A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF AFRICA’S DEVELOPMENT IMPASSE: INSIGHTS FROM A NIGERIAN SURVEY

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BY

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ABSTRACT

Various theories and strategies have attempted to explain and overcome Africa’s developmental impasse to no avail. Indeed, from the modernization through the dependency debates the question of why Africa remains underdeveloped continues to attract attention -so much that there is now a shift towards alternative paradigms in the literature on African development and underdevelopment. How exactly do Africans conceive of development? Are there any psychological predispositions that can facilitate our understanding of Africa’s developmental impasse; particularly in the context of the modern state system? In essence, is post colonial Africa characterized by an African personality with regards to African development or underdevelopment? This paper is an unconventional analysis of Africa’s developmental impasse. Through an inductive method and from data gathered in Nigeria, the paper establishes a link between the psychological predispositions of Africans and the continued state of underdevelopment on the continent.
INTRODUCTION

Africa; to a large extent has continued to remain the most underdeveloped region of the world with several explanations accounting for this state of affairs. For example, issues like the preponderance of traditional institutional practices as opposed to modernization, corrupt and dictatorial regimes which were more interested in strengthening their arsenal than in economic and social development, and governments with no legitimacy or political will to change existing harmful political and economic structures have severally been cited as some of the internal factors contributing to Africa’s underdevelopment. As for its external factor, underdevelopment in Africa has also severally been seen as part of the lingering effects of imperialism and colonization (Rodney 1972, Frank 1969, Ake 1981). Whether from within or without, the problem of Africa’s underdevelopment seem to be well researched and documented. Yet, the reality of underdevelopment in Africa still remains.

Without prejudice to the strengths of the foregoing factors of Africa’s underdevelopment (Internal and external) which to a large extent are institutional, the location of the African in the development project in recent years is scarcely highlighted in the literature on African development and underdevelopment. Indeed, the question of how Africans conceive of development -particularly in the context of the modern state system upon which the development imperative is incumbent- or whether post colonial Africa has been characterized with an African personality with regards to African development and underdevelopment has been taken for granted in research on Africa’s underdevelopment. Yet, the insights to be gained from a psychological analysis of Africa’s developmental impasse cannot be overemphasized; especially as the importance
of a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to the problem of underdevelopment has increasingly become recognized and emphasized.

This paper is an alternative approach towards understanding the development impasse in Africa. Its point of departure is that instead of focusing on institutional factors (internal or external) as have severally been done, the psychological predispositions of the African - the target in development- within the context of the modern state system and its incumbency of the development imperative is taken as the unit of analysis. The paper particularly sets out to investigate the following: How do Africans conceive of development? Where do Africans situate the incumbency of the development imperative? And what roles do Africans think they can play to ensure that those responsible for bringing about development are held responsible for the failure to ensure development. The foregoing questions are vital against the backdrop of the following submissions:

1. The imperative of development in Africa is incumbent on the modern state system.

2. Democracy is a viable instrument that can be used to hold African leaders accountable for the failure to ensure development

Thus, it is only when Africans are conscious of the fact that the development imperative is incumbent on the state that they can use the instrumentality of democracy to hold those who control state power responsible for the inability to bring about development. Of course, such a socio-psychological approach towards understanding Africa’s developmental impasse is likely to engender some criticisms; particularly, as some have argued that group personality study is an anathema to cultural relativism. Yet,
as Lassiter (1998) notes, it is not impossible to have a basis for identifying an African personality.

To find answers to the problem of this study a total of six hundred questionnaires were administered to sampled respondents from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria and data gathered were analyzed through the use of descriptive statistics with quantities appearing in tables and percentages.

The paper is divided into five sections. Following this introduction is a conceptual clarification of the concepts development and underdevelopment. The third section of this paper is an examination of the dominant theories on Africa’s underdevelopment and the imperative of alternative explanations. The fourth part of this paper presents and discusses data gathered in the course of this study. Finally the fifth part is the summary conclusion and recommendation.

UNDERDEVELOPMENT, DEVELOPMENT AND THE LOCATION OF THE STATE IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Any discourse on underdevelopment will be incomplete without an examination of the related concept- development. In fact, the concepts of development and underdevelopment are inseparable; as the concern with why some societies are underdeveloped beget a similar concern of how such societies can achieve development.

Development and underdevelopment have been defined in different ways and in different contexts. Indeed, much of the controversy that arises in development and underdevelopment discourse is largely as a result of the various conceptions of the terms (development and underdevelopment). Most of the literature tend to assume that the content of development is economic that is to increase national output and wealth. However, as foster (1985) notes, at least three other aspects of the content of
development can be identified. These are, firstly: Social- which involves issues bordering on the distribution of surplus produced. Secondly, political- which in contemporary times has come to mean democratization and thirdly, cultural- which is the emphasis on the traditional values of societies. Development therefore is essentially a qualitative change in the socio-economic, political and cultural aspects of a society as indicated by the general welfare of the populace. Underdevelopment on the other hand seems to be even more controversial than development. While some see it as an independent variable, others argue that underdevelopment is a dependent variable and have therefore identified an alternative concept - undevelopment. Modernization theorists for example are generally of the view that underdevelopment refers to the absence of development, but dependency theorist argue that underdevelopment is not the absence of development but the product of an unequal relationship. In essence, the development of one society leads to the underdevelopment of another. Suffice it to say that underdevelopment for the purposes of this paper is taken as the backwardness of Africa when seen in relation to the developed societies of the west.

Traditionally; the essence of the state as in the social contract theories of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke was largely in the maintenance of law and order. However, that the development imperative is incumbent on the modern state system cannot be overstated. Indeed, throughout history the provision of public goods -development- has also been an important function performed by the state (Janda: 2000). Even though the role of the state in the economy continues to result in much ideological debate, experience across the globe (for example in South East Asia) indicates that there is no viable alternative to the primary role of the state in achieving development.
AN OVERVIEW OF MAJOR THEORIES ON AFRICA’S UNDERDEVELOPMENT: THE IMPERATIVE OF ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

A somewhat simplified but useful way of distinguishing among development and underdevelopment theories is to classify them according to where the causal explanations lie: that is internally (endogenous explanations) or externally (exogenous explanations). Thus, one prominent theory which focuses on internal characteristics of underdeveloped societies such as cultural values to explain development and underdevelopment is the modernization theory; whereas the dependency theory places more emphasis on external relations among countries to explain differences in development. While the modernization and dependency theories may have provided some insights into the problem of underdevelopment in Africa in their hey-days (i.e. in the 1960s and 1970s respectively), the content and approach of development and underdevelopment has changed dramatically. Indeed, it is now generally given that any good development strategy must not only concomitantly comprehend endogenous and exogenous factors, but should also be the product of a holistic and multidisciplinary endeavor. Unfortunately, a close examination of the dominant trend in the trajectory of Africa’s development and underdevelopment discourse reveals an apparent neglect of socio-psychological analysis.

The modernization theory evolved from two ideas about social change developed in the 19th century: the conception of traditional versus modern societies and positivism that viewed development as societal evolution in progressive stages of growth. As popularized by Rostow (cited in Foster: 1985), modernization theory considered the lack of capital, technology and modern social values within a society as the cause of underdevelopment. The (Modernization) theory posits that the problem which held back
the development of underdeveloped societies is related to the irrational way, in which resources were allocated in a traditional society (foster: 1985). Traditional societies therefore become modern (developed) by rationalizing resource allocation and by the elimination of cultural, institutional and organizational roadblocks that did not allow countries to develop. In essence, according to the modernization theory underdeveloped countries evolve by starting from a stage with a traditional society and through an evolutionary linear process change its society by rationalizing it and becoming a modern and developed society.

Since the modernization theory saw underdevelopment as a natural (traditional) state through which all societies must necessarily begin from, the prevailing idea for Africa and other developing parts of the world when the modernization theory held sway in development discourse was that development was likely only if the African continent invests in development appurtenances particularly from the developed west. This recapitulationsist model of development as I have once argued, was the foundation on which African states pursued a development strategy that emphasized the establishment of a range of industrial, agricultural and infrastructural projects in the 1960s - 1970s (Moveh: 2007) Driven by the illusion of catching up with the west, this approach to development by projects turned out to be a farce when the African continent entered a profound economic and social crisis at the dawn of the 1980s. The influence of the modernization theory was also evident in the Berg report issued by the World Bank in 1981. The Berg report advocated the adoption of western oriented economic and political practices typified in structural adjustment programs (SAP’s). However, as Jega (2000)
notes SAP resulted in a generalized and acute immiseration of the majority of the people of Africa.

While modernization theory implied that a society's value system, as well as its culture and institutional configuration determined its potential for development, the dependency theorist criticized modernization theory for failing to make distinctions between countries, regions, structural and historical conditions. Dependency theorist argued that modernization theory was an oversimplified and generalized theory with strong racial stereotype and cultural bias; as it ignored (i.e. the modernization theory) specific historical experiences and phases of prosperity in societies that had not changed their traditional culture (e.g. in china).

The dependency theory was elaborated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA); responsible for studying the development problem from an underdeveloped perspective. André Gunder Frank (1969) simplified and popularized many of the ideas of Dependency produced by ECLA through his work published in English. Frank (1969) argued that underdevelopment was the result of an unevenly structured global capitalist system. His (Frank) key term of the “development of underdevelopment” suggests that the global capitalist system taken as a unit of analysis is characterized by a metropole –satellite relationship in which surplus is continuously appropriated and expropriated upwards –to the metropole. This occurs because each metropole has monopoly economic power in its bit of the system, rather than a free market. Given this scenario any real development will require a revolutionary break from the system. In essence the dependency theory saw underdevelopment in Africa and other parts of the third world as a consequence of imperialism and colonization. The influence
of the dependency theory on Africa’s past development agenda was evident in the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) published in 1980. The LPA was a classic dependency interpretation of Africa’s underdevelopment crisis. It (LPA) exonerated African leaders and blamed historical injustices suffered by the continent and the continued dependence on external forces for the underdevelopment crisis. Having diagnosed the problem of underdevelopment in Africa as exogenous, the solution according to the LPA involved far reaching regional approach based primarily on collective self reliance (OAU, 1981: 5). Unfortunately, the dependency theory- the theoretical and ideological foundation of the LPA- did not produce a unified formula on how to achieve the desired internal, self-centered economic progress it advocated for. Furthermore, the decline of the dependency theory was highlighted by the capitalist development recorded by the “Asian tigers” which dependency theory had argued was impossible within the existing international capitalist system.

From the mid 1980’s to the present, the decline of the dependency theory in development and underdevelopment discourse was accompanied by increased globalization. Globalization refers to the process of the intensification of economic, political, social and cultural relations across international boundaries. It is principally aimed at the transcendental homogenization of political and socio-economic theory across the globe (Akindele and Gidado, 2002: 3). Globalization is equally aimed at “making global”, that is, being present world wide- as in the primacy and emphasis on the activities of its agents – the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO)- in contemporary international economic interactions.
For the proponents of globalization, underdevelopment is a result of the fact that Africa and other developing parts of the world could not take advantage of the globalization process which encourages the sharing of basic knowledge, technology, investments, resources and ethical values. Globalization culminated in the adoption of structural adjustment programs (SAP’s) and democratization across Africa. In addition, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) launched in the year 2001 was an endorsement of the globalization process in the quest to overcome Africa’s underdevelopment. However, it has been established that the asymmetry of power and interests of member states in the global village, as well as the lopsidedness in the rules of the game there in, cannot benefit Africa and her people (Akindele and Gidado, 2002).

It is apparent from the forgoing that while institutional factors - internal and external- have featured severally in Africa’s underdevelopment (and development) discourse, the same cannot be said of a socio-psychological analysis.

AFRICAN PERSONALITY AND AFRICA’S UNDERDEVELOPMENT: RESULTS FROM A NIGERIAN SURVEY

As was mentioned in the introductory part of this paper three issues were identified for measurement in order to determine if there is an African personality with regard to Africa’s underdevelopment. These are: firstly, what do Africans consider as development. Secondly, where do Africans situate the incumbency of the development imperative? and thirdly, what role do Africans think they can play to hold government responsible for the inability to bring about development.

Evidence gathered in the course of this study indicates that for a majority of Africans development is synonymous with a guaranteed satisfaction of basic needs.
TABLE 1: AFRICANS CONCEPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic needs</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment opportunities</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructural facilities</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 1: A TABLE ON AFRICANS CONCEPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

Source: Field work: 2009

From table one above it is evident that while more than half of the respondents attribute development to the satisfaction of basic needs, 23.8% of the respondents see development as the provision of employment opportunities and 24.1% of the respondents see development as the provision of infrastructural facilities. The foregoing corroborates the findings of a survey conducted in 2002 by the Afro barometer; where it was established that 51% of Africans cite economic problems as the main developmental challenge confronting Africa as compared to 42% who cited social problems and only 7% citing political problems (Afro barometer: 2002).
When asked who has the incumbency of the development imperative, a majority of the respondents argued that the government (state) has a major role to play in ensuring development. However, when asked what Africans can do to ensure that the government does not fail in bringing about development a preponderant of the respondents were ignorant as to what the populace could do.

**TABLE 2: A TABLE ON WHERE AFRICANS SITUATE THE INCUMBENCY OF THE DEVELOPMENT IMPERATIVE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OWNERS OF INCUMBENCY OF DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 2: AFRICANS VIEW ON THE INCUMBENCY OF THE DEVELOPMENT IMPERATIVE**

African's View on the Incumbency of the Development Imperative

- State: 64%
- Others: 21%
- Don’t know: 15%

Source: Field work: 2009
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLE OF AFRICANS IN ENSURING DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing Demonstrations</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: field work: 2009

From the foregoing it is apparent that even though a majority of the respondents acknowledge that the state has the incumbency of the development imperative, most respondents do not know what to do to hold the state responsible for the failure to ensure development. The implication of this is that not only are Africans ignorant of the instrumentality of democracy in ensuring that leaders are held responsible for the failure to bring about development but they have also unwittingly permitted the persistence of underdevelopment.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This paper is not an attempt to provide a comprehensive explanation for Africa’s developmental impasse but to highlight an aspect that has been taken for granted in research on Africa’s underdevelopment. While a lot has been done on the role of institutional factors in Africa’s underdevelopment; the same cannot be said of a socio-psychological analysis of Africa’s developmental impasse. Therefore, with data gathered from Nigeria, and within the context of the modern state system; this paper establishes a link between the psychological dispositions of Africans and the continued state of underdevelopment on the African continent. Findings indicate that even though a majority of Africans are aware of the fact that the development imperative is incumbent on the state, most Africans are also not aware of what they can do to ensure that the state is held responsible for the failure to ensure development. This is why a recommendation that an extensive program on the enlightenment of Africans on the instrumentality of democracy in holding leaders accountable is imperative.
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