Africanist ideal of self-determination. Dependency did not only provide a scathing criticism of Eurocentric diffusionism and historical tunnel vision, it also provided an alternative intellectual perspective, centred in the Third World. By so doing it implied a self-reliant approach to socioeconomic thinking and the indigenization of theory.

It is acknowledged at the outset that such a brief presentation as the one undertaken in this chapter, cannot account for all the diverse currents of ideas in the dependency tradition: such as the ‘new dependency’ or ‘world systems’ perspectives. It also does not account for its criticisms. Rather, what I attempt to show in this chapter is how the dependency perspective poses a challenge to NIE - particularly the RF thesis, the assumptions it upholds, and its policy implication. I also illustrate how dependency represents efforts by Third World and African

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<sup>120</sup> Hettne, *Development Theory*, 79.

<sup>121</sup> Mkandawire, “The Social Sciences”, 26.

intellectuals to indigenize ideas about socioeconomic change as well as formulate their own frameworks for socioeconomic progress independent of the Western gaze.

### Theoretical Heritage of Dependency

A snowball sample of literature on the dependency perspective reveals that it emerged from the convergence of two major intellectual trends in the rather broad period of 1950-1980. These are the Marxist tradition and Latin American structuralism. Below, I elaborate briefly on these two intellectual trends.<sup>122</sup>

#### 1. Marxist Thought

Despite their failures, revolutions make history – in the long run. Through the avant-garde values that define their project, they make it possible for creative utopian ideas to win over minds and, eventually, achieve the supreme ambition of modernity, which is to make human beings the active subjects of their own history. These values contrast with those of what Marxist intellectual, Samir Amin, has called the “bourgeois order”, which the argument goes, promotes behaviours of passive adjustment to the so-called objective requirements of capitalist development and give complete power to the economic alienation that underlies this submission.<sup>123</sup> The success (or failure) of the Chinese (1946-1949) and Cuban (1953-1959) revolutions helped spread the Marxist analysis of socioeconomic change to other parts of the Third World. Between the early 60s and peaking in the 70s, the approach had attained a remarkable influence on various intellectual traditions around the world, including dependency. Furthermore, according to Aidan Foster-Carter, these political advancements gave rise to a new generation of Marxists predominantly situated in the Third World, who dubbed themselves as ‘neo-Marxists’.<sup>124</sup>

While the orthodox Marxist analysis of classes is based specifically on European experiences and emphasizes the emancipatory mission of the industrial proletariat, neo-Marxists have a more generous view of the revolutionary potential of different

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<sup>122</sup> Sampled texts include the following: Gabriel Palma, “Dependency: A Formal Theory of Underdevelopment or a Methodology for the Analysis of Concrete Situations of Underdevelopment”, *World Development* 6, no 1 (1978), 881-894; James Petras, “Dependency and World-System Theory: a Critique and New Directions”, in Ronald Chilcote (ed.) *Dependency and Marxism: Toward a Resolution of the Debate*. (Boulder, CO: Westview publishers, 1982), 148-155; Hettne, *Development Theory; So, Social Change*; David Apter, *Rethinking Development: Modernization, Dependency, and Postmodern Politics*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1987)

<sup>123</sup> Samir Amin, *The World we Wish to See: Revolutionary Objectives in the Twenty-first Century*. (New York: Monthly Review Press), 18.

<sup>124</sup> Aidan Foster Carter, “Neo-Marxist Approaches to Development and Underdevelopment”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 3, no 1 (1973), 7-33.

groups, for instance the peasantry... And so they view the possibilities of starting a revolution with greater optimism as well as emphasize the role of subjective factors as opposed to orthodox Marxists who have a somewhat deterministic emphasis on objective conditions.<sup>125</sup>

Neo-Marxism thus reflected a 'transformation of Marxist thinking from the orthodox approach, focused on the concept of development and taking a basically Eurocentric view, to another approach, which placed an emphasis on the concept of underdevelopment and expressed it as a Third World view'.<sup>126</sup> In other words, while the orthodox Marxists advocated a strategy for a two-stage revolution, that is, a bourgeois revolution before a full socialist revolution – relying on a progressive bourgeoisie to carry out the revolution; the neo-Marxists, influenced by political events in Cuba and China, argued that the Third World was ripe and ready for a socialist revolution which would ultimately place the means of production in the hands of the peasant and proletarian populations. They argued that the minority 'comprador', bourgeoisie class held divergent interests from the majority, proletariat and peasant classes, and, thus was incapable of fulfilling a liberating role. For neo-Marxists, the peasantry and the proletariat were to play the leading role.

Although I am generalizing, this is but one perspective on the evolution of neo-Marxism from Marxism. Indeed, it will be difficult to know with any certainty which theoretical strand of Marxism animated dependency, for ideas in themselves are dynamic and in a constant flux. Besides, not all Marxists (or neo-Marxists) can have, or need to have the same view. This latter point can further be amplified to imply that no product of scholarship dictates an identical reading on all interpreters of its meaning. Moreover, some controversy has arisen concerning the distinction between neo-Marxism and classical, orthodox Marxism. John Taylor, for instance, has rejected the dependency approach, and has even labelled it as non-Marxist. He has argued that dependency, as well as neo-Marxism, is incompatible with classical, 'proper' Marxism in its fundamental signification. In the context of this discussion, however, the labelling game is unimportant. What is relevant is that Marxist thought, in whatever form it may have taken, became increasingly relevant as a means of understanding socioeconomic change in the Third World, between 1950 and 1980. This also meant that orthodox Marxism,

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>126</sup> Hettne, *Development Theory*, 82.

in itself, had to undergo certain fundamental changes and had by the 1970's, become indigenized by various Third World intellectuals.<sup>127</sup>

Before we move forward, however, it is important that we put down a marker on the work of Marx. Marx's essential theory, as I read it, seeks to explain social evolution at the very largest scale, that of human history since the dawn of class society. One of the most common criticisms of Marx's work by contemporary Marxists and non-Marxists alike, is that it only looks down, so to speak, the European tunnel of time, and fails to consider extra-European historical events as data. Perhaps Marx could not have avoided these errors, since crucial knowledge about the non-European World did not exist in his lifetime, or had not yet diffused into Europe, or was actually suppressed for political reasons. That said, Marx had nonetheless, been briefly concerned with the problems of socioeconomic change and capitalist development in the Third World in as early as the 1850s. John Martinussen notes that in his journalism pieces published between 1852 and 1861, "Marx tried to assess what would be the long term impact of European colonisation of South East Asia".<sup>128</sup>

Marx arrived at the conclusion that imperialism would probably destroy important elements of material subsistence such as local small-scale manufacturing and agriculture, as well as set in motion a massive exploitation of the colonies; but, he also believed that European expansion would simultaneously remove obstacles to the development of capitalism in the societies concerned. In other words imperialism implied destruction and exploitation in the short run, but it also implied the construction and creation of necessary preconditions for the colonies historical transformation from pre-capitalist society to capitalism, socialism and then finally to communism. It may be added that Marx later toned down the emphasis on the constructive aspects of imperialism in his assertions that British colonisation of Ireland had only destructive effects.<sup>129</sup>

It is clear from the above that Marx viewed capitalist development as a historical process bound to take place in one region after the other. In Asia and Africa, this process needed the assistance of imperialism – repulsive but also, historically insistent and progressive. Similarly, Hettne observes that famous follower of Marx, Russian political theorist, Vladimir Lenin, held onto this perspective in his analysis of the development of capitalism in Russia, rejecting the populist

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<sup>127</sup> John Taylor, "Neo-Marxism and Underdevelopment: A Sociological Phantasy", *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 4, no 1 (1974), 5-23.

<sup>128</sup> John Martinussen, *Society, State and Market: a Guide to Competing Theories of Development*. (London: Zed Books, 1997), 85.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*,

view that capitalism could be bypassed; although he emphasized that the process of socioeconomic change was complex and necessarily full of contradictions, due to the country's backwardness.<sup>130</sup>

For the purposes of our discussion, it is important that we acknowledge not only the reach, but also the dynamism, as well as dialectical nature of Marx's own ideas on socioeconomic change, the impact of imperialism on previous subject peoples and the development of capitalism in the Third World – recognizing that his ideas have been interpreted in various ways (and for various purposes) by different intellectuals including dependency theorists, all of who claim to be following in a Marxist tradition.

## 2. The Latin American Connection

Dependency has not only been connected with neo-Marxism and the indigenization of Marxist thought in the Third World. It has also been suggested by Dos Santos, as well as, Blomstrom and Hettne, that the dependency perspective is associated with the historical structuralist approach formulated by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA or in Spanish, CEPAL). This relationship reflects the specific socioeconomic and intellectual experiences in various Latin American countries, particularly stemming from an economic historical analysis of the financial crises (Great Depression) of the 1930s and its effect on Latin American countries.<sup>131</sup>

The impact of the Great Depression, originating in North America in October 1929, dramatized the dimensions of Latin American dependence, initiated more systematic socioeconomic research, and necessitated a policy of import substitution. In the 1950s, the import-substitution strategy was generalized into a Latin American macroeconomic strategy by ECLA, which was, by the way, established by the United Nations (UN) on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1948 with its headquarters in Santiago, Chile.<sup>132</sup>

The approach of ECLA, which has come to be known as “historical structuralism”, focuses on the analysis of the ways in which the *institutional legacy* (emphasis added)

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<sup>130</sup> Hettne, *Development Theory*, 83.

<sup>131</sup> Theotonio Dos Santos. “The Structure of Dependence”, in K.T. Kan and Donald C. Hodges (eds.), *Readings in U.S. Imperialism*, (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1971) 226; Magnus Blomstrom and Bjorn Hettne, *Development Theory in Transition: The Dependence Debate and Beyond - Third World Responses*, (London: Zed books, 1984), 45.

<sup>132</sup> ECLA is one of the five regional commissions of the UN, included is the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) which was established in 1958.

and inherited production structure influence the economic dynamics of developing countries and generates behaviours that differ from those of developed nations. This approach does not recognize the existence of uniform stages of development, since for latecomers, the dynamics of the process are different than they were for the nations that underwent development at an earlier point in history.<sup>133</sup>

It is important to highlight the contributions of one of the most prominent Latin American structuralists to provide a bit of context about the work of ECLA and its connection to dependency – Argentine Economist, Raul Prebisch. Prebisch was executive secretary of ECLA from May 1950 to July 1963. He contributed generously to the development of the historical structuralist paradigm, which, with some variations, ECLA has maintained up to the present day. Prebisch was uniquely positioned. Although ECLA was established by the UN to undertake research and other activities to facilitate, and promote, the economic integration of countries in the Latin American region and to enhance regional economic cooperation with other regions, Prebisch was a critic of the outward-oriented development strategy of most Latin American countries right from the start. In hindsight, it seems that he was more national and regional oriented than international. According to his biographer, Joseph Love, Prebisch' solution to the problem of socioeconomic advancement, especially his ideas concerning industrialization through import substitution, can be traced back to his early writings on Argentina in the 1930's and 1940s.<sup>134</sup>

In what has come to be known as the 'ECLA Manifesto', written by Prebisch in 1950, he criticized what he regarded as an outdated schema in the international division of labour, production, and exchange. According to him, this schema constrained the growth of Third World economies because it implied a continued reliance of the Third World, including Latin American economies, on the export of primary products, whereas the developed countries produced and exported industrialised products. Furthermore, primary products were less valued than industrialised products on the hierarchy of value essential to this schema. Continued reliance on the export of primary products for Prebisch would only consolidate the 'peripheral' position of developing countries in the global economy and would lead to a deterioration in the terms of trade and in the promotion of what he termed as an unequal exchange.

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<sup>133</sup> The History of ECLAC, *ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean)* [www.cepal.org/en/historia-de-la-cepal](http://www.cepal.org/en/historia-de-la-cepal), accessed 8 March 2016.

<sup>134</sup> Joseph Love, "Raul Prebisch and the Origins of the Doctrine of Unequal Exchange", *Latin American Research Review* 15, no 1 (1980), 45-72.

Although Prebisch wanted to promote exports and continued cooperation of Latin American countries with the industrialised Western Europe and USA, he was also convinced that a necessary precondition was a developed industrial base in Latin America. This to him was the only way of promoting meaningful interdependence between the ‘centre’ of Western Europe and the USA with the peripheral, ‘Latin America’. The development of an industrial base, by implication, could only be established by means of a temporary seclusion (autarky) and promotion of self-reliance through import restrictions, not necessarily on the national but possibly on a regional level. For him, the skewed division of labour and exchange was to be stopped, and Latin America was to follow in a path of self-servicing industrialisation. Industrialisation was to be stimulated by import substitution for domestic production, which was to be attained through taxes, tariffs and other protectionist measures to support domestic industries until they were internationally competitive. At the same time, the production of primary commodities would continue strategically, not as an end but as a means to an end. The income earned would be used to pay for capital-intensive imports to further speed up domestic industrial production and more importantly, to raise the rate of internal gross capital formation. In terms of governance and in the distribution of the means of production, Prebisch proposed a model of state-led development, which implied that Third World governments would have to participate actively in the market as coordinators, and not leave it to the mythical forces of a supposedly ‘free’ market, which left to its own devices would promote unequal exchange as he had empirically observed to be happening in Latin America in the 1940s.

Summarizing the body of work of Prebisch upon his death in 1986, Osvaldo Sunkel, observed that although Prebisch lived through decades of debates on socioeconomic change and of course continuously modified his views, he consistently made the plea for a combination of import-substitution and export promotion. “What he stressed throughout his works was the global dimension of unequal exchange in all economic processes, expressed in his simple but forceful centre-periphery model”.<sup>135</sup>

The ECLA program under the leadership of Prebisch was statist and opposed to laissez faire economics in its approach. However, it failed to make any substantial impact at a regional and on a national level. According to David Pollock, it failed in Latin America because it was “very unorthodox in the context of conventional socioeconomic thinking in the 1950s and was conceived as revolutionary, by some, and utopian, by others, within Latin America and also

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<sup>135</sup> Osvaldo Sunkel, “The Transnationalization of the Centre-Periphery System: in Honour of Raul Prebisch” *Development & South-South Cooperation* 2, no 3 (1986), 179.

among its major trading partners”.<sup>136</sup> The hostility of particularly the US was intensified when the state interventionist and self-reliant policy position of ECLA was crystallized in Prebisch’ manifesto.

At this point, it is important to recall the hostile political climate of the Cold War (1947-1991) as the historical context in which ECLA was born. This was a period not only of military and diplomatic tension, but also ideological and theoretical tension between free-marketers, those who upheld the market and advocated for minimum state intervention and private ownership of the means of production, and the so called socialists and communists – advocates of state intervention, state ownership of the means of production and a general demotion of the market to human will. Such theoretical divides transcended national boundaries and were reproduced in academic debates as they became crystalized as two extreme economic ideologies, laissez faire economics on the one side and rationalized state dominance of the market or Keynesian economics on the other.<sup>137</sup>

A direct consequence of this ideological impasse, and other reasons such as the lack of political will, suspicion of the motive of the ECLA (it was commissioned by the UN after all), was a failure of implementation of the ideas of Prebisch at a national level. Subsequently, this contributed to the lack of regional coordination. In other words, the ECLA manifesto was not very well received by Latin American governments and so it could not push forward radical measures necessary for socioeconomic change in the direction which Prebisch had envisioned. It also failed to restructure the international division of labour. In fact, as So has observed, economic stagnation and political conflict characterised Latin America from the mid-1950s to the 1970s decade. He writes that:

Initially, and for various diverse reasons, including a threat of losing national sovereignty, the ECLA strategy was rather coldly received by Latin American governments in the 1950s. This resistance explains why the ECLA could not push forward radical measures such as land reforms and state capture of the means of production. In fact, structural changes which the ECLA had envisioned were never placed high on the priority list of necessary changes. To a certain extent the strategy can be considered overly optimistic. It assumes that the various characteristics of an underdeveloped society would automatically disappear in the process of

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<sup>136</sup> David Pollock, “Some Changes in United States’ Attitudes towards CEPAL over the Past 30 Years”, *CEPAL Review*, no 9 (1980), 61.

<sup>137</sup> David Engerman, “Ideology and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917–1962”, in Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 20-43.

industrialization – that is industrialization would put an end to all the problems of development.<sup>138</sup>

Similarly, Blomstrom and Hettne explain that there were several shortcomings of the protectionist and increasingly interventionist, import substitution policy, by which the import of various commodities was to be substituted by domestic production:

The purchasing power of industrial and manufacturing equipment was limited to certain social strata, and the domestic market showed no tendency to expand after the needs of the strata had been fulfilled. The dependency had simply shifted from consumption goods to capital intensive goods. The result was acute balance of payment problems in one country after another. The optimism of growth changed into deep depression as other challenges began to appear.<sup>139</sup>

For a limited period, the import-substitution policy worked, but it proved to be inadequate. It was inadequate because of two factors: industrialization required a different set of input commodities; this led to a different kind of dependence, technological and financial. Second, the pattern of income distribution, being highly skewed, confined the demand for industrial equipment and inputs in the hands of a small elite, and as soon as their demands had been met, industrial growth and internal gross capital formation came to a standstill.

Hettne has noted elsewhere that “in light of the later dependency debates, the ECLA-doctrine may not appear as a particularly radical view of socioeconomic change at all”. This is because the revolutionized societies emerging out of the yolk of economic imperialism were confronted with the contradictory task of “catching up”, which implies the use of methods analogous to those of capitalism and “doing something else”, which implies the transformation of socioeconomic relations in favour of the popular classes and pursuing an alternative path. The former is what I would describe as a moderate program and the latter, I would term as a radical program. The regimes in Latin America between 1940 and 1970 were certainly less radical about transforming socioeconomic relations. The failure of what in retrospect, can be described as a ‘moderate’ ECLA program, prompted proponents of the dependency perspective, not only in Latin America but also, in other regions such as in Africa and in Asia, to propose more radical programmes which further operationalised Prebisch’ hypothesis on the skewed division of labour, production and exchange. However, they were not particularly successful. What is important is that through the efforts of individuals like Prebisch and other Latin American

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<sup>138</sup> So, *Social Change*, 94.

<sup>139</sup> Magnus Blomstrom and Bjorn Hettne, *Development Theory in Transition: the Dependence Debate and Beyond - Third World Responses*, (London: Zed Books, 1984), 45.

intellectuals, the idea that the “development” of some societies (the dominant centers) and the “underdevelopment” of others (the dominated peripheries), i.e. the centre-periphery model became entrenched in dependency. Using the centre-periphery model, dependency theorists generally advocated for economic self-reliance for the dominated periphery, as well as, state-led industrialisation. Viewed from another perspective, the dependency perspective was opposed to the laissez faire view that the market should not be subjected to human will or state intervention.<sup>140</sup>

### An Overview of Dependency

In view of the complex theoretical heritage of the dependency tradition – which comprises of neo-Marxism, as well as Latin American Structuralism, attributable to the work of Prebisch and the ECLA, it can be deduced that there are necessarily different perspectives within the dependency tradition itself. Dependency theorists may differ in style, emphasis and theoretical preference, but they also share certain basic ideas about socioeconomic change. In 1971, Dos Santos described dependence as follows:

Dependence is a conditioning situation in which the economies of one group of countries are conditioned by the development and expansion of others. A relationship of interdependence between two or more economies or between such economies and the world trading system becomes a dependent relationship when some countries can expand only as a reflection of the expansion of the dominant countries, which may have positive or negative effects.<sup>141</sup>

The above definition describing a historical process of interdependence and exchange which may either result in positive (development) or negative (underdevelopment) historical effects, can be taken as a general, simplified view of socioeconomic change according to dependency theory. What needs to be emphasized is that the capitalist mode of production, i.e. the conditioning situation which Dos Santos refers to in the above passage has produced a decisive break in world history, whose reach extends beyond the simple, albeit prodigious, progress of productive forces it has achieved. Indeed, capitalism has overturned the structure of relationships among different aspects of socioeconomic life (economic organization, political

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<sup>140</sup> Hettne, *Development Theory*, 86.

<sup>141</sup> Dos Santos, “The Structure of Dependence”, 227.

order, the content and function of ideologies) and has refashioned them on qualitatively new foundations.

Writing in 1990 about how variations of the dependency perspective were oversimplified in the previous decades – Hettne, referring to the later work of Dos Santos, notes that:

Characterizations and summaries of the dependency approach have been oversimplified, partly because they were written with a polemical intent, and partly because they identified the theoretical positions of the perspective by means of a one-dimensional analysis, i.e. by stressing one distinctive factor while neglecting others. ...In fact, the Dependencistas, put more emphasis on internal factors compared to the Cepalistas. Dos Santos later elaborated on this problem in order to avoid further misunderstandings about the respective role of external and internal dimensions for socioeconomic change. He made a distinction between conditioning and determining factors, in saying that the accumulation process of dependent countries is *conditioned* by the position they occupy in the international economy, but *determined* by their own laws of internal development (emphasis added). The result is nevertheless a dependent capitalism, unable to break the chains with the metropolitan centres and achieve its full development.<sup>142</sup>

We have seen that the dependency perspective attempts to describe a process of interdependence and exchange which has a negative historical effect on the dependent region. But now we ask, *how* in reality, does interdependence or exchange result in a negative effect? Dos Santos points us to conditioning and determining factors. However it is not sufficient to answer ‘conditioning factor’ in the external environment or ‘determining factor’ in the internal environment if these categories are left hanging in the air of abstraction. One may point to the dynamic tension between ruling classes which control the means of production and demand an ever increasing share of production, and the producing classes, which in resisting this demand in some ways, acceding to it in others, engage in unceasing economic, cultural, and political struggle not only to retain the fruits of their labour but also to gain control of the means of production. When the answer is posed in this concrete way, our attention is drawn to a fact so obvious that it tends to go unnoticed. The ruling class of a given society may exploit two groups of producers, one ‘native’, the other ‘foreign’ - where the former is an internal producing class and the latter, an external producing class. Likewise, from the point of view of the producers, there will be an internal ruling class and there may also be an external one.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Hettne, *Development Theory*, 89.

<sup>143</sup> Many combinations are possible: conflict and class struggle may be entirely a relationship between a ruling class and its internal producing class. It may involve both internal and external producers in varying weights and

Dependency attempts to understand social reality. This social reality, considered in its totality, has three dimensions: economic, political and cultural. The economy probably constitutes the best-known dimension of social reality. According to Samir Amin, “bourgeois economics has forged instruments for its analysis and, with a greater or lesser degree of success, for the management of capitalist society”. The domain of power and the political is considerably less well known and the “eclecticism of the various theories that have been proposed reflects the feeble mastery of this area of social reality”. As for the cultural dimension, it remains mysterious; “empirical observation of cultural phenomena (religion, for example), has not produced anything more than some intuitive essays”.<sup>144</sup> Market exchange and wage labour are, of course, important, but they remain limited in their range and marginal in their scope of a theoretical analysis of the structural relationship between these three dimensions of social reality. Hettne re-iterates this point, once again referring to the work of Cardoso and Faletto:

Dependency theory went beyond economics in attempting to provide a general explanation of underdevelopment, and the radical dependentistas in particular were often sociologists. They conceived dependency as a socio-political phenomenon, which in turn made room for an even more complex view of the centre-periphery relationship....in a preface to the American edition of their classic work on dependency, Cardoso and Faletto write that: “we conceive the relationship between external and internal factors as forming a complex whole whose structural links are not based on *mere external* forms of exploitation and coercion, but are rooted in coincidences of interests between local dominant classes and international ones, and, on the other side, are challenged by local dominated groups and classes”.<sup>145</sup>

It is imperative to note that although intellectuals like Dos Santos, Cardoso, Faletto and Hettne, advance the argument that dependency emphasized internal factors as well as external factors, as well as looked beyond the narrow domain of economics in its theoretical attempt to understand social reality, most critics of dependency have attacked the paradigm for neglecting internal factors in its analysis or being narrow in its methodological approach. In the next section, I provide examples of dependency in Latin America and in Africa.

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kinds of exploitation. It may involve, from the standpoint of a class of producers, a combination, often quite complex, of internal and external ruling classes; sometimes, more than one of each. It can never be purely an exploitation external producers, since this would imply no exploitation at home. It goes without saying that not all ruling classes have had the political power to exploit external workers.

<sup>144</sup> Amin, *Eurocentrism*, 97.

<sup>145</sup> Quoted in Hettne, *Development Theory*, 88.

## 1. Underdevelopment, Metropolises and Satellites: Andre Gunder Frank

One of the most well-known proponents of dependency is Andre Gunder Frank. Frank begins his analyses of socioeconomic change with a diatribe of the modernization perspective after which he points us to a limitation of the centre-periphery model, attributable to Prebisch. Frank notes that there is a relationship between a ‘centre’ and a ‘periphery’ in an international system. However, he “denied that the poverty of the periphery was a prior state out of which each nation or region had to struggle or a consequence of feudal economies in Latin America. Such regions were part of a single capitalist economy in which the poverty, distortions and stagnation of the periphery were an intrinsic part of the dynamism and wealth of the center”.<sup>146</sup> As a result of this insight, he emphasizes the fact of a single capitalist economy by pursuing to analyse socioeconomic relations from the perspective of a network of ‘metropolises’ and ‘satellites’.<sup>147</sup> In hindsight, Frank’s appraisal of modernization theory is analogous to my criticism of the policy implication of RF thesis in the previous chapter. It is similar in that we both suggest that a theoretical perspective is Eurocentric and has been distilled exclusively from the economic historical experience of North America and Western Europe. Regarding this point, we observe Frank writing that:

Available theory fails to reflect the past of the underdeveloped part of the world entirely, and reflects the past of the world as a whole only in part. More important, our ignorance of the underdeveloped countries history leads us to assume that their past and indeed their present resembles earlier stages of the history of the now developed countries. This ignorance and this assumption lead us into serious misconceptions about contemporary underdevelopment and development. Further, most studies fail to take account of the economic and complementary social relations between the metropolis and its satellites throughout the history of the worldwide expansion and development of the mercantilist and capitalist system. Consequently, most of our theory fails to explain the structure and development of the capitalist system as a whole and to account for its simultaneous generation of underdevelopment in some parts and of economic development in others...a related and also largely erroneous view is that the development of these underdeveloped countries, and within them of their most underdeveloped domestic areas, must and will be generated or stimulated by diffusing capital, *institutions* (emphasis added), values etc., to them from the capitalist metropolis. A historical perspective based on the underdeveloped

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<sup>146</sup> Frederick, Cooper. “Africa and the World Economy”. *African Studies Review* 24, no 3 (1981), 8.

<sup>147</sup> The centre-periphery model, in Frank’s view is better conceptualized as a network of metropolises and satellites.

countries past experience suggests that on the contrary, development can only occur independently of most of these relations of diffusion.<sup>148</sup>

It is crucial that we note Frank's emphasis on institutions, as well as his latter comment about the past experiences of underdeveloped regions, as I have earlier provided a critique of the policy implication of the RF thesis, which is based on the transference of good colonial, European private property rights institutions to regions which do not have them, in order to stimulate economic growth. Frank, however, from the dependency perspective, it seems, arrived at the opposite conclusion to AJR in the 60s.

Unlike the RF thesis, Frank, on the contrary, argued that the historical process of underdevelopment was attributable to a skewed international division of labour and its accompanying institutions, which in turn affected the terms of trade and social relations of production and accumulation. Most importantly, he rejected the commonplace dualism in modernization theory, where underdeveloped regions were believed to comprise of two separate economies: a modern and capitalist economy on the one side and a traditional and non-capitalist economy on the other, or a centre on the one side and a periphery on the other. For Frank the underdeveloped and the developed region were subsumed in a "network of unequal exchanges":

Evident inequalities of income and differences in culture have led many observers to see 'dual' societies and economies in the underdeveloped countries. Each of the two parts is supposed to have a history of its own, a structure and a contemporary dynamic largely independent of the other. Supposedly only one part of the economy and society has been importantly affected by intimate economic relations with the outside capitalist world; and that part it is held, became modern, capitalist and relatively developed precisely because of this contact. The other part is widely regarded as variously isolated, subsistence based, feudal, or pre-capitalist, and therefore more underdeveloped. ... I believe on the contrary that the entire dual society thesis is a false dichotomy and the policy recommendations to which it leads will, if acted upon, serve only to intensify and perpetuate the very conditions of underdevelopment they are supposedly designed to remedy.<sup>149</sup>

Rather than accept the dual thesis, which he saw as a 'false dichotomy', he formulated a theory grounded in the analysis of a network. This network was specified by social relations of production, which consequently resulted in a dictation of the terms of trade by the developed regions. He described this network of unequal exchanges as a "pyramidal structure of linkages

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<sup>148</sup> Andre Gunder Frank, "The Development of Underdevelopment," *Monthly Review* 18, no 4 (1966), 17.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

between metropolises and satellites". For him, it was this pyramidal structure which was important because it subsumed and conditioned the processes of production and accumulation in the underdeveloped economies<sup>150</sup>.

Regarding this network analysis, So has described the work of Frank as follows:

He claimed that capitalism permeated the whole of the periphery to such an extent that Latin America and other satellite societies had become integral parts of one world capitalist system after the first penetration by metropolitan merchant capital. This established capitalist exchange relations and networks that linked the poorest agricultural labourers in the periphery with the executive directors of large corporations in the metropole. The agricultural labourers and the small farmers in the rural regions of the periphery were satellites at the bottom. They were linked, mainly through trade, to the landowners and local centres of capital accumulation that is, the local metropolises. These in turn were satellites in terms of regional economic elites and centres of surplus extraction in their relation to the developed world. In this way the structure grew – through several links – until it reached the ruling classes at the world centres of capitalism. Throughout this pyramidal structure, surplus was appropriated by the centres which in turn, were subject to the surplus extraction activities of higher level centres.<sup>151</sup>

Frank thus viewed socioeconomic change and the prospects for Third World development in a global, macroeconomic pyramidal framework within which he identified the historical process of underdevelopment. Furthermore, he suggested that empirical evidence from Latin America (Chile and Brazil) proved his assertion that economic surplus generated in the Latin American peripheral region was being extracted to the metropolises – Western Europe and USA. Instead of income generated being used for domestic investment, to promote industrialization, improve the terms of trade, and perhaps some degree of self-reliance, most of the income earned from the mid-1950s to the 1960s, according to Frank, were transferred to the industrialised metropolises.<sup>152</sup>

A theoretical perspective which takes a pyramidal structure of linkages dominated by powerful surplus extracting centres as a departure point is bound to have a policy recommendation which is radically different from the more recent RF thesis, which is more optimistic, I suspect, of the international structure of economic, political and cultural relations. Frank derived from his theory the debatable conclusion that all countries in Latin America – as well as other peripheries

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>151</sup> So, *Social Change*, 96.

<sup>152</sup> Frank, "The Development", 22-24.

– would be better off if they disassociated themselves from, or totally broke the links to the industrialised countries temporarily. Delinking from the world market was his underlying conclusion. This, of course, is similar to the view of Raul Prebisch on import substitution industrialisation, and the necessity of a socialist, state-driven model of development; because the petite bourgeoisie, the ruling classes, land owners and comprador capitalists in the periphery cannot be expected to remove the foundation for their own surplus generation.

Consider the following observation of Frank, which in my opinion is still highly relevant to the discussion on socioeconomic change in Africa, especially when contrasted with the thrust of the RF thesis:

Underdevelopment is not due to the survival of archaic institutions, the transference of modern institutions or the existence of capital shortage in regions that have remained isolated from the stream of world history. On the contrary, underdevelopment was and still is generated by the very same historical process which also generated economic development: the development of capitalism itself. What this suggests is that the global extension and unity of the capitalist system, its monopoly structure and uneven development throughout its history, and the resulting persistence of commercial rather than industrial capitalism in the underdeveloped world deserve much more attention in the study of economic development and cultural change than they have hitherto received. ...the goals of development of the Third World will not be accomplished by importing sterile stereotypes from the metropolis which do not correspond to their satellite economic reality and do not respond to their liberating political needs.<sup>153</sup>

In conclusion, contrary to the policy implication of the RF thesis which point to the lack of a certain type of property rights institution as a historical factor of development, and so implicitly suggests the importation of such institutions, Frank's basic point was that peripheral satellites were linked in an exploitative pyramidal structure of underdevelopment to centre metropolises. Although Frank does not explicitly speak of property rights institutions, what his theory does, however, is that, it provides a warning to the student of socioeconomic change about the subjective nature of theory. In particular, it points to the dangers of mechanistic assumptions, as well as notions of unilinear progress, which very often lead to simplistic conclusions and policy recommendations as the one upheld by AJR in the RF thesis.

Frank's theory on exploitative pyramidal linkages between metropolises and satellites is exemplary of the general thrust of dependency theory. It is, however, much easier to appreciate

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

the dependency perspective if a distinction is made between the different forms of linkages between the metropole and satellite in a historical continuum. Theotonio Dos Santos has identified three distinct historical forms of dependence. These are colonial dependence, financial-industrial dependence, and technological-industrial dependence. Chronologically, colonial dependence manifested at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By the end of the century, financial-industrial dependence emerged. After the end of World War II, the exploitative linkages between the metropolises and the satellites had evolved into technological-industrial dependence. “Each of these forms of dependence corresponds to a situation which conditioned not only the international relations of these regions but also their internal structures: the orientation of production, the forms of capital accumulation and distribution, the reproduction of the economy, and, simultaneously, their social and political structure”.<sup>154</sup>

In colonial dependence, the commercial and financial hub of the dominant country, in alliance with the colonial state, monopolized the control of land, mines as well as human resources. The export of raw materials, including tropical cash crops, gold, and silver were all under the auspices of the colonial state or colonial sanctioned companies.

Under colonial dependence, commercial and financial capital from the metropole, in alliance with the colonialist state dominated the economic relations of the Europeans and the colonies, by means of a trade monopoly complemented by a colonial monopoly of land, mines, and manpower (serf or slave) in the colonized countries.<sup>155</sup>

Financial-industrial dependence consolidated itself at the end of the nineteenth century. Although still dominated by metropolis capital, the colonial state did not hold a monopoly, and a productive structure began developing in the satellite economies devoted to the export of primary products to the metropole. This resulted in what Prebisch in the ECLA manifesto referred to as a foreign-oriented development. In this period, the economies of the satellite economies expanded somewhat unsustainably through investment in the production of raw materials and agricultural produce largely for consumption in the metropolis. Production in the satellite economy was largely determined by externally driven demand, and unequal bargaining power of the dominant country in establishing the terms of trade. As a result, production was susceptible to massive fluctuations and instability. “In the post-war period, a new type of dependence has been consolidated, based on multinational corporations which invest in industries geared to the internal market of underdeveloped countries for financial profits”. Even

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<sup>154</sup> Dos Santos, “The Structure of Dependence”, *American Economic Review* 60, no. 2, (1970), 231-236.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

if such industries are situated in the satellite economy, the profits are usually extracted to the metropole and are not necessarily reinvested in the satellite economy. Development in the satellite is not autonomous and gross capital formation is at a minimum.<sup>156</sup>

In the era of technological-industrial dependence, industrialisation in the Third World is in large part still dependent on the existence of an export sector. The dependence on the export sector affects Third World countries in several ways: (1) the continued reliance on traditional agricultural and raw materials reinforces pre-existing trade relations, resulting in a state of affairs where the petite bourgeoisie and the decadent oligarchs maintain considerable power and control over the economic surplus generated. (2) The export sector is linked to foreign interests, particularly, multinational corporations, thus it also signifies political dependence on the metropolises and so the maintenance of the status quo in the terms of trade. (3) Since capital needed for industrialisation is characterised by unequal exchange, a fossilized hierarchy of value and balance of payment fluctuations; the highly monopolized international market leads to a consistent lowering of the price of raw materials and raises the price of industrial products, resulting in a vicious cycle of exchange deficits and balance of payment problems. (4) Foreign capital retains control over the economy of the dependent countries and so results in the continuous transfer of profit to the metropolises and lack of investment in the domestic sector.<sup>157</sup>

Under these historical conditions, Dos Santos has observed that in all forms of dependence, production in the satellite is to a large extent determined by the metropole. Specifically, concerning technological-industrial dependence he notes that:

Foreign capital enters with all the advantages: in many cases, it is given exemption from exchange controls for the importation of machinery; financing sites for the installation of industries is provided; government financing agencies are available to finance industrialization but loans from foreign banks dictate the terms of industrialization...the context of a local cheap labour market combined with the utilisation of capital intensive technology leads to profound differences among various domestic wage levels. This high concentration of foreign income leads to a high rate of exploitation (or super exploitation) of domestic labour.<sup>158</sup>

By specifying the historical evolution of dependence from the nineteenth century through colonial, financial-industrial and technological-industrial modes, Dos Santos arrives at a conclusion very similar to Frank. He observes that the historical process of underdevelopment

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

is not due to a lack of integration with capitalism or proven European institutions, but rather “it is the monopolistic control of the terms of trade: capital, finance, and technology in international trade that prevents underdeveloped countries from achieving optimal levels of internal self-servicing production”.<sup>159</sup> I would add that the exploitative process which Dos Santos aptly describes is only possible in a pyramidal network of linkages between metropolises and satellites. However, Dos Santos’ work and much of Post-Frank dependency theory, has moved away from a rigid network dichotomy of metropolises and satellites and analysis on a world scale. Rather, it has moved towards a greater emphasis on internal dynamics and internal class structure, however, this is still within an international framework that focuses on an exploitative network.<sup>160</sup>

A growing number of empirical studies have been influenced by concepts taken for granted in dependency, such as unequal exchange, centre-periphery relations, exploitative network of metropolises and satellites, and underdevelopment. Moreover, valuable evidence of the power of the metropole over the satellite in international trade and negotiation have been unearthed in some of these empirical studies. In hindsight, it is interesting that a recent (2016) report, published by the African Union (AU) and Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), provides substantial empirical evidence on massive illicit financial outflows from Africa to the metropolitan regions in the post-colonial era. This finding, perhaps adds some validity to the dependency perspective and in particular, Dos Santos’ diagnosis of technological-industrial dependence, not as an illicit exploitative process, but as a fundamental characteristic of the relationship of satellites to the metropolises in the post-colonial era.<sup>161</sup>

### Dependency, Intellectual Autonomy and Economic Radicalism in Africa

Dependency is a perspective which anchored the debate on socioeconomic transformation in the Third World. It established a populist base in intellectual circles in Latin America and then later spread to other regions in Asia and Africa. What follows in this section is a discussion of the emergence of dependency in Africa. The historical context is the 70’s decade when the perspective was at the height of its influence among African intellectuals.

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>160</sup> Cooper, “Africa and the World Economy”, 10.

<sup>161</sup> AU/ECA Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, *Illicit Financial Flows: Report of the High Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa*. (Addis Ababa: 2016) [http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/iff\\_main\\_report\\_26feb\\_en.pdf](http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/iff_main_report_26feb_en.pdf)

Mkandawire, Shivji and Ibbo Mandaza (all writing in 1988) have observed that although the process of intellectualism and academic freedom has been ongoing in different social contexts from time immemorial; social science in Africa, and particularly the freedom of expression in economic thought, is a late example of how the struggle for self-reliance and indigenization of ideas, although highly relevant, “has only just begun” in Africa. As an example of how recent formal efforts at indigenization were at the time, they point to the establishment of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), headquartered in Dakar, Senegal in 1973. For the aforementioned intellectuals, the formation of CODESRIA represents an important critical juncture in the evolution of intellectual autonomy and economic radicalism in Africa.<sup>162</sup>

For Cadman Atta-Mills, the first phase of indigenization of knowledge, was during the struggle for independence, in the late colonial era, 1930 - 1970. This was an easily identifiable period where ideas challenging the status quo and Western intellectual hegemony, many of which had a socioeconomic content emerged among African intellectuals and activists.

Take for example the various intellectual contributions of Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Sekou Toure, Patrice Lumumba, and Jomo Kenyatta. What they produced was a kind of non-institutionalized social science, comparable to Latin America’s *pensadores* and Maoist sociology. Certainly it was politically orientated, dealing with the colonial and post-colonial situation, African identity and alternative strategies of development. But who would assert that the colonial social science, with its concern with kinship structures, patterns of migration, culture and values etc. was less politically motivated? Or for that matter, the ‘modern’ social sciences with its obsession with modernization, lack of achievement motivation, planning and the stages of growth?<sup>163</sup>

To take full account the impact of the contributions of activist-intellectuals on economic theory such as Amilcar Cabral and Julius Nyerere would involve a systematic study of their works. Such a comprehensive account is not provided in this dissertation. What I do, however, is formulate a broad hypothesis about intellectual autonomy and economic radicalism in Africa. But, first, what do I mean by ‘economic radicalism’?

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<sup>162</sup> Mkandawire, SID World Conference, New Delhi, *Problems of Social Sciences in Africa*, March 1988; Ibbo Mandaza, “The Relationship of Third World Intellectuals and Progressive Western Scholars: An African Critique”, *Southern Africa Political and Economic Monthly (SAPEM)* no 5, (1988), 1–14; Issa Shivji, “Reflections on Intellectuals in Africa”, *Southern Africa Political and Economic Monthly (SAPEM)* no 5, (1988), 15–35.

<sup>163</sup> Cadman Atta-Mills, “The Role of Social Scientists in Development: the Rise, Fall and Rebirth of Social Science in Africa”, *CODESRIA Working Paper no 10*, (1979).

I use the term to mean both radical economic theory and radical political ideology based on economic analysis. I am indebted to Ali Mazrui, who has suggested that “economic radicalism refer to the body of ideas which are inherently optimistic about the chances of transforming the economic basis of a given social order”.<sup>164</sup> Yet, what constitutes a radical idea is something which is historically relative. I would like to suggest that in the immediate two decades after independence, the radical idea amongst African activist-intellectuals on the whole, tended to be the ethic of social fellowship and welfare, which was contrasted against the ethic of individualism. It also suggests a leftist inclination, a leaning towards socialism or some organic communal oriented socioeconomic order, as well as a critical assessment of the inherited order which was termed as neo-colonial.<sup>165</sup> My hypothesis on the evolution of economic radicalism in Africa is that although it was a reactionary, but also progressive force against colonialism, it was short lived and amounted to no real change – in practice and in popular economic ideology which dominates the African economist to this day.

The first phase of economic radicalism, was generally regarded as utopian and revolutionary, and so it did not survive the emergence of modern social science as it pertained to Africa. A lot of the ideas proposed in this period were regarded by social scientists, most of whom were trained in the West, as unscientific, political, impractical, Communist, and often ridiculed and caricatured. This partially explains why the 3<sup>rd</sup> executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Adebayo Adedeji, from 1975 to 1991, has remarked that:

Every attempt that has been made by the Africans to forge their future and to craft their own indigenous development strategies and policies has been pooh-poohed by the international financial institutions (IFIs) with the support, or at least the connivance, of the donor community. While African leaders can be faulted in many ways, they have made a series of heroic effort since the early 1970s to craft their own indigenous development paradigms in the light of their own perceptions. Unfortunately, all of these were opposed, undermined and jettisoned by the Bretton Woods institutions and Africans were thus impeded from exercising the basic and fundamental right to make decisions about their future. This denial would have been ameliorated if the African leaders had shown the commitment to carry out their own development agenda. But given their excessive external dependence, their narrow

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<sup>164</sup> Ali Mazrui, *On Heroes and Uhuru-Worship: Essays on Independent Africa*. (London: Longman Group Limited, 1967), 159.

<sup>165</sup> See Julius Nyerere, “Ujamma – The Basis of African Socialism”, *Journal of Pan-African Studies*, no 1, (1987), 4-11.

political base and their perennial failure to put their money where their mouth is, the implementation of these plans has suffered from benign neglect.<sup>166</sup>

Thus the second phase of indigenization, encompassing the rather broad period from the 1970s to the early 2000s decade, can be regarded as a departure from feeble and marginal economic radicalism of the activist-intellectuals such as Cabral, Nyerere or Nkrumah, to a submission to the persistent forces of academic imperialism. According to Atta-Mills the second phase of indigenization “had just begun at the time of writing”, which was 1979.<sup>167</sup> African intellectual efforts in this period attempted to become more objective and “scientific” and have even been criticised as being more concerned with external interests and audiences, whom they look to for approval and funding. Regarding this, we have seen a shift in collective, Pan-African policy plans from the likes of the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) in 1981, which advocated collective self-reliance to the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), in 2002, which has been criticized by civic society groups across Africa as promoting a neo-colonialist agenda.<sup>168</sup>

In the phased intellectual transition, appears a belief in the multiplicity of ways of historical evolution and progress, as well as a call for a right to difference by African intellectuals, activists and politicians. This is not at all surprising as the newly independent African nations were confronted with the contradictory task of either national liberation from imperialism - and a preservation of the socioeconomic relations of capitalism - or following an alternative radical path, of constructing a new horizon of meaning which did not preserve the socioeconomic relations of capitalist modernity. Whether it was in the originality and ethical appeal of Nyerere’s *Ujamaa* in Tanzania, the Marxist-Leninist military regime of Marien Ngouabi in Congo Brazzaville or of others elsewhere, the challenge remained: “catch up in the existing system” or “do something else”.

Not only was the ideological spectrum broadened during the first three decades of African independence, but external and internal events also unveiled a sombre set of possible outcomes. The spill over of the southern African liberation struggles hurt countries such as Zambia and Mozambique. Coup d’état’s and conflicts plagued west, east and central Africa. Soaring debt burdens became an issue in the 1970s, together with the attendant ideology of “debt

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<sup>166</sup> Adebayo Adedeji, “From the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) to the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and from the Final Act of Lagos to the Constitutive Act: Wither Africa?”, Keynote address prepared for presentation at the African Forum for Envisioning Africa in Nairobi, Kenya, 26 – 29 April 2002. <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic1494737.files/Adebayo%20Adedeji%20Whither%20Africa.pdf>

<sup>167</sup> Atta-Mills, “The Role of Social Scientists”, 12.

<sup>168</sup> Patrick Bond, *Fanon’s Warning: A Civil Society Reader on the New Partnership for Africa’s Development*, (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2002).

management-driven” development promoted and facilitated by the Bretton Woods institutions. Meanwhile, in the realm of socioeconomic ideas and notions of progress, continuity jostled with a radical critique of assumptions.

In retrospect, Amin, who was involved in the formation of CODESRIA, as well as, the dependency debate, has observed the following about the jostle between continuity and radical critique of assumptions underpinning socioeconomic thought and notions progress:

The result was an inability to produce anything more than impressionistic histories and a nurturing of simplistic philosophies of history...all of the varying expressions (indigenous thought, radical and conservative), were nourished by the scientism of the century and the almost naïve expression of a religious faith in progress. This faith was assimilated into universalism, without calling into question the capitalist and Eurocentric content that it transmitted. Europe and the United States’ were the model for everything, and the idea of calling into question its civilizing mission could only seem preposterous...substituting a new paradigm is a difficult, long-term task. It requires a theory of the political and a theory of culture, complementing the theory of economics, as well as a theory of their interaction. These theories are still sorely lacking, as much in bourgeois thought as in constructs of Marxist inspiration in Africa and beyond.<sup>169</sup>

The programme of constructing a new economic paradigm in Africa is far from being fulfilled, and the issue is far more complicated than was realized in the 1970s. Most African intellectuals, after all were trained in the West and their audience remains largely Western. It is possible then to have generations of African intellectuals who continue with substantially much of the same pedagogical and epistemologically defective offering that was extended to students under the colonial system. Regarding this matter of education and intellectual sovereignty, we find Kwesi Prah proposing in a speech delivered to the Academy of Science in South Africa, in 2016, that the most intimidating question academics in Africa face is “how do we decolonize the intellectual enterprise; how do we indigenize knowledge production; how do we usefully domesticate knowledge and its production?”<sup>170</sup>

Given the present situation, it can be suggested that the option taken by African intellectuals, political leaders and policy makers in the immediate decades after independence from colonial rule was to “catch up in the existing system” as opposed to “doing something else”. Short lived

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<sup>169</sup> Amin, *Eurocentrism*, 197-205.

<sup>170</sup> Prah. “Has Rhodes Fallen?”

attempts were however made at constructing new paradigms and horizon of meanings by some Pan-Africanist activist-intellectuals.

Below, I provide an example of what I regard as an example of a ‘soft’ dependency perspective by an African intellectual. Ali Mazrui is an eclectic intellectual and so cannot be regarded as a consistent dependency theorist of the same order as Samir Amin or Walter Rodney. It is for this reason why I label his work as soft dependency, whereas the more traditional theorists are regarded as ‘hard’. I decided to focus on Mazrui because there already exists a considerable amount of work on Rodney and Amin as prominent advocates of dependency in Africa. Even though Mazrui’s work, which I highlight, is not exactly a neat depiction of dependency, it shares some of its most basic assumptions and conceptual tools such as unequal exchange, centre-periphery relations, exploitative network of metropolises and satellites and underdevelopment.<sup>171</sup>

Unlike Mazrui, Amin is regarded as an exceptional and consistent dependency theorist. Hettne, for instance has observed the following about Amin:

In Africa, Amin stood out as a dependency theorist in his own right. Although his indebtedness to early ECLA analysis was acknowledged, Amin has also emphasized discussions within the Egyptian communist party in the 1950s as influential. Together with Gunder-Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein, he later became associated with World-system theory and thus more concerned with universalization than indigenization.<sup>172</sup>

Similarly, Rodney is generally seen as one of the major contributors to the dependency perspective as it has been applied to Africa. By associating Mazrui with dependency, I am suggesting that his aforementioned work, be treated as an alternative entry point into the dependency question in Africa.<sup>173</sup>

Moreover, it is an intervention in the discourse of socioeconomic change which complements my criticism of the policy implication of the RF thesis. Particularly, it speaks to a contemporary debate in NIE about the role of institutions and geography in socioeconomic change, which, I

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<sup>171</sup> Mazrui, “The Political Economy of World Order: Modernization and Reform in Africa.” in Jagdish Bhagwati (ed.), *Economics and World Order: from the 1970s to the 1990s* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 287-321

<sup>172</sup> Hettne, *Development Theory*, 110.

<sup>173</sup> See also Horace Campbell, “The Impact of Walter Rodney and Progressive Scholars on the Dar es Salaam School”, *Utafiti, Journal of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Dar es Salaam* 8, no 2 (1986); Sheila Smith, “Class Analysis versus World Systems: Critique of Samir Amin’s Typology of Underdevelopment”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 12, no 1 (1982), 7-18.

believe, influenced AJR in their formulation of the RF thesis, which emphasizes institutions and not geography.

The RF thesis can, in fact, be viewed as a response to a view about the relationship between geography and socioeconomic change most recently championed by Jeffrey Sachs. Sachs has argued that forces of socioeconomic transformation, and so the historical processes of development and underdevelopment familiar with dependency theorists, are a function of geography and not institutions.<sup>174</sup> Mazrui, anticipating this debate, criticised the geography perspective (and like AJR proposed a more institutionalist view) as a robust theory of socioeconomic transformation and as a basis for economic specialization. This work was published in 1972, around the same time that Amin and Rodney were engaged in dependency. Given that he was writing at the height of influence of dependency, it is probable that he was influenced by its view on socioeconomic change. Moreover, since I have criticised the RF thesis and in effect, NIE, I find it necessary to discuss, however brief, the relationship between institutionalist and geography perspectives of socioeconomic change. Mazrui's work besides sharing assumptions with dependency, depicts neatly, the debate on the role of geography and institutions in the debate about historical socioeconomic change.

## 2. Geography and Social Stratification: Ali Mazrui

Most adaptations of dependency in Africa, including what I have labelled as a soft dependency, have not only offered criticisms of the modernization perspective but also, they have argued that it is necessary to redefine the general aims of progress and the direction of socioeconomic change in Africa and across the Third World. For them, development and its anti-thesis, underdevelopment, are historical processes. Moreover, development means more than a sustained increase in the production of output and industrialisation. At least for Mazrui, it meant a qualitative change in the structure and design of the global economic order ("the rules of the game" as popularly described in NIE), its institutions and the type of social and political relationships formed between countries.

Recently, there have been debates concerning the role of institutions and geography in historical socioeconomic transformation. Like the RF thesis of AJR, the policy implication of the

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<sup>174</sup> Jeffrey Sachs, John L Gallup, and Andrew D Mellinger, "Geography and Economic Development", *Working paper 6849, National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER)*, 1998; Sachs, "The Economic Burden of Malaria." *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, no 3 (2001), 85-96.

geography thesis is internalist in the sense that underlying it is the idea that there is a historically robust, empirical and quantitatively proven association of specific internal “features” with development. In this case, instead of property rights institutions, geography is regarded as the driving and constraining force of socioeconomic change.<sup>175</sup> Mazrui, however, argued that the geography perspective was anachronistic and simplistic. Most importantly he proposed that it was of little relevance to the African intellectual.

For him, the geography thesis, which he traced to Baron de Montesquieu (1689 – 1755), disregarded the effect of social relations on socioeconomic transformation – for a rigid and simplistic view, which assigned to Africa the role “hewer of wood and drawer of water”. Such a perspective incorporated Africa into a global economy specified by a type of division of labour which in essence was a caste division of labour, as distinct from a class division of labour. The insight to distinguish between caste and class divisions in a network of exchange is in my reading, Mazrui’s greatest contribution to the dependency debate which I will discuss at a later stage.

Mazrui also advances the view that regardless of who proposes an idea of socioeconomic change - be it historical or contemporary; internalist and externalist perspectives are not mutually exclusive, but, rather, interdependent. In this sense, domestic and diplomatic issues are inextricably linked. In my reading, this is a position not very different from Frank’s pyramidal linkages between the metropole and satellite, the view of Prebisch on international trade between the center and the periphery or the emphasis on conditioning external parameters and determining internal parameters suggested by Dos Santos, as well as Cardoso and Felato. For Mazrui, how quickly a country could cease to be underdeveloped was, therefore, a question which touched on the potential for internal socioeconomic development as well as a favourable external international climate which would allow for autonomous internal development. The balance between the internal and external, would, ideally, promote impartiality in the specification of the terms of trade, as well as the social relations of production and accumulation.<sup>176</sup>

That said, he observed that “in any given society, the strivings of some of its members conflict with the strivings of others, and history reveals a struggle of social classes; between nations and societies, as well as within nations and societies”. From this position, he argued that the

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<sup>175</sup> Adam Przeworski. “Geography vs. Institutions Revisited: Were Fortunes Reversed?” *New York University, Mimeo* (2013); and Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson, “Reversal of Fortune”, 1231-1294.

<sup>176</sup> Mazrui, “The Political Economy”, 287-321.

direction of socioeconomic change, on both a global and a domestic front, was towards the abolition of class structures and hierarchies of humanity altogether. More specifically, he proposed that if socioeconomic change could not lead towards the complete abolition of classes in the world economic order; it should at least, lead towards the minimization of class inequality and the maximization of mobility of labour across social classes. “Increased possibilities for accelerated movement from one stratum to the next, optimization of opportunities for self-improvement, and minimization of class privilege,” he wrote, “are the essential targets in the process of global socioeconomic transformation and progress”.<sup>177</sup>

I find Mazrui particularly relevant because of his use of perspectives of social stratification to understand historical socioeconomic transformation. Primarily, beyond the abolishment of class structures in the global economy, he argued that the geography view of socioeconomic change was based on caste relations which were necessarily different from class relations of social stratification.

Caste relations, according to Mazrui, perpetuate dependence and underdevelopment. By making this association, he implied that the geography perspective advocated for a clear hierarchy of advantage in terms of labour specialisation and production. “Underdevelopment, far from constituting a state of backwardness as a result of geography, is a consequence of a particular form of capitalist development known as dependent capitalism”.<sup>178</sup> His qualification of capitalism with the word ‘dependent’ is important to note:

Producing unrefined tropical goods can be an instrument of comparative advantage and socioeconomic development in its own right; yet ‘even if the terms of trade were to remain favourable for primary producers, and Europe were to continue buying cocoa from Ghana, there would still remain a serious imbalance because there is little meaningful “interdependence” left between the producer of cocoa in Africa and the buyer in Europe. Europe could presumably live without buying chocolate, but could Ghana live without selling cocoa? Could she do so if her economy depended overwhelmingly on cocoa for Europe’s chocolate consumption?’<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 292-295. It is important to stress that his position is no different from Prebisch’ assertions on unequal exchange relations between the developed core and the underdeveloped periphery, or Frank’s idea of structural pyramidal linkages between satellites and metropolises. Like Prebisch and Frank, Mazrui views socioeconomic change within a global lens; for him, the minimization of class privilege across the globe is the overriding goal of socioeconomic change. However this does not necessarily lead them to the same conclusions.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*,

Not only do I find Mazrui's above observation astute, but I interpret his statement on the lack of a meaningful interdependence, to be very significant and worthy of critical reflection if we are to move towards an improved understanding of the historical processes of underdevelopment.

Primarily, in my opinion, his observation is about the division of labour, its attendant hierarchies, meritocracies, value systems and reward systems. What gives primary products such as cocoa or coffee, less value than secondary or tertiary products such as processed chocolate or drinking coffee? Is it the 'free' market and its laws of demand and supply? Or some other, perhaps informal institutional constraints? And how does this relate to underdevelopment and capital accumulation overtime?

Cocoa is needed to make chocolate, so there is a clear interdependence at work, but cocoa and chocolate are rewarded/valued so differently by the humanely designed and specified, market pricing mechanism, that it is more profitable to produce chocolate than to farm cocoa - the price differential it is commonly argued exists because of the 'value' added to the unrefined cocoa to make the final product, but is there any chocolate without cocoa? If there is an interdependence at work, how meaningful is this interdependence between the trading parties? Might the problem of underdevelopment be in the fact that even if certain regions specialised in economic production according to their geography, there would still be discrepancies in the subjective valuations of labour produce? Certainly, it could be these subjective valuations which are subsequently reflected in income inequality and underdevelopment.

Mazrui has suggested that instead of uncritically accepting theories of socioeconomic change which consider the valuation mechanism underpinning exchange as sacrosanct, students of socioeconomic change in the Third World, and especially in Africa, should examine such theory and analyse them critically within a prism of social stratification, meritocracies, and hierarchies of value to better understand the reality that these theories profess to describe. "In a class system", he wrote, "nations are graded on a scale which moves from indigence to affluence. Potentialities for mobility within the system, and capacity to increase living standards and perhaps even close the gap between this and that country, are within the bounds of possibility". But an international caste system is more rigid and absolutist. "Just as in the case of a single society, a caste system perpetuates itself by relating gradation to unchangeable hereditary factors. So in the international economic system, gradation is rigidified by attempting to base

economic specialization as well as long-term economic performance on unchangeable climatic and geophysical factors”.<sup>180</sup>

The above is a crucial point and an insight I wish to emphasize. From this point of view, the geography thesis is an example of a perspective of socioeconomic change which applies a caste system of social stratification to economic history by implying that socioeconomic change is a function of heredity in the form of geography. Furthermore, Mazrui observed that “a caste system implies a system of interdependence, with the specialization of roles, but included within that specialization is a clear hierarchy of advantage”.<sup>181</sup> Thus, although, I have earlier criticized the RF thesis for remaining largely a narrative of the rise of the West in its formal institutional bias and its notion of unilinear progress, it is important that I also acknowledge that the RF thesis presents a healthy deviation from perspectives such as the geography thesis. In moving forward, therefore, it is necessary to revise, rehash and indigenize the NIE framework which AJR employ to include other institutional factors (informal institutions) and move beyond unilinear notions of progress, but certainly not an outright rejection.

To summarise, Ali Mazrui argued that the economic backwardness of underdeveloped countries was not solely due to internal conditions such as geography - I would add, nor the lack of European private property rights institutions. Such perspectives, according to Mazrui, were misleading and missed a crucial point about socioeconomic change. Instead, he proposed that underdevelopment was a result of caste relations in international trade. These caste relations were to him enveloped in the social relations surrounding the specification of the terms of exchange, which prevented underdeveloped countries from reaching an advantageous position in the global economic order. For him and speaking to the Pan-Africanist ideal of self-determination, “the greatest problem the newly independent Africa has to face is the problem of an increasingly independent Europe in a caste international economic order and a rigid system of hierarchical divisions”.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, 298.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 300.

## Conclusion: Dependency, RF Thesis and Interdependence

Dependency as witnessed in the work of Prebisch, Frank, Dos Santos, and Mazrui, focuses on exploitative international relations which are believed to be the cause of unequal exchange, and, a dictatorship of the terms of global economic interdependence. Such exploitative social relations, I would emphasize, informal institutions, are believed to determine the conditions of economic production within countries. They also specify the international division of labour and so have a marked impact on the nature and evolutionary path of capitalist accumulation on a world scale.

In terms of policy, dependency implies very different recommendations to the RF thesis. For dependency theorists, underdevelopment is a historical process underpinned by an unequal exchange. This process may persist because of social relations between a centre and a periphery, a pyramidal structure linking satellites to metropolises, caste relations or simply, what Mazrui has called a lack of meaningful interdependence. Consequently, many dependency theorists, including Frank, Prebisch, Dos Santos, Amin, and Rodney have flirted with a combination of protectionism and temporary “de-linking” from global trade as a policy strategy for underdeveloped regions. Such policy ideas have not been radically autarkic, rather they have very often been conservative, though autarkic in spirit. Popular policy recommendations include import-substitution industrialisation and an increasingly interventionist state in the market (developmental state).<sup>183</sup>

In as much as I agree with dependency, in that, it is important to examine the international trade environment, and more importantly, the social relations affecting the terms of trade, the division of labour and the relations between the satellite and the metropole, I also deem it necessary that internal conditions- class struggles, the role of the state in the market, and most importantly, informal institutions (culture, values, and ethics) be brought back into studies of historical socioeconomic change. The real world, which history attempts to describe, after all, is shaped not only by material or economic relations, but, also, by the intersections of values and ethics, between different cultural systems (macro-level) and different people (micro-level).<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Cooper, “Africa and the World Economy”, 10-18.

<sup>184</sup> Take for example the shift from slave labour to wage-earning labour, and the incorporation of Africa into a global economic order. This is indicative of a radical change in the rules of international commerce. This is a complex, nuanced historical process which, in my opinion, has to do with communication and substantive ideas of what is right or wrong as much as it is about material means and economic conditions. My view is one in which underdevelopment on a fundamental level, is a problem of communication. It is born out of the failure of different cultures and peoples to appreciate fully the nature of global human interdependence, and agree from a

Moreover, just as it is commonly said that ‘no man is an island’, there are no countries which are completely self-sufficient and no country whose development can be understood merely as a reflection of what goes on outside its borders. The world is very much an interdependent organism. By this, I mean that all countries are dependent on each other and the system of relations which they form a part; and all social groups within any country are dependent on each other, as well as on the external environment. There are of course different types of interdependence, both in kind and in degree and necessarily different types of linkages. Moreover, power, social and psychological relations between different regions and populations make interdependence meaningful or not.

Timothy Murithi has observed that the cultural worldview found in many parts of Southern and Eastern Africa, known as *ubuntu* highlights the essential interdependence of humanity and emphasizes principles of empathy, sharing, and cooperation in exchange relations. Moeketsi Letseka has highlighted key elements of *ubuntu* for the purposes of socioeconomic change. He argues that it encapsulates moral norms and values, I would add, informal institutions. These norms denote interdependence and an active appreciation of the value of human difference. For Letseka, people living in communities that embrace *ubuntu* are marked by a commitment to treating others with a sense of *botho*, justice, and fairness. Ramose has also suggested that *ubuntu* should be the basis for the production of knowledge in Africa. He wants Africans to decide anew on their own systems of knowledge and content transmission in line with this understanding of interdependence.<sup>185</sup>

Roger Avenstrup points out that opening up curriculum content and knowledge production to African cultures as expressed through languages, sciences, arts, crafts and religious beliefs involve reconceptualising what is often touted as universal from African perspectives. Brigit Brock-Utne and Azaveli Lwaitama have encouraged African scholars to study “indigenous systems of thought and remnant artefacts of wisdom of the kind, for instance, Nyerere drew upon in articulating the concept of *ujamaa*, the essence of African socialism or *ubuntu*”. Like *ubuntu*, *ujamaa* also denotes interdependence.<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, Catherine Odora has noted that

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humanistic philosophical disposition, how the formal and informal institutions of trade and commerce are to be specified.

<sup>185</sup> Timothy Murithi, “An African Perspective on Peace Education: Ubuntu Lessons in Reconciliation”, *International Review of Education* 55, no 3 (2009), 221-233; Moeketsi Letseka, “In Defence of *ubuntu*”, *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 31, no 1 (2012), 47-60; and “African Philosophy and Educational Discourse”, in P. Higgs, N.G Valikasa, T.V. Mda and N.T Assie-Lumuba (Eds.), *African Voices in Education* (Cape Town: Juta, 2000), 179-193; Ramose, *African Philosophy*.

<sup>186</sup> Roger Avenstrup, “Introduction to the Proceedings of the Sub-Regional Curriculum Conference: Shaping Africa’s Future Through Innovative Curricula” in R. Avenstrup (ed.), *Shaping Africa’s Future Through Innovative*

the communication of knowledge, in contrast to what is understood today by formal education and training – and in the meantime, a universal – context, in Uganda has very little to do with *ubuntu* or interdependence. In her view:

The moment children go to school, they learn to talk about “my chair, my homework, my position,” and less and less about “our”, “we”. The risks of alienation get more profound the higher one climbs up the ladder in search of the elusive certificate<sup>187</sup>

Abdourahim Bakar has also observed of his school days that: “since we were considered as French, nothing but French was taught. The whole curriculum was based on France and the French worldview whereas Comorian, our mother tongue, and our indigenous worldview, was never considered to be suitable for modern instruction.<sup>188</sup> Similarly, Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong’o writes that language and missionary education supplemented the colonisers’ swords and bullets as a means of subjugating Africans:

The night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard...the bullet was the means of physical subjugation. Language and religious instruction was the means of spiritual subjugation.<sup>189</sup>

Language, identities, culture and more generally, informal institutions, as can be seen from the above are an important topic of discussion when it comes to socioeconomic transformation in Africa. However, the above description of interdependence even if it is claimed to be a philosophical disposition centred in some African culture, might be taken as ambiguous, because simply stating the fact of interdependent relations between countries and among peoples does very little to expose the contents and terms of these interdependent relationships. When, for instance, is interdependence meaningful? For example, one can say that the slave and the slave owner are interdependent on each other. Similarly, workers and the owners of the means of production are interdependent on each other. But, how is interdependence expressed under such conditions? The notion of interdependence thus represents a challenge for past and present views of socioeconomic transformation, especially when conflated with the role of power and hegemonic relationships in establishing the terms of interdependence between

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*Curricula* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 1997), 1-6; Brigit Brock-Utne, *Whose Education for All? Recolonization of the African Mind*, (Seoul: Homi Publishing, 2006), 334.

<sup>187</sup> Catherine Odora, “Indigenous Forms of Learning in Africa with Special Reference to The Acholi of Uganda” in B. Brock-Utne (ed.), *Indigenous Education in Africa, Rapport no 7* (Oslo: Institute for educational Research, 1994), 84.

<sup>188</sup> Abdourahim Bakar, “Small Island Systems: a Case Study of the Comoro Islands”, *Comparative Education* 24, no 2 (1988), 184.

<sup>189</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising The Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986), 9.

nations and peoples. Dependency theorists may argue that the terms of interdependence are exploitative on a world scale. Those who oppose dependency will suggest otherwise. Frederick Cooper has suggested that a “Ricardian would reply that the periphery may indeed get less than the center from exchange, but more than it would have got from no trade at all; trade is not a zero-sum game”.<sup>190</sup>

Furthermore, the colonial situation and the subsequent calls for cultural affirmation, decolonization, and self-determination in the post-colonial era, are all concerned in a fundamental way, with issues of interdependence and the terms thereof between the peoples of Africa and the rest of the world. Any good reading of Africa’s immediate past and intellectual history reveals this. And so, in conclusion, I would like to suggest that as a way forward from the impasse between perspectives which point to external constraints, and those which point to internal constraints as causes of underdevelopment, it would, perhaps, be useful, to isolate and consider interdependence as a theoretical concept in its own right. Isolating interdependence, will enable one to ask questions of whether the social, economic and political relations among countries and people are exploitative or humane? The object then would be to locate and examine the past and present realities to expose the contents and the terms of interdependence. How have these relations changed? And what historical forces contributed to such changes? From a NIE perspective, one could ask, were such forces of change in the formal or informal institutional domain? Such a perspective, I believe could provide the student of socioeconomic change with incredible insights.

The modernization perspective, post-World War II, I will suggest in the next chapter, like dependency, was concerned also with the fundamental issue of interdependence. However, it was more optimistic of the linkages of interdependence than the latter. Whereas dependency is critical of the terms of interdependence, modernization tends to see them as benevolent and historically progressive.

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<sup>190</sup> Cooper, “Africa and the World Economy”, 9.

### Chapter 3: “Modernization and Its Malcontents”<sup>191</sup>

The primary goal of this dissertation is to show how some theoretical perspectives of socioeconomic change have contrasting policy implications. The previous chapters have dealt with two antithetical policy implications. In Chapter 1, we discussed NIE, by way of the RF thesis, which we saw, identified a certain type of internalist condition; i.e. the lack of Eurocentric private property rights institutions as the cause of a ‘reversal of fortune’. In Chapter 2, we considered the dependency perspective, which we saw, emphasized the external environment and the exploitative network of pyramidal relations formed between the centre and the periphery, or, alternatively, satellites and metropolises as the primary cause of underdevelopment.

Chapter 3 is divided into two parts: In part 1, the theoretical heritage of modernization and some of its basic assumptions are discussed. In part 2, I will illustrate how some assumptions of modernization have been previously contested by twentieth century Gold Coast intellectual, Kobina Sekyi (1892-1956). I find Sekyi’s work particularly interesting because Pan-Africanist intellectual historian, Ayodele Langley suggested in 1997 (4 years before AJR published the RF thesis) that:

Reviewing Sekyi’s writings, which addressed problems of African development whether they were on law, philosophy, history, sociology, government or literature, we can conclude that his theory of the role of indigenous institutions and cultures is a precursor to important developments in contemporary development and cultural theory, especially the *new institutional economics* and efforts to adapt indigenous African cultures and institutions to management practices and to social and economic development (emphasis in original). In some respects Sekyi was perhaps even more radical in his theory of endogenous development such as his insistence that Africans should ensure that they develop the capacity to formulate their own ideas on the type development and political system best suited to their needs and environment.<sup>192</sup>

The present chapter is consistent with the previous two chapters on NIE and dependency. It examines the modernization perspective and its policy implication by way of a presentation of what Langley has referred to as Sekyi’s malcontentedness with modernization. Furthermore,

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<sup>191</sup> The title of this chapter is taken from Langley, *Modernization and its Malcontents: Kobina Sekyi of Ghana and the re-statement of African Political Theory, 1892-1956*, (Edinburgh: Centre for African Studies, 1970)

<sup>192</sup> Langley, “W. E. G (Kobina) Sekyi’s Theory of History, Social, Political and Economic Development, 1910-54” in (eds.) Simon McGrath, Charles Jedrej, Kenneth King and Jack Thompson, *Rethinking African History*, (University of Edinburgh: Centre for African Studies, 1997), 264.

it provides an example of a criticism of modernization, which, although, different from dependency and NIE, nevertheless shares certain basic assumptions with them.

## Part 1: Theoretical Heritage of Modernization

### 1. Historical Context

Change is an abiding feature of reality and so no idea is trapped in time, exhausted in meaning nor sealed from interrogation or intervention. Similarly, ideas of socioeconomic transformation follow patterns of change. A study of the most popular perspectives of socioeconomic change reveals that such ideas have their origins in history, and can be seen to have evolved and changed in response to specific socioeconomic challenges, as these have emerged in the historical process. Thus, the modernization perspective as we know it today is the result of a constant and unending interrogation, responding to the socioeconomic challenges of the times. In short, modernization is not homogenous, rather it consists of a heterogeneous body of ideas which share certain basic assumptions.<sup>193</sup>

Viewed from a historical perspective, modernization theory is traceable to assumptions about the inferiority and unsuitability of non-European cultures in the pursuit of progress which were prominent in nineteenth century Europe. Such assumptions were crucial in the construction of difference between human beings, in play under the colonial situation, and in the shift from direct to indirect rule in the colonies. More recently they can be found in the adaptation of the scientific spirit to historical analysis of society – and are noticeable in the emphasis of formal over informal institutions, as well as, in the idea of transferring good formal institutions from a developed to a developing area. It is commonly held, however, from surveyed literature, that the modernization perspective, together with its most fundamental assumptions gained traction in the immediate post-WWII environment as a result of three significant and related historical events.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> In my reading the RF thesis shares some of its most basic assumptions (tunnel history, formal institutions bias, mechanistic) with modernization.

<sup>194</sup> Surveyed literature include the following: Alejandro Portes, “Convergences Between Conflicting Theoretical Perspectives in National Development”, in Herbert Blalock (ed.) *Sociological Theory and Research* (New York: Free Press, 1980): 220-227; Tim Allen and Allan Thomas, *Poverty and Development into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Oxford: The Open University, 1992); Daniel Chirot, “Changing Fashions in the Study of the Social Causes of Economic and Political Change” in James Short (ed.), *The State of Sociology*. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage publications, 1981); So, *Social Change*; Robert Holton, “Talcott Parsons and the Theory of Economy and Society” in Bryan Turner and Robert Holton (eds.), *Talcott Parsons on Economy and Society*, (London: Routledge, 1987), 25-106; Jephias Matunhu, “A Critique of Modernization and Dependency Theories in Africa: Critical

The first was the crumbling of European imperialism and the disintegration of colonies in Africa and in Asia beginning in the 1930s decade. The birth of ‘nation states’, was a societally reflective, structurally incremental and historically constructed phenomenon in the sense that it encouraged a global populist search for new paradigms of socioeconomic transformation. Such paradigms were to provide models of progress which would promote the economies of the emergent nations as well as, the old, in an interdependent fashion, and contribute significantly to a restructuring of their societies. The second was the rise of the USA as a global political ‘super power’. While previous European nations such as Britain, Germany, and France were greatly weakened by the war, the USA emerged from WWII strengthened, and became a leader in the implementation of the Marshall Plan which was to restructure Europe.<sup>195</sup> The third is the beginnings of what has been referred to as the Cold War, which is the arising conflict between the USA, and the Soviet Union. This conflict had a significant impact on international diplomacy as well as theoretical perspectives of socioeconomic change.<sup>196</sup>

The colonies, which had now become independent, were in a hurry to launch programmes of socioeconomic restructuring. African elites and governments assumed from various colonial administrations, the formal responsibility, and mandate of charting the direction of socioeconomic change in their respective countries. At the same time, given the diplomatic tensions between the Soviet Union and the USA in the historical context concerned, it is interesting to note the following observation of Chirot: “it was natural that American political elites encouraged their social scientists to study Third World nation states, to promote the American economic development model and political framework, so as to avoid losing the new states to the increasing threat of the Soviet Communist bloc”.<sup>197</sup>

From Chirot, one can say that socioeconomic relations were at a critical juncture where most nations recognized the need to form new linkages of interdependence. For the erstwhile colonial masters, this was a period, after the devastation of the WWII, where it was crucial to work out new modes of co-existence with former colonies and dependencies. More importantly, new intellectual relationships were also required. And so they decided to extend their cooperation in a limited way to aid in the endeavour of the newly emergent nations. It is

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Assessment”, *African Journal of History and Culture* 3, no 5 (2011); Shyama Dube, *Modernization and Development: the Search for Alternative Paradigms* (London: Zed Books, 1990).

<sup>195</sup> Nicolaus Mills, *Winning the Peace: The Marshall Plan and America's Coming of Age as a Superpower*, (New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2008), 3-31.

<sup>196</sup> “The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto” a title given by Rostow to his work on socioeconomic change, is for instance exemplary of the influence of the Cold War on theoretical perspectives.

<sup>197</sup> Chirot, “Changing Fashions”, 263.

important, however, especially in our recollection of history that we recognize the nature and specification of social relations as well as the power dynamics at play – the former colonial masters in extending their help were impelled in part by conscience, and humanitarian impulses, but also, strategic power interests and possible long term economic gain entered into the calculations and influenced decisions.<sup>198</sup> Considerations of national interest weighed as much with the previous colonizers as it did with the previously colonized. Then president of the USA, Harry Truman’s 20 January, 1949 presidential inaugural address, captured these sentiments:

We must embark on a bold new programme for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. The old imperialism - exploitation for foreign profit - has no place in our plans.<sup>199</sup>

Although Truman implies that the imperialism-exploitation model be relegated to the past, it is nonetheless important to stress the point that it is only through a systematic study of the content of ideas in the said period that one can know with any certainty whether it was indeed relegated to the dust bin of history. A study of ideology, as David Apter has observed, is capable of revealing the objective and assumed “scientific” status of social science more clearly than does any other subject. To study about ideology raises issues about the objective quality of social science methods. These issues are: the role of the observer – in our case, the passionate but reflective African intellectual or the aloof social scientist of African development in an American or European university; the degree to which we can assume the motivations and attitudes of others by “empathizing” with their roles; the degree to which we can separate observer roles from previous ideological commitment, or put more generally, the problem of bias in research; and the nature of prediction.<sup>200</sup> A detailed study of the ideology of modernization falls outside the purview of this dissertation. However, the tension between the process of shaping new principles or changing old ones serves as the underlying rationale for the rest of the chapter. This is especially evident in my discussion of the basic assumptions of modernization as well as depiction of how these assumptions were contested by Sekyi.

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>199</sup> Quoted in Allen and Thomas, *Poverty and Development*, 6.

<sup>200</sup> David Apter, *Ideology and Discontent*, (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1964), 18.

## 2. Assumptions and Implications of the Modernization Perspective

A review of secondary literature on modernization reveals that late nineteenth century Victorian evolutionary theory and mid-twentieth century American functionalism were highly influential in shaping the intellectual tradition. This is especially evident in the attempt of modernization theory to illuminate the dynamics of socioeconomic change - what it regarded as the necessary and challenging transition from 'backward looking' traditional societies to 'forward looking' modern societies. Accordingly, it is worthwhile to review the evolutionary and functionalist approaches.

Classical evolutionary theory was born out of naturalist philosophy, specifically, the work of Charles Darwin. Although first developed from the study of nature, the concept of evolution managed a successful transition from the natural sciences to the social sciences, beginning first with its widespread acceptance and popularity in Victorian Europe.<sup>201</sup> In its application to the study of societies, classical evolutionary theory makes the following basic assumptions. First, it assumes that change is unilinear; that is society invariably moves along a pre-determined pathway, from a primitive to an advanced state, characterised by superior technology. Second, it established a value judgement on the process of change – the movement toward the advanced state was good because it represented the ultimate goal of humanity.<sup>202</sup> Third, the rate of change in society was necessarily slow – it was evolutionary and not revolutionary. That is, the transition from primitive (traditional) societies to technologically advanced (modern) societies was a necessarily painful process taking centuries to complete.<sup>203</sup>

If evolution was the theoretical framework, then the functionalist approach provided the modernization perspective with an influential analytical toolkit, including concepts such as 'system', 'functional imperatives', 'pattern variables' and 'homeostatic equilibrium'. So makes the observation that:

Since many prominent members of the modernization school – such as Daniel Lerner, Marion Levy, Neil Smelser, Samuel Eisenstadt, and Gabriel Almond – were schooled in functionalist theory, their modernization studies are inevitably stamped with the functionalist trademark of Talcott Parsons.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Daniel Dennet, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and The Meanings of Life* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 5-27; Fichman, *Evolutionary Theory*, 1-18.

<sup>202</sup> Portes, "Convergences", 220-227; Robert Rhodes, "The Disguised Conservatism in Evolutionary Development Theory," *Science and Society* 32, no 1 (1968), 383-412.

<sup>203</sup> Willem Wertheim, *Evolution and Revolution: The Rising Waves of Emancipation* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1974)

<sup>204</sup> So, *Social Change*, 19.

The functionalist approach is closely linked to evolutionary theory. In fact, Talcott Parsons, regarded by some intellectual historians as the originator of the approach, was trained first as a biologist before he later turned his attention to the study of the economy and society, so the influence of evolution in his work is not at all surprising.<sup>205</sup> The influence of evolution is especially pertinent in his conception of society, and its interrelated components and processes, as an interdependent system of functional subsystems. Regarding this, So observes further that:

The different parts of a biological organism can be said to correspond to the different *subsystems* that make up a society (emphasis added). Just as the parts that make up a biological organism (such as the eye and the hand) are interrelated and interdependent in their interaction with one another, so the subsystems (such as the economy, the individual and the government) are closely related to one another. Parsons uses the concept of a system to denote the harmonious coordination among subsystems.<sup>206</sup>

Similarly, Javier Trevino notes that:

Parsons regards the social system as one of four primary constituents of more general systems of action, the other constituent units, or subsystems of action, being the cultural system, the personality system, and the behavioural system. Because he distinguishes these four subsystems in terms of the primary functions they perform, Parsons attributes primacy of adaptation—the “A” function—to the behavioural organism, primacy of goal-attainment—the “G” function—to the personality of the individual, primacy of integration—the “I” function—to the social system, and primacy of latency-pattern maintenance—the “L” function—to the cultural system. This constitutes Parsons’s famous four-function paradigm, or AGIL schema.<sup>207</sup>

The AGIL acronym stands for A - adaptation to the changing environment (individual behaviour in relation to the economy); G - goal attainment (The goal oriented personality of an individual shaped by the collective); I - integration (the cement and social network which links institutions and subsystems together, performed by law and religion); L - latency (pattern maintenance of values inter-generationally, performed by culture; i.e. family and education). So, just as each part of an organism has a specific role, every subsystem has its own unique functional imperative in the general system. Furthermore, Parsons argued that these are the four fixed functional imperatives that every society must perform if it is to survive the test of time. These functional imperatives, for Parsons, are important for the survival of a society, in just as

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<sup>205</sup> Holton, “Talcott Parsons”, 25-106; Leon Mayhew, *Talcott Parsons on Institutions and Social Evolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 107-179.

<sup>206</sup> So, *Social Change*, 21.

<sup>207</sup> Javier, Trevino, *Talcott Parsons on Law and The Legal System*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 2008), 3.

much the same way as breathing, the ingestion of water and the digestion of food are crucial for the survival of the human organism. From this observation, he formulated the concept of homeostatic equilibrium, which he used to refer to the uniform and desirable state to be observed across society when all of its subsystems are in tandem.<sup>208</sup> Once again, according to So, a biological metaphor comes in handy:

For example, if an organism needs to maintain a normal body temperature of 98.6 degrees Celsius, then the body will sweat in very hot temperatures and shiver in very cold temperatures in order to maintain the desired norm and level of equilibrium. For Parsons, society also observes the rhythms needed for homeostasis; because there are constant interactions among institutions to maintain equilibrium. When one institution experiences social change, it causes a chain reaction of changes in other institutions so as to restore equilibrium. From this angle, Parsons' system is not a static, stationary, unchanging entity; rather, the institutions that constitute the system are always changing and adjusting.<sup>209</sup>

Rhodes has pointed out that Parsons' functionalist scheme has a conservative basis, because of the assumption of homeostatic equilibrium.<sup>210</sup>

Because the approach is based on the implicit assumption that society is striving for harmony, stability, equilibrium and the preservation of an internal status quo, Parsons assumes a priori that institutions will generally strive to be in harmonious cooperation rather than in conflict with one another. As a biological organism will not kill itself, so Parsons assumes that society will not destroy its existing institutions".<sup>211</sup>

In the above, a conservative society is one which is striving towards internal stability. A less conservative society is one within which the society does not strive for the maintenance of any structure, but is malleable, and free to flow in any direction at the slightest internal or external force.

The most important contribution, however, from Parsons functionalist approach in our context is his theory of pattern variables. Pattern variables have been previously used to distinguish traditional societies from modern societies. The maintenance of pattern variables depicts socioeconomic change as a historical process whereby external factors have a socially desirable impact on the individual and culture. "Pattern variables are the key social relations that are

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<sup>208</sup> Kenneth Bailey, "Talcott Parsons, Social Entropy Theory, and Living Systems Theory", *Systems Research and Behavioural Science* 39, no 1, (1994), 25-45.

<sup>209</sup> So, *Social Change*, 19.

<sup>210</sup> Rhodes, "The Disguised Conservatism", 383-412.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

enduring, recurring and embedded in the cultural system – the highest and most important system in Parsons theoretical framework”.<sup>212</sup> In my opinion, it is these pattern variables and their usage in modernization, five of which were identified by Parsons and the implicit hierarchy in how they are conceptualised and valued that have encountered a barrage of intense criticism from proponents of the dependency perspective.<sup>213</sup>

For example, consider the affective vs. affective-neutral pattern variable. This pattern variable suggests that traditional societies form distinct social relationships that tend to have an affective component – particularly, personal and emotive dimensions. Affective societies, because everything is personalised and affection based, are prone to nepotism, corruption, and bureaucratic capture. As such the spread of wealth generated by such societies is likely to be compromised. Consider the following observations from So, on the differences between affective and affective-neutral societies:

Even in the workplace, employers treat employees as household members, and will not discharge them even when they are unproductive or in down periods of the business cycle where profits are at an all-time low”.... On the other hand, modern societies are different in the sense that in juxtaposition to traditional societies, they are not as prone to nepotism or corruption, they are impersonal and professional, because the pursuit of profit is a primary and a common goal. In modern societies, social relationships tend to have an affective-neutral component, which is regarded as the most optimal for socioeconomic progress. Such affective-neutral relationships are professional, impersonal, detached and unemotional.... “In modern societies, employers must treat employees in an affective neutral manner; fire employees when necessary, otherwise economic productivity and profitability suffers.”<sup>214</sup>

In the above, it is interesting to note that the only goal of modern society, which also signals socioeconomic progress is apparently the narrow pursuit of profit and economic productivity. This narrow view can be associated with the emphasis on formal institutions as drivers of progress as opposed to informal institutions in the contemporary discourse. Another interesting pattern variable to consider, given the implications of the RF thesis concerning good European

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<sup>212</sup> So, *Social Change*, 20.

<sup>213</sup> Parsons distinguishes between particularistic versus universalistic; self-orientation versus collective orientation; ascription versus achievement; functionally diffused versus functionally specific and affective versus affective-neutral pattern variables.

<sup>214</sup> So, *Social Change*, 21-23.

private property rights institutions, is the dichotomy between collective orientation and self-orientation societies.

Parsons explains, a role, then, may define certain areas of pursuit of private interests as legitimate, and in other areas obligate the actor to pursuit of the common interests of the collectivity. The primacy of the former alternative may be called “self-orientation”, that of the latter, “collective orientation”.<sup>215</sup>

According to this dichotomy, in traditional societies, loyalty and trust are often owed to the collectivity, such as the family and the community; and people are asked to sacrifice their own interests in furtherance of the collective interest. This according to Parsons, is a conservative way of ensuring social cohesiveness and a way of keeping the status quo in check in the face of a perceived instability caused by technological innovation, creativity, and imagination, activities which are all, by the way, viewed as primarily individualistic. On the other hand, in modern societies, the aforementioned individualistic impulses are stressed and encouraged. This stress on self-orientation apparently serves to energize the individual, leads to technological innovation, raises economic productivity and promotes socioeconomic progress. In fact, the above two examples depict the circular reasoning, and flaws inherent in Talcott Parsons’ pattern variable dichotomy which distinguishes traditional societies from modern ones. It is not clear at all from history that the greatest inventions are made by primarily individualistic people. In fact, it may be that the converse is true, and technological innovation is an interdependent and collective venture. Furthermore, the necessity of the division of labour and labour specialization, highlighted by Adam Smith, which is supposed to increase economic productivity can be described as an interdependent and collective effort of society. However, in Parsonian terms, the pattern characteristics of traditional societies which are viewed as collectivist, are generally regarded as not conducive to socioeconomic progress.<sup>216</sup>

The modernization perspective has been criticized for failing to consider the role of human agency in traditional societies as well as the role of indigenous institutions in socioeconomic change in general. Rather, it advances a narrow view of socioeconomic progress as an increase in productive capacity and economic profit. By ignoring the involvement and participation of the target community, the intervention strategy and policy recommendation, often prescribed

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<sup>215</sup> Roshan Joseph, “Parsons Pattern Variable and Social Change Analysis”, *Search and Research Youth Journal* 3, no 3 (2012), 18-21.

<sup>216</sup> See McClelland. “Business Drive”, 165-178 and Alex Inkeless, “Making Men Modern: On The Causes and Consequences of Individual Change in Six Developing Countries” in Etzioni and Etzioni (eds.) *Social Change*, 342-461.

by Eurocentric academics become an imposed strategy in the target community. Another intriguing weakness of the modernization perspective is that it is based on a mechanistic assumption which implies that socioeconomic change is a linear historical process, with the West (or more specifically societies characterised by individualistic pattern variables) at the top of the historical hierarchy. Such an assumption gives little room for the reciprocal relationship of causation from within the developing region. Furthermore, it encourages foreign powers to prescribe the socioeconomic trajectory of societies identified as traditional, indigenous or lacking in development.<sup>217</sup>

More critical and more nuanced uses of pattern variables include more favourable interpretations of traditional society such as in the work of Robert Bellah, Herman Kahn, and Morishima Michio. Where it has been suggested that the socioeconomic success of Japan, already visible in the Meiji period was not solely a result of the wide acceptance of the Eurocentric pattern variables of ascription, particularism, affective-neutrality, diffused expectations, and self-orientation, but most importantly that, it was as a result of a form of critical interdependence, involving a mix of certain traditional Japanese values inherited from the preceding Tokugawa period (Confucian ethics and Tokugawa religion) with some degree of Eurocentrism.<sup>218</sup>

In the following section, I will suggest that before dependency opposed the modernization perspective between 1950 and 1970, there were certain individuals of the African petty bourgeois class who were exceptionally articulate, and able to conduct their own case against some of the assumptions underpinning modernization in the colonial period (1912-1956). Instead of regarding the pattern variables of traditional societies as diametrically opposed to progress and technological advancement, they saw them as compatible. In particular, I will suggest that although Gold Coast intellectual, Kobina Sekyi, from his observations of the colonial situation also conceived the society as a biological organism, very much akin to Parsons' theory, he did not see traditional pattern variables as inherently backward. On the contrary in his essay titled the "Future of Subject Peoples" (published in 1917), he argued that if Africans do not develop along the direction of the values and ethics of their unique pattern

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<sup>217</sup> Matunhu, "A Critique of Modernization", 67.

<sup>218</sup> Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957); Herman Kahn, "The Confucian Ethic and Economic Growth" in Mitchell Seligson (ed.), *The Gap Between Rich and The Poor: Contending Perspectives on the Political Economy of Development*. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1984), 78-90; Morishima Michio, *Why Has Japan Succeeded? Western Technology and the Japanese Ethos*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

variables, socioeconomic progress was bound to be constrained by a cultural crisis which he referred to as “denationalisation”.

## Part 2: Modernization and African Activist-Intellectuals

In hindsight, and with a specific focus on pattern variables, it is perhaps not difficult to identify likely obstacles and reactions to the modernization perspective from Third World intellectuals.

Regarding this, Dube has noted that:

Some warnings were sounded even at the time it was first offered to the Third World: forces of tradition it was noted, would not yield without a series of battles; traditional loyalties would assert themselves time and again, making socioeconomic progress difficult; torn between its allegiance to tradition and commitment to modernization, the Third World elite is likely to falter and dilute the vigour of its pursuit; sloppy and inept planning and management of modernization programmes may impede their progress; even the relatively “successful” programmes may encounter unanticipated fundamentalist reactions at the most unexpected turns. Most of these arguments were well taken; but it has to be borne in mind that all the anticipated barriers and the possible causes of breakdowns of modernization were seen as lying essentially within the societies that were aspiring to ‘modernize’ themselves.<sup>219</sup>

In the above, Dube makes three crucial observations on the modernization perspective. There was an assumption that pattern variables associated with modernization were incompatible with that of tradition. Second, by way of a cultural resistance, the forces of tradition, it was believed, would not yield easily to external forces even if they were ‘modernizing’. Third, the perspective advocated an oversimplified view of institutional change – it is not tradition, but rather human nature, which has a natural propensity to resist change in favour of the status quo. Change is resisted because it brings in elements of uncertainty. The fear of uncertainty and the defence of the status quo should not be restricted to either a traditional or a modern society, regardless of how they are defined.

Moreover, Dube suggests that the breakdown of modernization, that is, the resistance to modernizing forces, was generally believed to be situated in the societies that were aspiring to modernize themselves. And yet the fear of uncertainty, as we have noted, is fundamentally

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<sup>219</sup> Dube, *Modernization and Development*, 22.

neutral. Neutrality of the resistance to change, in this regard, is a more nuanced view than the simplistic, one-way view of causality which the modernization perspective suggests.

In addition, the notion of universality and rationality of certain pattern variables over others is debatable. Indeed, Dube in the same document has observed the following of the modernization perspective:

It is now recognized that rationality can be of different kinds, at different levels, and, in different contexts. The explanatory power of the paradigm was limited and the guidelines to action embodied in it were somewhat obscure. Two basic questions remained unanswered: *Whose modernization? Modernization for what?* (Emphasis in original) The formulation did not adequately take into account the qualitative changes in the problems that humanity faces, nor did it explore the prospects of modernization against the backdrop of the realities of the contemporary world order. The exploitative and repressive aspects of the contemporary world order were not seriously questioned and the alternative of a revolution was ruled out.<sup>220</sup>

Thus modernization was very internalist in that the global context of modernity (even if unnecessarily defined as universal) and its relations, especially, concerning the pattern variables, remained largely unexamined, and internal factors such as the forces of tradition or cultural resistance were simplistically elevated as the focus of analyses.

This is the stage at which I want to begin the discussion of responses by African activist-intellectuals against the modernization perspective. The historical context of my narrative is the colonial situation – particularly, the first three decades after the Berlin conference of 1885, which in my opinion, marked the climax and consolidation of European competition for territory and power in Africa. Nobody will contest the claim that the history of colonialism and the decolonization movement in Africa amounts to a narrative of struggles, strategies and tactics for both the colonizer and the colonized. The challenge is the extension and translation of this historical understanding to the domain of theory – in this case, a theoretical counter to modernization.

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<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

### 1. Reflective “Transvaluation of Values” as a Response to Pattern Variable Bias<sup>221</sup>

The challenges Africa faced in the period between 1890 and 1920, brought with it a confluence of events which make it an interesting period to study. The general act of the Berlin conference contributed to increased colonial activity in Africa. This of course was accompanied by increased levels of resistance among certain groups of African populations. The patterns of change in the period, resulted in a cultural hotchpotch which amplified confrontation involving indigenous cultural values and colonial, ‘modernizing’ values. This resulted in what George Hagan has referred to as a transvaluation of values (comparison of value systems) by the colonial administration as well as the indigenous populations. The period also involved the indigenization of values such as Christianity (through missionary education) and in other moments, triggered episodes of cultural resistance and revolt (Ethiopianism for example).<sup>222</sup>

In the Gold Coast, and I suspect, in other parts of Africa, the debate on culture, values and informal institutions became one of the driving forces of proto-nationalism in the aforementioned period.<sup>223</sup> Some indigenous classes (detrribalized, western educated, petty bourgeois) saw the aggressive westernization and evangelization of indigenous peoples as a peril to progressive socioeconomic change. Others saw this as a movement towards progress, and, claimed it was an inexorable, irresistible force that was not to be confronted but to be accommodated and embraced. The confluence of these two ideological positions dictated much of the political philosophies and discussions which animated the educated native in his dealings with the colonial administration as well as indigenous authority such as chiefs.

Of those petty bourgeois natives in the Gold Coast who saw the force of westernization as a threat, none was more vocal than Sekyi. Sekyi’s awareness that the educated members of Fanti society had chosen to abandon their cultural roots and Fanti identity in pursuit of the externals of European culture, filled him with horror. His confident and uncompromising advocacy of the need to preserve elements of African traditions, values and institutions in the march forward, and his courage to live what he preached brought him scorn among those who claimed that the colonialists had brought civilization to the people of Gold Coast and, therefore, used this not only to justify a blind imitation of European lifestyles but also to reject every indigenous cultural practice and philosophy as backward, uncivilized and satanic. He was also

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<sup>221</sup> The association of the work of Sekyi with a process labelled as a transvaluation of values is credited to Hagan, “Nyim Dze Nsee Dze”.

<sup>222</sup> Graham Duncan, “Ethiopianism in Pan-African Perspective, 1890-1920”, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 41, no 2 (2015), 918-218.

<sup>223</sup> Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation*, 18.

uncompromising towards the indigenous authorities, in particular, some of the chiefs, who he saw as working together with colonialists.<sup>224</sup>

Delivering the first Kobina Sekyi Memorial lecture, held at the University of Ghana on November 14<sup>th</sup> 2009, Hagan writes that:

Through his own journey of self-discovery, Sekyi realized that Africans could come to a proper appreciation of the soundness of our traditional institutions and way of life and restore pride in our cultures, only by appreciating that African institutions and modes of life are based on core ethical values that are distinct or diverge in certain areas from the core moral principles on which European institutions and way of life rest. He became aware of this divergence by reflective transvaluation of values, that is, through the rational exploration and comparison of the values of other peoples, especially the English and the cultures of classical antiquity on the one hand, with African cultural values, on the other. After all it was on their own epistemological and ethical premises that Europeans condemned African cultures as irrational, primitive and evil. Sekyi asserted that, if Africans also used our cultural frame as a reference point to estimate European values, we might discover that African cultures have always in fact had higher moral principles. So he remonstrated that we should not use the superficial aspects of European cultures to measure their sophistication; we should compare their core values with our own; and we should do it on the basis and affirmation of African cultural values. This approach to intercultural discourse can be described as ‘transvaluation of values’.<sup>225</sup>

In the above passage, it is crucial to note the emphasis on the concept, reflective transvaluation of values. Hagan urges us to remember Sekyi as an individual who was engaged in such a process. In fact, the title of his lecture, which is “culture affirmation and transvaluation of values” reflects this.<sup>226</sup> Again, this assertion can be viewed as an illustration of the concern of African intellectuals with informal institutions.

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<sup>224</sup> Samuel Kofi Date-Bah, “Aspects of Kobina Sekyi’s Constitutional Thought and its relevance to Contemporary Ghana”, Third Kobina Sekyi Memorial Lecture, (Kofi Drah Lecture Hall, Department of Political Science, University of Ghana, 23 March, 2013. Occasional Paper no 72, (CASAS) Centre for Advanced Studies in African Society), 4.

<sup>225</sup> Hagan, “Nyim Dze Nsee Dze”, 10.

<sup>226</sup> Memorialization is a process that satisfies the desire to honour various figures or events as a means to examine the past and address contemporary issues. In my opinion, memorials are interesting to study, because they provide one with an insight into how historical figures are variously being remembered. For this reason part of my discussion on Sekyi is based on memorial lectures.

Because of his views on the role of culture in socioeconomic transformation, Sekyi has been labelled as a ‘radical conservative’ by Langley. However, in the introduction to the first memorial lecture, Prah has referred to him as a ‘progressive traditionalist’:

Sekyi has been described as a “radical conservative.” My view on him is different. He is much more of a “progressive traditionalist” than anything else. Kobina Sekyi’s life and thought is particularly significant for our times, because 50 years into the post-colonial era, the 50 odd states of Africa continue to desperately flounder in the quest for development and societal advancement. In Africa, all in all, we have for the good part of a half a century been menaced by a rash of tin pot dictators of all sorts in and out of uniforms, kleptocratic and inept leaders, cessionary and culturally capitulationist elites who have become Trojan horses for the maintenance of neo-colonial culture and Western mimicry in Africa; elites who turn their backs on their cultural values and ethics, and still expect us to be able to make progress.<sup>227</sup>

In some sense, one could say that the two competing labels of radical conservative and progressive traditionalist are interchangeable. On this score, I prefer the latter because the intention of Sekyi’s unwavering consideration of the difference between Fanti and British culture, values, norms, and pattern variables (informal institutions) is not to situate African and European societies in antagonistic opposition. In my reading, his affirmation of Fanti culture and his reflective transvaluation of values was not to set up confrontation but rather to restore to the Fanti people the right of agency, the right to signify, the right to represent themselves independent of the western, Eurocentric gaze. Sekyi affirms the cultural difference of the Fanti from the British by shifting the position of theoretical enunciation from Europe and proclaiming the legitimacy of non-European cultural worlds as philosophical and rational locations.

He was obsessed with the challenge of African advancement, which he saw as an acquisition of certain elements of western rationality and technique, however, he was also suspicious of indiscriminate borrowings. He lived during a period of immense change, where, in his opinion, he witnessed the decline of Fanti culture as the affirming and abiding principle of Fanti socioeconomic life and aspirations. Fanti society before the colonial encounter, Sekyi argued, rationalized its development along lines drawn from and adapted to their existent forms and social structures of production, distribution, and exchange. Western dominance reformulated the conceptions of socioeconomic transformation. The idea of socioeconomic advancement was

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<sup>227</sup> Quoted in Hagan, “Nyim Dze Nsee Dze”, 2.

made a prerogative of Western, colonial hegemony in the Gold Coast, a benefit accrued to the ‘natives’ and ‘primitives’ as a result of the civilizing mission of colonialism.

Consequently, the quest for socioeconomic progress at the time of Sekyi was organized in the service of the overall colonial endeavour. While it espoused the interests of certain classes of the indigenous populations, it was treated as a social application for the maintenance of Western hegemony in a cultural, economic and political sense. European missionaries, for instance, regarded the heathenization of African religious practices and their replacement, with Christian ones as progress, the introduction of hut and poll taxes were seen as ways of forcing the native into useful work and increase his economic productivity (as if his previous activity was not economic), and the imposition of colonial languages, as a method for liberating the colonized from a pre-modern world. Sekyi observed these processes as well as its effects on the Fanti elite and was convinced that much of the thrust of Western civilization could be misleading to African efforts at progress.

He ridiculed and warned his petty bourgeois, Western-educated, peers of the dangers of uncritically emulating European institutions. Rather, he encouraged Fanti’s specifically, and Africans more generally, to use their cultural frame as a reference point to estimate European values. If they did this, according to Sekyi, they might discover that African cultures have always, in fact, had higher moral and ethical principles than that which they are quick to emulate. Witness Sekyi, writing in October, 1917 that:

On the one hand we have the progressive aggressiveness of European industry, and on the other hand we have the complacent decadence of the subject peoples who believe that by imitating Europe will raise their respective nations to a level of power, or of efficiency, similar to, if not the same as, that of Europe. The subject peoples of these days pride themselves on their efforts to acquire external qualities which they believe to be essential... now the fault with those in Africa and elsewhere who are at present striving might and main to emulate Europe is that they are copying the habits of a diseased state of society”.<sup>228</sup>

Given the importance of a reflective transvaluation of values to Sekyi’s ideas of history, society and economy, it is from this viewpoint - the juxtaposition of African and European cultural systems, and their attendant informal institutions or pattern variables – that I want to view Sekyi’s criticism of modernization. This, in my opinion, is what constitutes the greatest

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<sup>228</sup> Quoted in Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation*, 243.

historical lesson of the period 1890-1920, which is also a criticism of an African activist-intellectual of the implicit assumptions of the modernization perspective.

## 2. “Modernization and its Malcontents” - Kobina Sekyi (1892-1956)

The title of this section is taken from Langley’s summary and situation of Sekyi’s work in the debate on socioeconomic change.<sup>229</sup> In 1997, in his chapter in *Rethinking African History*, Langley suggests that the body of work of Sekyi be connected with New Institutional Economics (NIE).<sup>230</sup> In a sense, my earlier criticism of the RF thesis (chapter 1) - that it is biased towards formal institutions, is a continuation of Langley’s work. Langley uses Sekyi’s work in an instrumental manner, as a way of emphasizing the importance of informal institutions in thinking through socioeconomic change. He also uses Sekyi to advance what in his opinion, is the need for self-determination and intellectual autonomy in theory and in praxis in the contemporary context. Indeed, it is a sad fact that despite the availability of some of the written works of Sekyi, and I suspect many other petty bourgeois African intellectuals, from at least the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the emphasis on informal institutions and the perceived effects of imperialism on informal institutions, or the role of informal institutions in establishing the terms of trade, largely remain neglected in contemporary debates on historical change.

The ensuing discussion is based on my reading of three of Sekyi’s written works – *Blinkards* (1915), *The Anglo-Fanti* (1918), and “The Future of Subject Peoples” (1917). *Blinkards*, and *The Anglo-Fanti* are self-published short stories, whereas the other is an opinion article, published in the *African Times and Orient Review*. The discussion includes summaries and observations of Sekyi’s work by Langley, his biographer, Kofi Baku, and four memorial lectures organised by the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (Cape Town) in conjunction with the University of Ghana.

Indeed, there is quite a lot to take away from Sekyi’s works, and more particularly, his observations of the petty bourgeoisie in Cape Coast. It is somewhat depressing to note that in 2016, several African governments, including, Ghana, have had to try intervention schemes to stop their populations from literally (whitening) bleaching their skins. He would surely have

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<sup>229</sup> Langley, *Modernization and its Malcontents*

<sup>230</sup> Langley, “W. E. G (Kobina) Sekyi’s”, 264.

something to say about the perverted state of mind that fosters such practices.<sup>231</sup> The significance of Sekyi lies in his recognition of the relevance of culture, habits and in general, informal institutions to socioeconomic change, and in the specification of incentives, aspirations and the type of agency in the early twentieth century. This was especially evident in his critical attitude towards what was regarded as modern and as progress by his petite bourgeois peers.

Between 1890 and 1925, political power in the Gold Coast had been taken over by the British colonial administration. Even when the administration began to accommodate a measure of participation by indigenes – through “indirect rule” – they did not provide room for vocal, educated locals like Sekyi; it was some of the chiefs, who had been co-opted into local administration. Furthermore, Sekyi was abhorred particularly by the colonial administration and some loyal chiefs for being a spoilsport.<sup>232</sup> In the words of his biographer Baku:

The more compromising of his contemporaries thought he was a traitor to the nationalist exercise because his political and intellectual activities continually brought down the wrath of the authorities on the westernized Africans. He was considered a spoiler who obstructed progressive development by his criticisms of every move by the colonial administration.<sup>233</sup>

Historically, it is safe then to say that in the early twentieth century, criticism of the colonial system and of the attitudes and values of Europeans, colonial administrators and company officials by the educated African elite was on-going. Political organizations and intellectual circles of which Sekyi was directly connected including the Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS), were engaged in debates as well as activism to protect indigenous people from what was perceived as exploitation, as well as, uplift indigenous institutions and values in the context of the colonial situation.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>231</sup>Angela Helm, “Ghana to Ban Skin bleaching products in August”, *The Root*, accessed 13<sup>th</sup> June, 2016, <http://www.theroot.com/articles/news/2016/05/ghana-to-ban-skin-bleaching-products-in-august/>

<sup>232</sup> D.E.K Amenumey, “An Introduction to the Ideas of W.E.G Sekyi: Intellectual, Educator, Philosopher, Nationalist, Lawyer, Journalist and Part-time Historian”, Second Kobina Sekyi Memorial Lecture, (Kobina Nketsia Hall: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 29 September, 2012, Occasional Paper no 71, (CASAS) Centre for Advanced Studies in African Society), 4-6.

<sup>233</sup> Kofi Baku, “An intellectual in Nationalist Politics: The contribution of Kobina Sekyi to the Evolution of Ghanaian National Consciousness”, (Ph. D diss., University of Sussex, 1987), 23.

<sup>234</sup> The ARPS was an association of traditional rulers and indigenous elite critical of colonial rule. It was founded in 1897 in Cape Coast to protest the Crown Lands Bill of 1896 that threatened traditional land tenure systems. The ARPS went as far as to send a delegation to Britain to ask for the release of Land into the ownership of the indigenous peoples. See Kweku Nti, “Action and Reaction: An overview of the Ding Dong Relationship between the Colonial Government and the People of Cape Coast”, *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 2, no 1 (2002), 1 – 37.

By birth and upbringing, Sekyi belonged to the petty bourgeois Anglo-Fanti class of Gold Coast society that would have been intimately involved, or at least had a voice, in the day to day administration of his society. This is the historical backdrop into which Sekyi was born, and within which he was forced to operate. Although he accepted his class conditioned social role, Sekyi lived very much as a rebel against his Anglo-Fanti origins and against the lifestyle for which his education and social cultivation (class position) had eminently prepared him.

The fact that Sekyi has been memorialised as an iconoclast and a rebel is interesting and not without meaning. In the colonial configuration of the Gold Coast, in which the Anglo-Fanti are the hybrids of English and Fanti (which in reality means a muddled mutant who belongs to the cultural realities of both the Fanti and the English), to be a rebel is to think critically or conservatively and to be African, i.e. to discard the Anglo and be Fanti. As a matter of fact, according to Nana Kobina Nketsia, who gave the Fourth Kobina Sekyi memorial lecture, when some of the educated natives in Cape Coast sought to re-immense themselves in their indigenous culture, they were described by the English administrators and ridiculed by their peers as having “gone Fantee”, i.e. gone native.<sup>235</sup> It is mind boggling to imagine that an African was ridiculed and labelled as a rebel for being African. It provides us with a little insight into the nature of the violence that was being waged on African minds by the colonial situation. Thematically this points us once again, in the direction of informal institutions as an important unit of analysis in our attempts to understand socioeconomic transformation in Africa.

According to Hagan, the words of Mr. Borofo, one of the two personae of Sekyi in his short story, *The Blinkards*<sup>236</sup>, provide a useful comment about how he may have regarded his origins and upbringing:

We were born into a *world of imitators*, worse luck...and *blind imitators* at that...But then my parents set out deliberately to make me as much like a European as possible before they sent me to England. They would have *bleached* my skin, if they could (emphasis added).<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Nana Kobina Nketsia (Chief of Essikado, Sekondi), “Applied History, Sekyi-ism and contending Futures”, Fourth Kobina Sekyi Memorial Lecture, (Francis Kofi Drah Conference Room: Department of Political Science, University of Ghana 23 September, 2014, Occasional paper no 76, (CASAS) The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society), 8.

<sup>236</sup> Boronyi means an individual of ‘European’ descent. Mr. Borofo, directly translated means ‘Mr. European’. The other character is Onyimdze, directly translated as “He who knows”. *Blinkards* is a satirical novel/play involving a series of conversations between Mr. Borofo and Onyimdze on the state of Fanti society.

<sup>237</sup> Quoted in Hagan, “Nyim Dze Nsee Dze”, 16.

I find the above quote particularly interesting, especially when contrasted with Fanon's later diagnosis of the post-colonial situation in the metaphor, 'Black Skin, White Masks'. While Sekyi makes the point in 1915, during the colonial era. There is perhaps some convergence between the perspectives of these two intellectuals. There might even be enough evidence for one to draw nomothetic conclusions. The problem is one of careful intellectual and scholastic synthesis, however, this remains work which is yet to be done. Even without being too definitive, it might be suggested that the observations of Sekyi, as well as, Fanon, in their respective social contexts, highlight a concern of Africanist leaning intellectuals with informal institutions. This is a topic which various scholars, as different as Fanon and Sekyi have dealt with, although they approach it differently, in different times and have ideological differences. For our present discussion, the words of Mr. Borofo makes it clear that we can only understand Sekyi by seeking to understand the world of 'imitators' in which he was born and what kind of education and upbringing he had. Moreover, he links particular actions and mundane practices with a wider set of meanings and, by doing so, points us towards a possible way of analysing informal institutions and their effect on socioeconomic change.<sup>238</sup>

Game theory has become a useful tool in contemporary NIE research, especially as a means of understanding negotiation, bargaining and the power relations involved in socioeconomic change. The "prisoner's dilemma" is a standard example of a game that shows why two completely 'rational' individuals might not cooperate or reach a fair bargaining outcome, even if it appears that it is in their best interests to do so. Regarding the observations of Sekyi on the peculiar nature of imperialism on informal institutions in Africa, a useful game, perhaps the "bleaching dilemma" can be specified and analysed between two rational individuals – person A, who is whitening his skin to the complexion of person B; and person B, who is aware of the fact that person A desires his complexion. These two individuals would be attempting to establish fair terms of trade. Through game theoretical analysis we could ask questions such as whether A and B would cooperate? We could also interrogate the incentives and aspirations which motivate them? And whether it is easy for B to predict the actions of A in the negotiation, given the fact that A is whitening his skin? Ultimately insights into the establishment of the

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<sup>238</sup> Many African countries, including Ghana, Ivory Coast in 2016, instituted a ban on skin bleaching products. See the following link: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/heres-why-this-african-country-is-banning-skin-bleaching\\_us\\_574df530e4b0757eae0ecdf](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/heres-why-this-african-country-is-banning-skin-bleaching_us_574df530e4b0757eae0ecdf). Perhaps there is something to be learnt from Sekyi concerning this.

terms of trade could be reached through such an analysis, however, such institutions have to first be recognized as important for socioeconomic change.<sup>239</sup>

The next section is not only biographical, it is also an attempt to better understand the historical context which Sekyi has hitherto described as a ‘world of imitators’.

### 3. Born and Raised in a ‘World of Imitators’

Sekyi was born in Cape Coast on 1 November 1892 and died aged 64, in 1956, a year before Ghana’s political independence. He was conceived to an elite, Anglo-Fanti, Cape Coast family – the son of John Gladstone Sackey, headmaster of the Wesleyan School and Wilhelmina Pietersen, the daughter of Willem Essuman Pietersen, respected figures in Cape Coast. His father was a chief in Elmina, (about 10 km from Cape Coast) and could have kept his stool name for all purposes. But as expected in a world of imitators, he had to have a European name, and so he adopted the name John Gladstone (previous Yaw Bonsu) and Sekyi became Sackey. His mother was a Dutch-African, who probably would have had an African name which was never put into active service.<sup>240</sup>

Socially and intellectually, Kobina Sekyi was connected to the petty bourgeois of Cape Coast society. He was the nephew of H. Van Hein, former president of the ARPS, Lawyer and one of the leaders of the National Congress of British West Africa; another uncle was Attoh-Ahuma - author of *Memoirs of West African Celebrities*, and *The Gold Coast Nation and National Consciousness*. He was also the grandson of Chief Kofi Sekyi, known for his influential role in the formation of the Fante Confederation, one of the first attempts at self-rule in West Africa. Thus he grew up around politically active individuals like Attoh-Ahuma and Henry Van Hein - who having witnessed the rise of industrialized and militarised Japan under Emperor Meiji (1868-1912), “consciously tried to model a new polity in the Gold Coast on principles in line with the Meiji reformation in Japan in order to create what, had it not been suppressed by the British Administration would have developed into a remarkably unique polity in West Africa, with the ability to preserve tradition and a willingness to reform”.<sup>241</sup> Given such a background, Sekyi’s later involvement with the ARPS and Gold Coast politics is not at all surprising.

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<sup>239</sup> Daniel Cable and Scott Shane, “A Prisoner’s Dilemma Approach to Entrepreneur-Venture Capitalist Relationships”, *Academy of Management Review* 22, no 1 (1997);

<sup>240</sup> Hagan, “Nyim Dze Nsee Dze”, 17.

<sup>241</sup> Langley, *Modernization and its Malcontents*, 26.

Sekyi was educated at the Wesleyan Methodist School at Cape Coast and at Mfantsipim College from 1905-1908, also in Cape Coast. He was one of eight students who made it possible for Mfantsipim to survive as an educational institution founded and run by the people of Cape Coast. He taught at Mfantsipim from 1908-1910.<sup>242</sup> He entered University College, London in 1910, and in 1913, became the second African to graduate with honours in philosophy. Between 1913 and 1915, he returned to Cape Coast. Upon returning to Cape Coast, Sekyi realized that what the educated petty bourgeois class attached value to, were the peripheral and unessential features of British life. His experience of English life had cured him of his own delusions, and he began to see the life of the Cape Coast elite as one of imitators and as a parade of masquerades. He must have determined at that point to bring his compatriots back to reality. For two years, in his own words, he “did no manner of work” but applied himself to first hand study of indigenous socio-political institutions, learning the laws and customs, ridiculing those whom he called the ‘Anglo-Fanti’ and urged in several newspaper articles (of which he was intimately connected to the editors), the need for renewed pride in African identity, and a return to the healthy values and ethics of indigenous institutions.<sup>243</sup>

Though Sekyi had settled back in Cape Coast, his mind and heart were restless. If he was to give back the benefit of his education, he had to address the issue of the peculiar mentality that afflicted the westernized, educated African and made them supine and blinkered pursuers of that which robbed them of their identity and made them caricatures of the English. To begin to change the outlook, he decided to present to his compatriots a dramatic representation of themselves in a satirical play, *The Blinkards*. This was his first major discourse critical of the class of imitators of whom he was an offspring and a product.<sup>244</sup> The *Blinkards* was a play meant to expose the life of the so-called elites of Cape Coast. A blinkard, directly interpreted, is a person who blinks or has imperfect sight. In Sekyi’s usage, the word, perhaps, also refers to a person who lacks a critical intellectual perception. From my reading, by referring to the elites as *Blinkards*, I believe Sekyi also meant to suggest that they were persons who had been bamboozled or hoodwinked by Eurocentrism.

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<sup>242</sup> Nketsia has noted this in his memorial lecture. Nketsia, who also attended Mfantsipim, writes that “attending Mfantsipim School, I found Kobina Sekyi, as one of the legendary faithful eight. The legend of the faithful eight, returning back to Mfantsipim to teach for basically no wages at a difficult time, inspired fresh students with the African spirit of cooperation, communalism, self-help and unwavering determination. It imbued new students with the spirit of perseverance and grit. So Sekyi’s name did not forsake me, even in high school; it helped to etch a name into my psyche”. See Nketsia, “Applied History”, 5.

<sup>243</sup> Langley, *Modernization and its Malcontents*, 37.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

A blinkard is a person who suffers from historical tunnel vision as a result of the legacy of the colonialism, so that their minds had been strapped in blinkers and they could not distance themselves from the picture of the European way of life they had been made to focus on. The central characters of the play were Onyimdze and Mr. Borofo. These two figures were in constant conversation about the social life which they observed in Cape Coast. Onyimdze had gotten rid of his blinkers, had lifted the veil of deception and was in the process of a transvaluation of values where he could compare the value systems of the English and the Fanti and appreciate the fact that the English culture was not superior to the Fanti. Mr. Borofo still had his blinkers on. The play ends when Mr. Borofo admits that Onyimdze may have been right all along.

For Hagan, the moral that Sekyi probably wanted to leave his reader and audience was to infer for themselves that “*Nyimdze nsee dze*”, translated as “one who knows the value of his culture is obliged to preserve it and not destroy it.” Hagan goes on to make this phrase as the title of the first Sekyi memorial held at the University of Ghana in 2009.<sup>245</sup>

It is interesting that Sekyi retraced his steps back to England in 1915. He read sociology and law at King’s College as well as an MA in philosophy. The latter, he saw as the intellectual training which would provide him with the tools for his new social passion, first explored in *The Blinkards* and in some of his essays. After this “lucid interval”, as he himself described it in a long poem entitled “The Sojourner”, he returned to London on the Ship, *S.S. Falaba*, which was torpedoed by a German U-boat and almost cost him his life. This second journey to England was nearly fatal and has been read as a “road to Damascus” in the consciousness of the young Sekyi by Hagan.<sup>246</sup>

At the time of his travel, the First World War was raging, and the torpedo incident on the *S.S. Falaba* resulted in a loss of 100 lives among the travellers.<sup>247</sup> But Sekyi by some good fortune survived. He managed to get a life boat, but at that point, as the story goes, a European shouted at him to get out of the boat, “as a black man had no right to be alive when white men were drowning.” This incident, which I will discuss further on, is believed by his biographer, Baku,

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<sup>245</sup> Hagan, “*Nyim Dze Nsee Dze*”, 26.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>247</sup> Jim Kalafus, “The SS Falaba is torpedoed”, *The Lusitania Resource*, accessed 25<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 <http://www.rmslusitania.info/related-ships/falaba/>

and reiterated by Hagan, and Nketsia, to have had a profound effect on Sekyi and confirmed his already strong rejection of any European pretensions to superiority or moral authority.<sup>248</sup>



S.S Falaba was torpedoed on 28 March, 1915 with Sekyi on board.

In 1918 he graduated with an MA in philosophy and as a barrister-at-law, after which he returned to Cape Coast and within a short period published his second critical discourse on the aspirations of the Cape Coast elite. This document was entitled, *The Anglo-Fanti*, without a doubt, Sekyi's description of the Cape Coast imitators. As a product of the existing educational fare, and like many of his petty bourgeois contemporaries, Sekyi was indoctrinated to be ashamed of his heritage – all things African – and to believe in the supremacy of European values. In fact, Amenumey, who delivered the second Kobina Sekyi memorial lecture, has observed that the world of imitators was populated by Gold Coasters “who treated African traditions and practices with contempt and accepted every silly European fad as a mark of civilization”.<sup>249</sup>

The imitators were mostly members of elite families that, like Sekyi, were offered the opportunity of Western education in mission schools and continuing professional education in England, acquired a taste for all things British and European. According to Kwesi Prah, a member of the organization committee for the first Kobina Sekyi memorial lecture:

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<sup>248</sup> Hagan, “Nyim Dze Nsee Dze”, 21.

<sup>249</sup> Amenumey, “An Introduction to the Ideas of W.E.G Sekyi”, 9.

The imitators were a product of a certain historical process. Decades of Christian evangelization on the coast had produced cohorts of elementary school scholars who knew much more about London and English culture than they knew about their own country and culture. They spoke English with much affection and aspired to be employed in the colonial service. Many of them were employed in the service of trading families and European merchants. They shaped their lifestyle on what they saw in magazines and read about in books.<sup>250</sup>

The *Anglo-Fanti* was a short story in which Sekyi described the upbringing of the Fanti child as a process of indoctrination and character formation that suppressed the spontaneity of the child and turned the child into an artificial being, tragically warped in mentality and behaviour. Christian indoctrination, the teachers' whip and the carrot of the promised land of superior culture, were the efficient tools by which the child was transformed. Besides sorting out the mechanisms and processes for forging the strange mind-set and aspirations of the *Anglo-Fanti*, Sekyi used the short story to examine the philosophical issues raised by the claim that European culture, values, and institutions were superior to those of the Fanti.<sup>251</sup>

Of Sekyi's world in the Gold Coast, the following picture emerges from his two critical interventions, *The Blinkards* and *The Anglo-Fanti*. The provision of education was largely a Christian endeavour. Those who went to school became Christians. Their conversion was not only religious, it was (for Sekyi) above all else, cultural and blinding. Christianity alienated them from their indigenous values, institutions, and ethics. The growth of a corps of alienated people in Cape Coast began with the Bond of 1844 which was signed half a century earlier between Fanti chiefs and the colonial administration.

In the British eyes, or at least in the words of Walton Claridge, historian of the Gold Coast, nothing new was gained by the Bond of 1844:

The Fanti chiefs were brought under better control and their relations with the government became more clearly defined. Nothing new was gained by signing the bond, it was none the less a very necessary step; for as time went on, it became more and more necessary to have documentary evidence of every agreement or arrangement made with the Chiefs and people, many of whom, in the coast towns especially, were now being educated and could no longer be regarded and treated as simple savages as had been the case in the past.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Interview with Prah, Cape Town, conducted by author, 17<sup>th</sup> August, 2016.

<sup>251</sup> See Sekyi, *The Blinkards and The Anglo-Fanti*, (Accra, Ghana: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1997)

<sup>252</sup> Walton W. Claridge, *A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti* 2 Vols. (London: John Murray, 1915), 452.

By contrast, Joseph Boakye Danquah<sup>253</sup> has written of the historical significance of the Bond of 1844 that:

The genesis of the Bond, is contained in the instructions to Commander H. W. Hill, R.N., newly appointed Lieutenant-Governor of the Forts and Settlements on the Gold Coast. These Instructions were conveyed to Commander Hill in a despatch dated Colonial Office, 16th December, 1843, and signed by Lord Stanley, Secretary of State....In those Instructions, Lord Stanley, having informed Commander Hill of the appointment of Captain Maclean to the office of Judicial Assessor and Magistrate, went on to stipulate more precisely that in the absence of an authority or permit by “the sovereign power” in each Territory on the Gold Coast, the Judicial Assessor was not, in pursuance of the recommendation of the House of Commons, to exercise any power or jurisdiction outside the Forts. Lord Stanley said: “As regards any power to be exercised by Mr. Maclean among Tribes not within British Territory, as proposed by the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the state of the British Possessions on the West Coast of Africa, I need scarcely observe that it must rest with the sovereign power in each Territory to authorise or permit the exercise of any jurisdiction on within that Territory, whether according to British Laws or the laws there prevalent”.<sup>254</sup>

Danquah writes further on the Bond itself that:

Captain Maclean who is said to have drafted the bond, and who knew the country better than anyone in the United Kingdom, did not think it wise to include such a clause in the bond, granting the sovereign power in each territory its own law...Captain Maclean was not interested in the acquisition of political power in the Gold Coast, his main interest was centred in the introduction of British ideas of justice to the people; therefore he left out of the bond any idea of “gradual introduction or further improvements”. The nearest he went to the question of further improvements was that the customs of the country should be moulded “to the general principles of British law”....There should be nothing startling about the use of the term “bondage” in connection with the bond of 1844. By agreeing to the abrogation or diminution of certain of their ancient rights and liberties, the Fantee Chiefs placed themselves under a bounding duty to observe the obligations of the bond....Under the bond of 1844 no special rights or liberties were granted by the British sovereign to the Fantee chiefs. If anything, it could be said that it was rather the Fantee Chiefs who granted rights and liberties to the British sovereign. The bond did not create, enlarge or confirm

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<sup>253</sup> Ghanaian statesman, one of the (big Six) founders of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), and the individual who together with Kwame Nkrumah is credited for giving Gold Coast, the name Ghana, upon independence in 1957.

<sup>254</sup> Joseph Boakye Danquah, “The Historical Significance of the Bond of 1844”, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 3, no. 1 (1957), 5.

liberties emanating from the British source to our Gold Coast end. By the bond, a free people, who were not subjects of the British sovereign, voluntarily placed themselves under a binding agreement to the British crown.... In thereby diminishing and abrogating certain of their ancient rights and liberties, they naively sought to secure a better maintenance of their society which was growing more complex by reason of its contact with a society based on a differently organised system of values.<sup>255</sup>

The Bond formalized the collaboration of the Chiefs and the colonial authority. Dissent, the defence of the legitimacy of the traditional order and resistance to colonial “overrule” as Sekyi called it, was now squarely in the hands of the petty bourgeois class and intelligentsia, of which Sekyi was very vocal. The bond also led to a surge in Christian evangelization as scores of missionaries flocked to the Gold Coast not only from Britain, but from other parts of Europe such as the Netherlands, and Denmark. The Bond of 1844 is also significant because it ushered in a historical period in which the colonial administration pushed forth the growth of extractive industries and the trade in cash crops had begun to take off. The palm oil and rubber industry put wealth in the hands of a local elite, this was facilitated further by the introduction of the money economy. The introduction of cash crops such as cocoa promised even greater accumulation from 1890 to 1920.<sup>256</sup>

Looking back, *The Blinkards* and *The Anglo-Fanti* have a lot in common. Taken together they provide us with two complementary aspects of the culture of the Anglo-Fanti, who were the imitators as perceived by Sekyi. While *The Blinkards* describes the state of Cape Coast society and especially the pretensions of the educated African to European cultivation, that is, the often neglected informal institutions (the mental attitudes, behaviour, values) that were prevalent among the elites, *The Anglo-Fanti*, on the other hand, focuses on the processes of power in informal institutional change – socialization and education, that produces the blinkered African who sees nothing good in African cultures and sees in European modes of life, and institutions all that is good and worth living for. In both of these works, Sekyi concludes by giving reasons for the educated African to pause and remove his blinkers, commit to a reflective transvaluation of values and perhaps through that, begin to appreciate the value of his traditional culture, institutions, and values. Hagan provides us with a summary of what he regards as the main lessons from these two works of Sekyi. He writes that:

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<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-8.

<sup>256</sup> Austin, “The Emergence of Capitalist Relations in South Asante Cocoa-Farming”, *Journal of African History* 28, no. 1 (1987), 259-279.

African and European cultures possess their own metaphysical systems, their own epistemologies and their own moral systems. Social formations are underpinned at any point in time by epistemologies and moral systems. They relate to the processes of production, distribution and exchange as well as the socioeconomic groupings which arise and are attached to the changing social context. Education and policy for the African should reflect African epistemologies and values. African cultural principles, values and institutions are rational and should be the touchstone of African dignity and self-determination.<sup>257</sup>

It is fair to say that the Cape Coast of the early twentieth century had an interesting class structure. There were in the population, the influential, educated and petty bourgeois Fanti whom Sekyi (although one of them), would probably have seen as imitators – Fanti who dressed, lived and perceived themselves as English, and who totally rejected any African culture as inferior. There was also a racial hierarchy. The Anglo-Fanti elite associated with people of mixed descent, the *Boronyiba*, the descendants of European traders and missionaries. These two groups constituted the upper classes of Cape Coast society. On the other side was a differentiated majority of the population, who, untouched by Western education and Christian religion, practised their cultural beliefs, values, customs and traditions, artisanship and were survived by fishing and farming along the coast.<sup>258</sup> The structural profile of Cape Coast today bears the stamp of the culture of imitation which Sekyi aptly described. Westernization of Cape Coast took the form of giving English place names to roads and public places and edifices. Cape Coast had and (still has) Victoria Park, Coronation Street, Beula Lane, Royal lane and wonder of wonders, London Bridge, trademarks without a doubt of the Anglo-Fanti and the spirit of imitation which Sekyi was critical of.<sup>259</sup>

Sekyi was born into an elite ‘imitator’ family and in a socio-historical context which was marked by the determined attempt of petty bourgeois Africans to uncritically adapt and imitate English formal and informal institutions. He was born an Anglo-Fanti and so received the best education that was available to the elites of his day. His upbringing was meant to forge him into the typical imitator, but he soon outgrew these ideas. In the words of Baku:

He underwent an identity crisis and an ideological change through his experiences in England as a result of race consciousness and a discovery of the moral high ground of

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<sup>257</sup> Hagan, “Nyim Dze Nsee Dze”, 31.

<sup>258</sup> For a comprehensive study on the *Boronyiba* population and the racial hierarchy in the Gold Coast, see Pernille Ipsen, “Koko's Daughters: Danish Men Marrying Ga Women in an Atlantic Slave Trading Port in the Eighteenth Century”, (Ph. D. diss., University of Copenhagen, 2008).

<sup>259</sup> Hagan, “Nyim Dze Nsee Dze”, 20.

his native culture. By the time he returned to Cape Coast, he had become a staunch advocate of the preservation and defender of African values and ethics.<sup>260</sup>

From his two critical interventions on the nature of Cape Coast society in 1915 and 1918, Sekyi addressed the “historic responsibility his raised cultural consciousness imposed on him to pull down the illusions of Eurocentrism in order to save future generations from such a life as he has been leading”.<sup>261</sup> It, therefore, comes as no surprise when Langley writes of Sekyi that:

He was primarily concerned with how to Africanize the social system to arrest the individualism and the debilitating effects of excessive westernization. He was particularly concerned with the basic question: how to westernize without being westernized; how to preserve while modernizing.<sup>262</sup>



London Bridge in the centre of Cape Coast (Rashid Yakubu, 2014).

Sekyi’s ideas about the rationality of African values, institutions and knowledge systems, were forged in the crucible of colonialism. Without the socio-historical circumstances attendant with colonialism, the perceived supremacy of Eurocentric institutions and the uncritical mimicry of educated Africans, Sekyi’s ideas on the importance of culture and more generally informal institutions would most likely have not emerged. Sekyi espouses a complex form of

<sup>260</sup> Baku, “An Intellectual”, 33.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>262</sup> Langley, *Modernization and its Malcontents*, 25.

African cultural nationalism which is anti-colonial and traditionalist but at the same time progressive in its promotion of African consciousness and culture-centeredness.<sup>263</sup>

Sekyi was progressive because he undermined racism and European cultural superiority whilst promoting an African personality and value system. In essence, his was a psychology of liberation seeking to reconnect Africa with indigenous philosophy and institutions, whilst at the same time urging Africans to be creative, innovative and not mere imitators of European institutions and values. Undoubtedly, one may find Sekyi's emphasis on culture and self-assertion amusing or ambiguous, but when one recalls Fanon's diagnoses of the post-colonial situation or Steve Biko's statement in the 1970s decade in South Africa that "the greatest weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed", it is easy to appreciate where Sekyi was coming from and the perceived socio-historical effects of colonialism which he witnessed and grappled with. Moreover, Sekyi's critique of Cape Coast society revealed the power of indoctrination of the African mind into servility and the importance of informal institutions in socioeconomic change.<sup>264</sup>

As already indicated, higher education and professional training in England had been intended to form Sekyi and equip him to be a good imitator. Sekyi went to England afflicted with Anglomania, but his experiences in England had the unexpected effect of turning him against the English way of life, engendering in him not only a deep contempt for the myth of European civilization and superiority, but a defiant pride in the African way of life, its institutions and its underpinning values. Below, I will discuss what may have triggered the positive transvaluation of values which led Sekyi to the awareness of the need for mental decolonisation and the search for decolonising methodologies as vital to any sense of African self-determination.

If after his first trip to England, Sekyi had come back to the Gold Coast disillusioned with English culture and values, the near-death incident at sea, on the S.S Falaba, must have shocked him into a new way of thinking about himself as an African, and about the path that his life should follow. For Hagan, the second journey and the incident at sea must be appreciated as a metaphor and as a Damascus moment in Sekyi's life. He speculates that:

After the near-death incident at sea, Kobina must have reached England emotionally traumatized and in a great mental turmoil. Clearly this traumatic experience did not

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<sup>263</sup> Nketsia, "Applied History", 22-33.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

affect his studies. Yet, the experience and the encounter with the white racist would have left him agitated and reflective for the rest of his life about the things that are important in life and to human existence. What is it that makes us human and different from other creatures? What is it that imbues us with intrinsic dignity and endows us with rights? If it is a definite perception and moral consciousness bred through culture that gives us human identity and dignity, is the value of human life absolute or relative to culture? The incident must definitely have shaped Sekyi's perception of the value of human existence for life. The mind-set of the white racist must have also told him that European culture diverged critically from African culture in their moral premises and in some metaphysical assumptions.<sup>265</sup>

In the young Sekyi, something of his old life had died in the torpedo incident at sea, and a new life had begun. But what was the new life and identity that Sekyi had become conscious of? Hagan continues with his speculation:

For one thing, the confrontation with the white man would have shown him that from the European cultural perspective or consciousness he, an African had no human dignity, and had no rights. Indeed on the scale of things, he was not worthy to live. He was nothing. In a way it made him critical of his own aspirations to live like a European. But Kobina Sekyi could also not affirm and fall back on his Anglo-Fanti identity. He did not believe that the Anglo-Fanti culture gave him an identity or substance. After all that culture, premised on the belief that European culture was superior to African culture, declared its own moral bankruptcy, and could also not give him an autonomous basis for redefining his identity and fighting for his dignity. Sekyi might, therefore, have seen that he was left with no choice but to recognize that his true identity, dignity and his very existence required him to re-establish his life with a reflective affirmation of African culture. In his mind and soul, he had to turn back to his African origins where his life was secure, his human character and dignity was unquestioned. Henceforth, he was dead to English culture and alive only in Fanti culture. And this opened up wider issues.<sup>266</sup>

The torpedo event on the S.S Fallaba may be interpreted historically as a defining moment in the life of young Sekyi and in the formation of his world view. The culture of imitation of which he was a product no longer existed. The thesis of European superiority had to be countered with the affirmation of an African cultural ethic – specifically that of the Fanti. By virtue of this experience and perhaps many others in England, Sekyi became sufficiently discerning to develop a critical consciousness and a genuine concern that the

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<sup>265</sup> Hagan, "Nyim Dze Nsee Dze", 23.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

“movement to synthesize, in the middle ground, European and African cultures and institutions had already moved so far towards the European pole of the cultural divide as to indicate that African cultural values were being seriously compromised and faced an existential threat.”<sup>267</sup>

Sekyi was thus at pains to persuade his compatriots that Fanti cultural institutions did have sound rational foundations, which, if pursued would enhance their dignity as Africans. His affirmation of indigenous institutions can be interpreted as representative of the definition of self-determination defined earlier, especially in its emphasis of the need for Africans to use African ethical values to evaluate what they can take from Europe to enhance their lives, and most important of all, to be more critical of Europe and move beyond slavish imitation. This was a call for a reflective transvaluation of values as a means of self-determination. Reflective because it demanded recognition by the African individual himself, that African institutions are not inferior, but rather, they have their own value systems which can serve as a reference point in the drive towards progress, however it is defined.<sup>268</sup>

#### 4. Sekyi and Progress

It is a curious fact to note that although informal institutions were the main theoretical pre-occupation of individuals such as Sekyi, and I suspect, many other petty bourgeois Africans in the highlighted period and beyond, the effects of colonialism on African society via informal institutions are often underemphasized in contemporary discussions of institutions and socioeconomic change. As should be obvious now, in retrospect, Africans lost the political initiative under colonialism. Rodney makes the point when he observes that:

During the centuries of pre-colonial trade, some control over social, political and economic life was retained in Africa, in spite of the disadvantageous commerce with Europeans. That little control over internal matters disappeared under colonialism. Colonialism went much further than trade. It meant a tendency towards direct appropriation by Europeans of the social institutions within Africa. Africans ceased to set indigenous cultural goals and standards, and lost full command of training young members of the society. Those were undoubtedly major steps backwards...the removal from history follows logically from the loss of power which colonialism

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<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

represented. The power to act independently is the guarantee to participate actively and consciously in history, except in the most passive sense.<sup>269</sup>

In chapter 1, I showed this formal institutional bias in the policy implications of the RF thesis. What was not done, however, was a discussion of institutional dynamics from a game theoretical perspective. However, it is easy to appreciate Sekyi's view on socioeconomic transformation using game theory.

From game theory, the assumption is that institutions, whether formal or informal, refer to the rules of the 'game'. The word game, in this case, refers to the interdependent interactions underpinning trade and commerce. These rules of the game are the sole mechanisms used to police and constrain the players, who exercise agency. Privileging formal institutions over the informal, and focusing on altering laws and regulations, in pursuit of making the game optimal, falsely assumes that the rules of the game, i.e. the laws and regulations are sacrosanct. Furthermore, it does not acknowledge the fact that the players have a right of agency, and indeed, are capable of changing the rules of the game fundamentally, if they so wish.

It has earlier been suggested that those economists and economic historians, such as AJR, who elevate formal institutions above the informal, ignore the importance of another type of constraint – the internal moral constraint which is embedded in informal institutions. It can be added that in recent years research output from behavioural and experimental economics has stressed the fact that people often appear to incorporate moral constraints into their decision making processes. In light of this growing body of research, Sekyi's criticism of the Anglo-Fanti is very important for future institutional analysis in a historical as well as a contemporary context. Sekyi, in my opinion, it seems, was an intellectual whose insights were ahead of his time. It is therefore not surprising that we find Langley explicitly connecting the work of Sekyi to NIE in 1997.<sup>270</sup>

The ballast of Sekyi's argument was simple: "a society must know itself if it is to progress". From such a perspective, if the inhabitants of a previously colonised region are to suddenly establish citizenship ties to a newly formed political and economically 'independent' African state, then the emergent civic culture (pattern variables) in this new polity must not ignore indigenous agency, and it must reflect a part of the social experience, values, and traditions of

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<sup>269</sup> Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 353.

<sup>270</sup> Edward, Stringham, "Embracing Morals in Economics: The Role of Internal Moral Constraints in a Market Economy," *Journal of Economic Behaviour & Organization*, 78, no 2 (2012), 98 – 109; Ken Binmore, "Game Theory and Institutions", *Journal of Comparative Economics* 38, no 1 (2010), 245 – 252.

the indigenous populations. Development from without - ignoring African agency and initiative, as well as informal institutions, would only lead to failure, and what Sekyi referred to as a social malaise of denationalization.<sup>271</sup>

To fully appreciate Sekyi's theory of socioeconomic change, we have to focus the present discussion on one of his essays, "The Future of Subject Peoples", published in October-December 1917 in the *Africa Times and Orient Review*, edited by Duse Mohammed Ali. The journal was the first editorial in England to be owned and published by an African person. It was published with the caption, "a journal devoted to the interests of the coloured races of the world".<sup>272</sup>

Consider the following quote from Sekyi's essay:

Civil, mining and mechanical engineers, surveyors, scientific agriculturalists, boiler-makers, and other efficient mechanics, all of these whom the editor considers likely to help us to survive the "development" schemes that are very much in evidence now will prove just as unsatisfactory as those who have secured the learned profession in acquiring the wealth that, it is thought, will enable us to survive. Because the trouble is not the remunerative or otherwise, mediate or immediate professions and other forms of industry, but rather the perverted state of minds and aspirations of those who learn the science, arts and crafts of Europe. This perversion was wrought by Europe and cannot but be continued and intensified by the persistence in following the lines laid by Europe in intellectual and industrial development....Let us not induce ourselves to think and believe that the only way to survive Europe's aggression is by organising on European (including American) lines, for that must involve conflict with Europe, and in time we must become like Europe, ever creating new wants to supply an insatiable desire for conquest, ever oppressing others to further this conquest. If we are to formulate any really sound and practicable scheme for our future, let us set before us, and try to understand, the ideal of living as men, and not seek the compromise of surviving as persecuted persons.<sup>273</sup>

The editor, Ali, very much in the tone of AJR's contemporary RF thesis and modernization theory, wrote an editorial suggesting that the way forward for subject peoples was to copy

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<sup>271</sup> Langley, "W. E. G (Kobina) Sekyi's", 261.

<sup>272</sup> "Duse Mohammed Ali spent about 40 years of his life in Britain, from when he was a child, and so, although Africa was very important to him, and had symbolic importance, he did not belong to any African society. Through this long exile, he forgot his native tongue, Arabic, and he never learned any other African language. Yet Mohammed Ali was not a consistent advocate of European ways either. As a polemicist rather than a consistent theorist, he took contrary positions at different times. On occasions he strongly deprecated Africans following European models", quoted in Langley, *Modernization and its Malcontents*, 84.

<sup>273</sup> Sekyi, "The Future of Subject Peoples", 244-5. The essay has been reproduced in full in Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation*, 242-251. This is the version of the essay I am drawing from.

European science and technology, institutions and values. Sekyi, however, thought otherwise and wrote an appraisal which Ali was kind enough to publish. According to Langley, the main difference between Sekyi and Ali were their views about economic development. He observes that, the main difference was in “the commitment to progress and the wellbeing of the so-called subject races”.<sup>274</sup> He goes on, “it appeared to Sekyi that Ali was not aware of the other behaviourally significant factors in modernization. Ali was committed to the idea that the industrial development and the accumulation of capital would help the African more than anything else and Sekyi was saying that this was precisely what ruined the African”.<sup>275</sup>

In the above, we find Sekyi arguing that the future of subject peoples may not mean the imitation of Europe and the hankering after learned professions (with the aim of becoming full participants in the wage labour economy) as Ali suggests. Even if it is maintained that it does, for Sekyi, it was an arguable proposition. He was more concerned with the nature and thrust of African agency and initiative in this wage labour economy. Moreover, his remarks on the ‘perverted state of minds and aspirations’ were perhaps based on his observations of the educated Cape Coast elite. He must have been convinced that if Africans were not guided by a state of mind capable of manipulating the integrative elements of indigenous institutions and of incorporating the wisdom of the past into development schemes, such schemes were bound to fail. For him, the challenge was psychological and behavioural (immaterial) as much as it was practical and material. The informal institutions were as important as the formal. In the same essay, he criticises those like Ali, who advised Africans to emulate European institutions with polemical intent:

Our advisors confident of their superiority in experience, translate the natural wisdom of self-protection or of reasonable self-assertion into the worldly wisdom of compromise. They argue, in effect, thus: ‘if a robber puts you in danger of your life and property, you too must become a robber in order to prevent the realization of his violent intentions, even though you may not have in you the qualities which go to make a successful robber!’ ....Therefore, they advise us thus worldly wisely: ‘Produce the utmost out of your land by scientific agriculture, develop your mineral resources, send your children to Europe and America to acquire scientific methods, then let them learn and apply the principles of European and American organisation. Stoop to conquer. Send your children to serve in European and American centres of industry. Then you will have the money. Money brings everything. See how wise we are!’ But that is just when our wisdom fails: money does not bring everything that is

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<sup>274</sup> Langley, *Modernization and its Malcontents*, 84.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*,

wholesome; and it very often happens that by the time there is enough money to command even the things that are within the reach of money, the man who made the money is a wreck, either physically or morally or in both ways at once.... ‘Ah,’ retort our worldly advisors, ‘that is all very well; but we do not want such moonshine. We want practical men in these opportunistic days. Be a good soul and compromise.’ Therefore we the despised dreamers, ask our practical advisors, ‘where would Europe herself have been by now if there had not been a renaissance, in the middle ages, to purge her of a certain degree of her innate barbarism?’ Were there not men in those days – Christian Priests and their adherents – who called the leaders of the renaissance dreamers? One can imagine them saying: ‘the bible says this and the bible says that. All this that you propose was put into your head by the devil; and in the name of Christ we will burn it out of you!’.....So they did with some, but not with all; otherwise the science and learning which sometimes blinds our African and Asiatic eyes to the natural savagery of Europe would not have been developed. But the savagery is still in the bones of Europe: for Europe, with her occidental wisdom, perpetuates the old Roman saying: ‘if you will have peace, prepare for war!’ Therefore, there is now in process the new renaissance that, in the form of a brutish war, is raging in Europe and purging her of some more of her barbaric dross. And now that Europe herself may wake up to a sense of her mismanagement not only of her own affairs, but, through her overweening belief in her own superiority, of the affairs of the whole world, would our eminently practical and worldly advisors urge us to acquire the habits that will sooner or later be discarded even by those who created them?<sup>276</sup>

Sekyi did not agree with advisors such as Ali, who proposed in the name of practicality, that Africa adopt or imitate the values and institutions of Europe. He was convinced that the ethical basis of the socioeconomic order, I would add, the informal set of institutions of the period, had a tendency to empire, which was to impose a hierarchical and oppressive relationship in its relations with others and even among Europeans themselves. He also suggested that Europe itself was beginning to become aware of the implications of this order. Although Sekyi was by all means not a dependency theorist nor a Marxist, this is a view of the network of socioeconomic relations which he perhaps shares with later dependency theorists such as Prebisch, Frank, Mazrui or Rodney.

The historical context is important, Sekyi was writing in 1917, during the First World War. The incident on the S.S Falaba must have also been fresh on his mind. In a sense, he may have reflected on the events which were taking place at the time and came to the conclusion that Europe was in the midst of a new renaissance which was to purge her of some of her savagery

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<sup>276</sup> Sekyi, “The Future”, 246-7.

and militarism. In hindsight, he may have been right. Some historians have suggested that without the First and Second World Wars, and their effect on human consciousness and morality, there would not be in existence today concepts and theories such as genocide and the declaration of human rights.<sup>277</sup>

Sekyi then goes on to develop his views on commerce or trade which are especially relevant in our context, because trade, after all, has first to do with a sense of ownership and so, the possession of some right to a property. On this score, he observed that:

Let us not forget that man is capable of his utmost only when he lives in society: the individual as such is impossible except as a freak. Society is an organism of which the so-called individual members are so vitally connected, the one with the other, that to treat them as separate entities is to destroy, immediately or mediately, the integrity of that organism. To those who are qualified to be dreamers it will be clear that the civilization of the West is based on commerce or trade; and from this it follows that those who desire to set up such a civilization must develop commerce or trade along Western lines. But what is generally overlooked by the eminently practical men who believe in nothing that does not conduce to trade or commerce is, that since commerce depends on the acquisition of the most by the expenditure of the least, it stands upon a principle that is to use the mildest term, inequitable. Observing this *foundation* (emphasis added) of trade or commerce in the light of what has been said above as to the oneness of society, it will be seen that if in any social group commerce or trade is established, the latter necessarily involves the juxtaposition of excess and deficiency, of wealth and poverty in that social group. Since, however, excess is as much a fault as deficiency is, it will be clear, to those at least who are qualified to be dreamers, that any man living in a society characterized by such a juxtaposition of surfeit and want cannot bring out the utmost he has in him; in other words, a society possessing such a civilization as the West boasts is unhealthy.<sup>278</sup>

Sekyi was a moralist. He had identified what he regarded as the ethical implications of international commerce or trade and argued that they were inequitable and bankrupt. This lack of a meaningful interdependence was, to him, a result of differences in cultural values between the European and the African. He was convinced, perhaps, even to a fault, that Africans in his era, did not need to imitate the habits of such an unhealthy society.

If we examine the inequitable principle upon which the whole western institution of commerce or trade stands, we shall see that its existence as a basis of a society requires

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<sup>277</sup> See Dirk Moses, *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008).

<sup>278</sup> Sekyi, "The Future", 248

the existence of either force or docility. Now a society which is organised on the basis of force is clearly unnatural, because there is no necessity to compel man to live in society. The units of such a society are individuals in the strict sense, so that the group composed of such individuals is not a society, but is a mere collection of individuals held together by force....Now it will not, I believe, be denied that the institution of respect is more highly developed among darker peoples than among the white. Similarly it will be admitted that the institution of war is more highly developed among the white peoples than among the darker. Moreover, the social institutions of the darker peoples are more communistic than those of the white – that is to say, the conception of the individual as the unit of society is almost exclusively confined to white peoples. All these to me are enough, if not to prove, at least to furnish substantial ground for the position, that the institutions of the white peoples are farther from the social ideal than those of the darker peoples....the success of the white man in establishing dominion over the black man, in my opinion, instead of proving, as the white man naively assumes, the superiority of the white man to the black man, on the contrary is further evidence of the crudeness of the white man's sense of respect; for it is clear that in any transaction between a polite man and a rude man, if brute force is of the essence of that transaction, the rude man is very likely to gain the upper hand; and any man is rude who often confuses respect with servility.<sup>279</sup>

The above excerpts may be taken as evidence of Sekyi's inability to conceptualize socioeconomic change, or of a propensity to view historical change in a racialized world of incomprehensible others. However, in my opinion, they should rather be read as further evidence of how informal institutions have been a theoretical domain of concerned African intellectuals.

Sekyi reflects on the importance of informal institutions, the construction and use of African heritage, frames of reference, philosophies and cultural filters in socioeconomic relations, in trade and commerce, and especially in the quest for progress. He achieves this through a process of negation, by discouraging the reader whilst at the same time providing a polemical argument to those who advise Africans to import western, Eurocentric institutions. His views might have arisen out of his lived experiences in England, the colonial situation and the cultural crises he observed of the Anglo-Fanti in Cape Coast.

But why is Sekyi important? Sekyi is an interesting historical figure because he provides one with an insight into the thoughts of a petty bourgeois Fanti intellectual in 1917. These are the thoughts of an African who had been exposed to the West, and was attempting to make sense

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<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

of the existential crises which the clash of values had engendered him. Sekyi was also concerned very much about the ethical implications of the social structure. In an NIE interpretation, he emphasized informal institutions in his thinking about society.

The crises of the colonial situation or the ‘social strain’ as anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, puts it, appears on the level of conflicting desires, archaic sentiments, and improvised defences. “What is viewed collectively as structural inconsistency is felt individually as personal insecurity...for it is in the experience of the social actor that the imperfections of society and contradictions of character meet and exacerbate one another”.<sup>280</sup> Viewed from such a perspective, Sekyi’s thoughts about progress can be regarded as a response to changes in Cape Coast society between 1910 and 1920 or to use the more technical term, a homeostatic disequilibrium, brought about by the colonial situation. As Clifford Geertz has observed:

Ideology provides a symbolic outlet for emotional disturbances generated by social disequilibrium. As one can assume that such disturbances are, at least in a general way, common to all or most occupants of a given role or social position, so ideological reactions to the disturbances will tend to be similar, a similarity only reinforced by the presumed commonalities in ‘basic personality structure’ among members of a particular culture, class or occupational category.<sup>281</sup>

There is what Nketsia has called a “violence beyond violence” attendant with colonialism. A phrase he used to describe Sekyi’s view on the raising of the Anglo-Fanti child, and how it is present in the modern context. “Even today”, Nketsia writes:

It is still a compelling and amorphous force. It sucks and batters Africans into accepting alien forms of particularistic norms presented as universal values. This violence on the African psyche is devastating. In its crude form, as Sekyi noticed, the European made himself the sole proprietor and determinant of universal human systems, norms, and values. From that arrogant position, Europe’s culture propagated itself as the universal paragon of humanity. This is the root of the ‘violence beyond violence’ which engendered and still engenders Blinkardism.<sup>282</sup>

Sekyi’s works dramatize the struggle of an African petty bourgeois intellectual in the early twentieth century. It also represents a protest against alienation and the dehumanization inherent in the development of industrial capitalism. He was critical of the practical answers to the problems of African modernization and progress in his time. Moreover, he placed a special

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<sup>280</sup> Clifford, Geertz, “Ideology as a Cultural System,” in David Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: Free Press, 1964), 51.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>282</sup> Nketsia, “Applied History”, 20.

emphasis on the immaterial and so informal institutions – which if considering the earlier comments about a formal institutions bias, is historically significant.

## 5. Conclusion

In the current era of globalization, through the impact of ubiquitous information and communication technology, there has emerged a global culture characterized by a felt compulsion by the educated African elite, to adopt not only formal institutions but also informal institutions and political ideologies uncritically from the West. These often come in the form of policy prescriptions and recommendations. They also come in the form of supposedly ‘objective’ scientific knowledge. The critique of methods and assumptions of scientific inquiry is often interpreted as being anti-scientific. Fearing this label, African scholars and intellectuals have been responsible for adhering religiously to existing ways of knowing and understanding the world.

The historical shift of Africa from a colonial to a post-colonial era, if it indeed does involve ideas, aspirations, motivations and agency more broadly – is thus one of cultural pattern and intellectual perspective, as well as social and political structure – although the economic relations between these levels are important also. In practice, it is difficult to distinguish an earlier world view from a present one or one subset of thought or assumptions from another. But this difficulty does not invalidate the reality of the distinction between capitalist and non-capitalist societies, developed and underdeveloped, native and modern, particularistic and communalistic, center and periphery, colonizer and colonized, and the numerous other historical markers in many an economic history of Africa, as well as perspectives of socioeconomic change. Furthermore, lifestyles, glamourized in film and television, are sweeping over Africa. This poses challenges, particular to the cultures, societies, and economies of Africa. While the allure and glitter of western lifestyles entice the upward mobile African youth, the negative images of Africa around the world, seem to invite them to abandon their institutions, ethics and values, which many, due to ignorance, see as the causes of Africa’s underdevelopment.

To relate our discussion to the present context, it is necessary to discuss, even if briefly, the nature and impact of ideas on socioeconomic reality. According to Bendix, in the historical, political and philosophical realms, ideas refer back to an object – a social movement, an institution, a class, or a psychological condition referred to as a “sensation”. In his view, ideas

are derived from some extra-ideational source, regardless of how the source or the process of derivation may be conceived.<sup>283</sup> If ideas are based on a sensation of reality, then Sekyi, at least as can be inferred from his works, confronted the reality in which he lived in a unique way. From his works one can peek into the nature and content of socioeconomic thought which animated a petite bourgeois Cape Coast intellectual, who had travelled to England and compared and contrasted English and Fanti culture between 1910 and 1925.

Yet, there are many African intellectuals who are better known than Sekyi, but there are few who are as necessary. Indeed, his life, and written work, uniquely dramatize the struggle of an Anglo-Fanti in quest of the man behind the man. In this, Sekyi must be known, for what he has to tell us about ourselves in an increasingly globalizing world is extremely necessary. His ideas and opinions remind Africans of the need to understand the relevance of African institutions and the role they can possibly play in socioeconomic progress. Where we have no idea of how past institutions operated, we must cultivate the courage to come up with new and innovative institutions, even if they are in direct opposition to the Eurocentric status quo through a transvaluation of values.

Too often questions about epistemology and policy implications of research have been evaded in the economic disciplines and social sciences more generally, so that belief in progress through science and distrust of common prudence in Africa have gone hand in hand. The view that the African, now independent and free, is subject to universal laws has been linked – implicitly perhaps – with the assumption that an elite of social scientists (including economists and economic historians) can understand these laws and enhance knowledge, human utility and productivity and power. If not consciously, then through the work they do, social scientists in Africa and outside of it, wield tremendous power in the specification of dominant ideas in the socioeconomic order. The power of social scientists in the contemporary moment reveal the importance of an infusion of “will and the affections of the indigenous people” and “perverted state of mind of actors” in the pursuit of progress – an observation which Sekyi made almost a century ago – in his reply to Ali.

In the face of this we must take stock of our assumptions. The combination of trust in the objectivity of economic science and distrust of prudence is in my opinion, illustrative of the undermining of informal institutions in Africa. Emancipation from received opinion, whether, it appears as a policy recommendation, or, a scientific truth, and repeated examination of the

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<sup>283</sup> Reinhard Bendix. “The Age of Ideology: Persistent and Changing”, in Apter, *Ideology*, 294-327.

mental set with which we approach the study of society and economy are indispensable methodological tools. Through a continuous examination of the mental set which advocated for practical strategies under the colonial situation and through a reflective transvaluation of values, Sekyi arrived at the conclusion that it was important to articulate a cultural identity to delineate the worldview and ideals that define, inspire, motivate and rationalize African customs and ethics. Without this, according to him, Africans would always live by how people of other cultures perceive and define them.

The significance of Sekyi lies not only in his recognition of the relevance of culture and other informal institutions to socioeconomic change in the early twentieth century, nor in his critical attitude towards what was regarded as modern and as knowledge by his petite bourgeois peers. His historical significance is also in the fact that Langley, has identified his body of work as a precursor to contemporary development theory, cultural theory and particularly, NIE. Thus the purpose of this section was not to elaborate on Sekyi's specific ideas, but merely to illustrate that the implications of his view on socioeconomic progress, is at odds with that of the modernization perspective as well as the RF thesis.<sup>284</sup>

The RF thesis, like modernization, is optimistic of the transfer of formal institutions from one region to another; that is, a developed region to an underdeveloped region. Sekyi was more pessimistic of the transfer of institutions. Furthermore, he considered the behavioural and psychological (informal) aspects of institutions equally as important as the formal aspects. The reflection on the world of imitators, undertaken in this chapter, within which his ideas arose suggest this. Likewise, regarding the social relations of production, he shares with the dependency perspective a general distrust of the external environment and the network of linkages formed – which he viewed as inequitable.

By way of a conclusion, the development of economic science and so perspectives of socioeconomic change – from modernization, to dependency and finally NIE – has been accompanied by efforts to control bias and by questions on the implications and uses of knowledge. These efforts and questions expose the fickleness of ideas and theories of change. This fickleness of course is greater in those fields of inquiry, such as history, in which every general statement applies to the man of knowledge as well as to the subject matter he

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<sup>284</sup> See Kobina Sekyi, "The State and The Individual Considered in Relation to its Bearing on the Conception of Duty", (M.A. thesis, University of London, 1918).

investigates. Accordingly, the implications and uses of knowledge in economic history as well as the ideological dimensions of intellectual effort call for a critical examination – more urgently than ever.

## **Conclusion**

At least two general remarks emerge from the contrast of perspectives presented in this dissertation. The first is that the tension between modernization and dependency perspectives has found no general resolution in current perspectives of socioeconomic change such as the RF thesis. Second, this ambiguity reveals that dependency, modernization, and NIE do not represent easily distinguishable factors within a larger movement, but idealised polarities, which enable us to understand the significance of socioeconomic thinking as a historical continuum.

Leaving the rather uncertain future of socioeconomic thought out of the question, there comes to my mind good reasons for welcoming what has been achieved so far. Since problems vary qualitatively from one society to another, due to both domestic conditions and the position of a region in the global economy, it should be the task of theory to identify specific problems and find solutions that are appropriate for the particular society, its institutions, culture, and values as well as international conjecture. Yet, I suggest we can discern in the confrontation of perspectives, if not a clear resolution of socioeconomic thought, at least some instructive patterns which will take into consideration the Pan-Africanist notion of self-determination.

### Moving Beyond Populism Towards Critical Pan-Africanism

In view of where Africa is coming from and where it is designed or destined to go, the debates about Africanism, self-determination, culture, and development are hardly surprising. The movement for independence from colonial rule, drew support from a mix of socioeconomic groups and cultures, all united in their wish to see the termination of both settler and non-settler colonialism. The broad societal base of the independence movements required political language which was presented in populist terms. Populist language targets “the people”, but frequently it is short on action as it is strident in rhetoric. The adversary is constructed as the outsider, external to the people. Sometimes, populism projects the idea of the foreigner as the agent of social ills and often cultivates racism and xenophobia as a political instrument for social mobilization.

The homogenized notion of the people under populism lends itself to the idea of classlessness. It is important to acknowledge the fact that populism in Africa occupied a central position in the anti-colonial movement. Although it claimed to represent the interests of the people or

“Africa” in a collective fashion, it was in actuality, led by petty bourgeois social groups and constructed around the object of ejecting colonial power and installing petty bourgeois rule.

Populism has in the African experience been favourable to socialist political rhetoric. Terms like the “African personality”, the “African character”, “Renaissance of the Black Race”, “Africa for Africans”, and “Ethiopia Unbound” permeate the work of nineteenth and early twentieth century Pan-Africanists from Edward Blyden, Martin Delany, Casley Hayford to Marcus Garvey. In this regard, Sekyi was no exception:

He stresses an organic analogy of society. He presents a picture of society, a picture of a family writ large in the relations between the ruler and the subjects, the relations of relatives and stresses all the duty of kinship, refers to slaves absorbed into the family, refers to officials of various kinds who would be servants of the state and yet the impression remains that he himself would have come from a society that had an elaborate social strata to go with this complex state. He finds it necessary to reduce society to a highly undifferentiated and simply stratified society against colonial rule.<sup>285</sup>

You will find Sekyi’s way of thinking in modern African ideologues and in the ubuntu philosophers of Southern Africa such as Ramose and Letseka. They talk about traditional African society being classless or egalitarian – though these may not necessarily correspond to reality. In Tanzania of the 1960s, Nyerere’s view of socialism was that “we in Africa, have no more need of being converted to socialism than we have of being taught democracy. Both are rooted in our own past – in the traditional society which produced us.”<sup>286</sup> Like Sekyi, Nyerere was disposed to the glorification and sentimental celebration of the African past. This has also found expression in Senghor’s *Negritude*, Kagisano in Botswana<sup>287</sup>, Nkrumah’s *Consciencism* and Kaunda’s *Humanism*. In attempts to evoke an idyllic African past, the unevenness of African history is glossed over or even silenced by the populists. Communalistic values are venerated and juxtaposed with Western individualistic values which are deemed savage and barbaric. Usually, an argument for ‘returning to the source’ is advanced.

It is important to emphasize that populism has had both progressive and reactionary histories in Africa. For as long as it served as a rally for action against the colonial order it was progressive and emancipatory. However, in post-colonial society where class cleavages have

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<sup>285</sup> Langley, *Modernization and its Malcontents*, 88.

<sup>286</sup> Nyerere, “Ujamma”, 7.

<sup>287</sup> Jeremiah Keketso, “Junior Secondary School Students’ Recognition of Kagisano/Social Harmony, the National Philosophy of Botswana”, (Ph. D. diss., Florida State University, 2005)

deepened amongst Africans, populist ideology has not only become reactionary, it has also become a language of the past which is invoked to engage with a reality which no longer exists. This is because in post-colonial societies, the problem of socioeconomic transformation or radical political change is not simply a matter of race, or, of colonizer versus colonized. Socioeconomic differentiation is becoming increasingly divided along class lines. In post-colonial and neo-colonial Africa, populist ideology advocating for a return to the source has become a rhetorical fossil unable to constructively deal with the elaborate class distinctions and antagonisms which we presently face.<sup>288</sup>

And so, when I insist in my criticism of the policy implications of the RF thesis that African cultures and the varied impact of colonialism on informal institutions should occupy a central position in policy frameworks, as well as, in our thoughts about socioeconomic change, I am in no way suggesting that all cultural attributes of the West must be abandoned or thrown away. For one thing, no culture in the world is a sealed system, neither is culture static nor is it unchanging. Cultures are in a constant flux. The fact that some cultural traits may be decrepit and may need to be abandoned, and are indeed abandoned by human communities everywhere does not negate the fact that it is some aspects of culture which are rejected, retreat into insignificance or abandoned. In this sense one can reject aspects of African or Western cultures, but one cannot dismiss them in totality. And so, the point that I am making in my criticism of the RF thesis is that whatever is borrowed or assimilated from the West needs to be thoroughly indigenized so that it blends with an African cultural base. My view is thus not one for a return to the 'good old days' or for a return to an antiquated 'African personality', but, that it is necessary that a selective process of engagement should take place by Africans involving above all, a transvaluation of values and the incorporation of aspects of African cultures in the progress endeavour.

Popular usage of the culture concept and in general, view of informal institutions, in the discourse on socioeconomic change, articulated or implied with reference to contemporary African societies, frequently suggest African values and suppositions to exist outside currently desirable habits and are seen to invariably stand in the way of appropriate contemporary, capitalist routines and praxes. Too many people understand culture to mean antiquarian practices, exotic dances, esoteric music, old carvings, and atavistic rituals which at best belong in museums. There is, all too regularly, a thinly veiled extrapolation that in Africa, there is

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<sup>288</sup> Prah, *Soundings*, 69.

prevalent a set of values and habits which are backward and constraining cultural survivals which should be discarded as swiftly as possible. African cultures are seen to be residues which belong to pre-capitalist, feudal and static societies; they are barbarous relics standing in the way of assimilation and serve as a hindrance to Africa becoming a successful copy of the modern and capitalist societies. The African elites have largely bought into this message and are today front-line purveyors of this idea. Thus, in Sekyi's words, swift 'cultural denationalization' in the estimation of the elites is assumed to represent the high road to modernity. Much of these implications are not explicitly mentioned but sub-textually implied. This view implies that, since African cultures and in general, informal institutions, stand in the way of progress, they should be jettisoned.

The vexing point is that, there is a popular generalization in hegemonic Eurocentric discourses which equate in an almost blanket way "African cultural practices" with backwardness; an assumption which throws the baby out with the dirty bath water and which effectively becomes a cheap and hoary rationale regarding Western culture and institutions as automatically superior to African cultural belongings and institutions. In many development projects which abound in Africa, the clash of western and indigenous perspectives often serves to underscore the gap between professionals and lay people, experts and end-users. Ever so often, the experts working on a development project will have Western training, and will be separated from the local community not only by professional knowledge and status, but also by broader cultural values. Furthermore, the incongruence in educational levels between the professionals and indigenous folk predisposes the former into concluding that existing indigenous institutions are of little value, and that their knowledge as experts is a better basis for planning and working out a future of progress for the indigenous peoples.

What is not realized is the fact that without recourse to the cultures of mass society, socioeconomic transformation which brings prosperity to the larger social classes in Africa will continue to systematically elude us. If the foundations of socioeconomic transformation are not grounded in the cultures of the majorities, the mission of African development will be impossible. Development cannot be extraneously engineered and piecemeal made to engulf increasingly larger fractions of the population, replacing tradition with modernity. And so, by way of my criticism of the RF thesis, I am suggesting is that in societies which are historically and culturally African, the usage of the cultural belongings of Africans is a democratic requirement for the emancipation of the broader sections of the populations, and the imposition of new institutions from without, (such as property rights institutions identified by AJR), will

only alienate the masses whilst benefiting the elites. In my opinion, the cultures of the majority should define and serve as the vehicle for the material and non-material engagement of people in processes of production, distribution, and exchange at any point in time. A developed Africa is one in which the culture of mass society has been creatively engaged in a modern technological culture. This can only be done through a type of critical Pan-Africanism engaging with the present reality (by way of a trans-valuation of values) and not a mere return to some antiquated past.

If the ethic of ubuntu, for instance, is identified as an important cultural belonging from an antiquated era, how can we as Africans use it in the contemporary context? These are important questions which need to be asked because Pan-Africanism which is not anchored in African cultures and the life of mass society will not create optimal conditions for broad-based socioeconomic progress. Furthermore, African researchers of socioeconomic change who are prone to borrow policy prescriptions from Europe and North America regardless of the different histories, cultures and value systems under which such policies have been developed need to be more critical, creative, innovative and above all, aware of the fact that borrowed policies are not necessarily 'policies of best practice'.

In conclusion, informal institutions are important, yet many NIE researchers ignore them. Rather they focus on the formal institutions and attempt to devise new laws and regulations following sacrosanct, untouchable, formal institutions, to influence economic behaviour. Such scholars seem to be overemphasizing the importance and efficacy of external constraints. Some historical changes are attributable to informal constraints especially on the African continent - in the moral restraint underpinning the abolishment of slavery and in the right to self-determination enshrined in independence from colonial rule. There is a need, therefore, for NIE to renew its connections with informal institutions and the role of culture in studies of socioeconomic change as it pertains to Africa.

Under such conditions, economic history and the Pan-Africanist ideal of self-determination might have much to offer each other. Historians could help explain what is happening with socioeconomic change and Pan-Africanist intellectuals might help historians scrutinize their own metahistorical assumptions: that is, the instrumental use of history, the nature, and meaning of history, the notion of progress and the cause and significance of historical change.

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