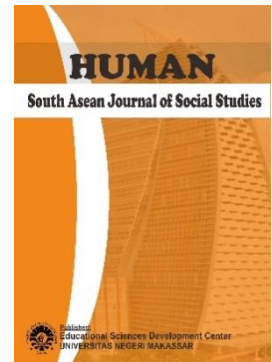


African History and African under Development: A Revisit of the Rodney Thesis

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Abstract. African and Africanists scholars formed the intellectual wing of African nationalism; which triumphed in the attainment of political independence of the former colonial possessions in the 1960s. In the course of the nationalist struggle, it was held out that African underdevelopment was caused by the unequal economic relations between the colonies and the metropolitan countries. Walter Rodney in a brilliant analysis of the low economic situation of the continent held out the prospects of rapid economic advancement of the continent once this colonial hegemony - which came at the heels of the abolition of the over four hundred years of the trans-Atlantic slave trade - was laid to rest. Other scholars pointed out paths to political Stability which, it is generally accepted, is a sine qua non of economic development. Regrettably, almost sixty years on, the African continent is still enmeshed in the backwaters of world economic progress. The Rodney thesis no longer suffices as an explanation of African economic underdevelopment. More so when juxtaposed with some Asian countries which gained political independence contemporaneously with African states. This paper attempts to answer the question of where and why did African political elite get It wrong? By so doing deepen our understanding of the African economic crisis and proffer ways of meeting the challenges so posed.

Keywords: African, Rodney Thesis, Underdevelopment, African History.



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INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines "developments as the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced stronger, etc. It is also the process of producing or creating something new or more advanced; a new or advanced product (Hornby 2000, p. 319). Development can be at individual and society levels. At the individual level, development implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline responsibility and material well-being (Rodney 2018, p. 1). More often than not, the term "development" is used in "an exclusive economic sense the justification being that the type of economic sense is itself an index of other's social features" (Rodney 2018, p. 12). It is clear, therefore, that constant economic development within human society has always been there since the origins of man; because man has "multiplied enormously his capacity to win a living from nature" (Rodney 2018, p. 3), and in the process progressed from the use of crude stone tools through the use of metals and to the complex social organizations of today. As time wore on, the man started to exploit his neighbor man and communities also started to exploit themselves, that is to say, nation-states exploiting other nation-states and their citizens through one of the popular means of trade (Rodney 2018). The development of man meant mastering his environment (Odey 2008; Nwagbara 2009; Odey et al., 2019). So every continent develops independently the mastery of its environment and so each continent can point to periods of economic development (Edigin 2020). Hence Africa being the original home of man, was obviously "a major participant in the processes in which human groups displayed an ever-increasing capacity to extract a living from the natural environmentAs part of the struggle for survival" (Rodney 2018, p. 3).

To master the environment, man must first know that environment (Bassey & Eyo, 2020). Long before the fifteenth century, the Africa had arrived "at a considerable understanding of the total ecology of the soils, climate, animals, plants and their multiple inter-relationships" (Rodney 2018, p. 45), hence he did not only make utensils and weapons but also devised systems of agriculture. Up to the sixteenth century Africa and Europe were technologically at parity (Davidson 1971). That is why not only did "blacks and whites inter-mingled freely and did not use colour as a criterion for evaluating people" (Rodney 2018, p. 45), but also Europe established diplomatic relations with African states to enhance her trade. Clearly, Europe recognized the intellectual and political excellence of Africans. In fact, Portugal celebrated the "consecration in Rome of Africa's first Negro Bishop, Henrique of Congo in 1518 (Davidson 1971).

Manufacturing was also done in Africa though on a small scale, clearly because most African societies fulfilled their needs (Rodney 2018). Their products, be they textiles, pottery, agricultural equipment, leather goods were of very high quality. So specialization had been achieved in both agriculture and industry. It was only on the large scale that Africans made no breakthrough, which failure Europeans overlooked.

THE TRANS ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

These were the comparative positions of Africa and Europe when the trans-Atlantic slave trade began in full swing in the first half of the sixteenth century (Undiyaundeye 2017). The first English man to engage in the slave trade was John Hawkins. He made his first slave trade voyage in 1562 to the West African coast where he captured slaves and sold them to the Spaniards in America. On his return from his first trip to England, "his profit was so handsome that Queen Elizabeth 1 become interested in directly participating in his next venture and she provided for that purpose a ship named the Jesus (Iroegbu & Echekwube 2005, p. 191). Hawkins left with the ship, stole more Africans whom he sold in the New World and returned to England with "such dividends that Queen Elizabeth made him a knight. Hawkins chose as his coat of arms the representation of an African in chains" (Iroegbu & Echekwube 2005, p. 192).

The slave trade was entrusted to a monopolistic company "Company of Royal Adventurers Trading to Africa" chartered in 1663, British participation in the slave trade was desultory until she established colonies in the Caribbean where sugar plantations were established and after the Revolution and civil war were put behind her (Young 2004). By 1660 Britain wholeheartedly turned her attention to the slave trade in order to ensure the survival of her sugar and tobacco colonies in the New World (Undiyaundeye 2005; Undiyaundeye 2009). With the decided focus on the slave trade, not only the sugar and tobacco colonies prospered. Liverpool which started the trade in 1709 began to rise in profile. Although progress was slow initially, yet by the end of the eighteenth century Liverpool became "the greatest slave-trading port of the Old World" (Young 2004, p. 64), profits from the trade called for more Investments such that by 1795 Liverpool had five-eighths of the British slave trade and three-sevenths of the whole European slave trade. In fact profits of over 100% were not rare in Liverpool. J. Latimer notes that

one voyage netted a clear profit of at least 300 percent. The Lively fitted out in 1737 with a cargo worth £307 returned to Liverpool with colonial produce and bills of exchange totaling £3,080 in addition to cotton and sugar remitted later. The Ann another Liverpool ship sailed in 1751 with an outfit and a cargo costing £1600altogether the voyage produced £3,287 net. A second voyage in 1753 produced £8000 on a cargo and outfit amounting to £3,253 (Morgan 2004, P. 64)

Not only did Liverpool rose in importance. Bristol also did. Eric Williams asserts that "it was estimated that on a fortunate voyage the profit on a cargo of about 170 slaves reached £7,000 or £8,000 exclusive return on ivory (Morgan 2004). For Britain, If said that the sterling value of 303, 737 slaves carried by 878 Liverpool ships between 1783 and 1793 was over £15 million after commissions and other charges, the cost of the outfit of the ship and maintenance of the slaves have been deducted. These profits explain why the leading trading firms "had royal patronage and investment by members of the royal family and why George III later opposed

abolition" (Williams 2021, p. 54). Not surprisingly, the slave trade was not undertaken by the dregs of British society but by worthy men who were fathers of families and excellent citizens among whom were leading humanitarians. Thus showing clearly that when it comes to vital economic interests people speak from both sides of the mouth.

The slave trade gave birth to the triangular trade which contributed greatly to the industrial revolution that started in England. It gave triple stimulus to British industry (Okoi 2020; Okoi 2021a; Okoi 2021b). Slaves bought with British manufactures were taken to the plantations where they produced sugar, tobacco, cotton, indigo and other tropical products; the processing of which created new industries in England. The maintenance of the slaves and the owners of the plantations provided another market for British industries. Sir Josiah Child argues that "every English man in the West Indies with the ten blacks that work with him accounting what they eat, use and wear would make employment for forty men in England" (Gupta 2007, p. 64). It was also computed that one person in the Caribbean islands whether black nor white "was as profitable as seven in England." It is therefore not surprising when in 1798 William Pitt assessed "the annual income from West Indies plantation at four million pounds as compared with one million from the rest of the world" (Rodney 2018, p. 53).

Along with the stimulus of industrialization was the encouragement of shipbuilding. Shipbuilding, in turn, engendered ancillary trades like carpenters, painters, boat builders, and other artisans. Just as Liverpool grew on account of the slave trade, so did the city of Manchester on account of textiles. A sort of umbilical knot bound the two. Manchester was Liverpool's, hinterland. Being a port, the capital accumulated from the trade was poured into the hinterland, as it were, to fertilize the energies of Manchester' which goods for Africa passed through Liverpool and her slave ships. According to the Privy Council in 1788, Manchester exported goods annually to Africa worth £200,000"£180,000 of this for Negroes only" "and giving employment to 180,000 men, women and children;" while she exported £300,000 worth of goods annually to the West Indies (Rodney 2018). What was good for England was also good for other slave-trading European states that possessed colonies in the new world.

Eric Williams has shown graphically how crucial the trans-Atlantic slave trade was to the development of British heavy industries, banking and insurance businesses all of which were the sine qua non for the development of British capitalism especially between 1783 and 1833 when the trans-Atlantic slave trade was abolished. Industrialization had found its feet and the trans-Atlantic slave trade was now of no use. It had served its purpose and was now an encumbrance in the new dispensation (Rodney 2018).

COLONIALISM

Colonialism in Africa came at the heels of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade that ravaged the continent for over four hundred years. Colonies were established "for the metropole by the metropole" (Uzoigwe 1978, p. 28). The Pall Mall Gazette was very blunt

Nor have we gone to the equatorial region from religious or humanitarian motives.... Still less have we sought out the African in order to endow him with the views and virtues of western Civilization... the dominating force which has taken us to Equatorial Africa is the desire for trade. We are in these tropical Countries for our own advantage and only incidentally, for the good of the African (Uzoigwe 1978, p. 28).

Arguing further that there was nothing immoral over the colonization, the Gazette accepted the fact that "we have done our share to demoralize the native hoping that through a rearrangement of the methods and development of the trade the African shall be protected from evils to which he has been exposed..." (Nkrumah *et al.*, 1963, p. 21).

Jules Ferry in 1885 wondered aloud whether it was not clear to "the great states of Europe" that the very conditions for existence — the question of markets... (Nkrumah *et al.*, 1963, p. 21), of which was a euphemism for colonies. He argued that colonies were for rich countries one of the most lucrative methods of investing capital. He saw France glutted with capital and in dire need of outlets for investments (Nkrumah *et al.*, 1963). Albert Sarraunt, French colonial secretary was even more emphatic in 1923 when he said

*What is the use of painting the truth? At the start colonization was not an art of civilization nor was & a desire to civilize, It was an art of force motivated by Interests. An episode in the vital Competition which, from man to man, from group to group, has gone on ever-increasing people who set out to seize Colonies in distant lands were thinking primarily of themselves and were working for their own profits, and conquering for their own power (Nkrumah *et al.*, 1963, p. 151-152).*

Clearly, therefore, colonization was nothing else but an enterprise of individual national Interests and had nothing good for the colonized. Having acquired the colonies, the colonialists then set out to make their enterprises pay. Africa was (and still is) rich in mineral endowments. As at 1954, she boasted

66% world supply of cocoa, 58% sisal, 65% palm oil, 26% groundnuts, 14% coffee, 11% olive oil, and as of 1956, 96% of diamonds (excluding the USSR), 69% cobalt, 63% gold, 44% antimony, 37% manganese, 34% chromite, 32% phosphates rock, 24% copper, 19% asbestos 15% tin, 4% iron ore, 4% bauxite, 85% columbite... she has the greater reserves of uranium ore, reserves of fissionable raw materials abound. Power resources are impressive. She has the greatest water potential in the world of which only 1% has been utilized...

Africa's coal reserves are estimated at 4.5million tons... has 27% of the world's forest... (Rodney 2018, p. 179)

The continent was indeed a gold mine — a paradise for colonial adventurers, The colonialists granted mining accessions on very liberal terms, and Africans were recruited in their thousands as miners. Differential wages policy was adopted in remunerating the miners, at miner underground was paid a shilling a day; and the one on the surface nine pence a day, their Scottish or German counterparts could earn in an hour what their Enugu counterparts got for a six-day week (Nkrumah, 1976). While in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe after April 1980) an average African agricultural labourer earned £5.3s a month; his white counterpart received £108 (Nkrumah, 1976). While the African miner earned £12 a month his white counterpart earned £138. African domestic servants - about 80,000 - were treated a "little short of slavery" (Nkrumah, 1976). In the colonial civil service, even where black and white officials had the same diplomas, experience, etc the black official was paid a tenth of the wages of his white counterpart.

The very low wages given to African workers for the most part explained the huge profits on investments made by European firms. In the 1950s, British investments of £860 million were yielding annually £129 million. While DeBeers made between £26 million and £29 million annually. The Congo Free State witnessed an investment inflow of £5,200 million between 1887 and 1953 and witnessed an outflow of £4,300 million "exclusive of profits retained within the Congo (Uzoigwe 1978). Union Miniere de Haute Katanga, a subsidiary, of Societe Generale — a major European financial monopoly was making a £27 million profit annually from 1889 when It gained a monopoly of Congo copper production (Nkrumah 1976). The great wealth from these concerns was systematically shipped away for the benefit of the shareholders in European capitals (Uzoigwe 1978).

In East and Central Africa, the land was sized virtually without any compensation and leased out at obnoxious rates to European speculators; denying the African of his choice land on the one hand and turning him into a tenant and worker of the speculator or farmer on the other (Rodney 2018). The pricing of cash crops that Africans were urged to cultivate was another avenue of ripping off the African producer. For the most part, prices of cash crops were on the downward slide while those of the manufactures were on the upward slide. This was especially so during the world war II years and the depression when consumer goods' prices doubled or trebled, thanks to the activities of the huge multinationals like the United Africa Company (UAC,) Unilever, Companie Franchise d' Afrique Occidental (CFAO) Societe Commerciale Quest Africaine (SCOA), etc. The marketing Boards that were created to cushion the volatility of prices in the world market on the African farmer ended up ripping him off as prices of cash crops were dictated by the buyers and the prices of consumer goods were also dictated by the seller. Either way, the African was heavily cheated.

Coupled with the low prices of cash crops and the ever-rising prices of consumer goods Was the stultifying of colonial industrialization deliberately by the metropolitan countries on the sordid reason, according to F.J. Peddler, that they wished "to safeguard the social system of the African tribes against disintegrating influences of urban conditions (Rodney 2018). The income tax system was also skewed against the African colonies. This was deliberately kept low. Thus companies that were registered in metropolitan countries received tax benefits from the enormous profits they made from the wealth and labour of Africans. By Kwame Nkrumah's estimation, British commercial and shipping interests made a total of £300,000,000 from the Gold Coast alone, in the last thirty years of colonial rule (Rodney 2018).

Rivalry occasioned by the high returns in the shipping industry led to a commercial war between 1929 and 1931, wage employment (Nkrumah *et al.*, 1963). Yet nothing was done to aid the colonies ameliorate their plight e.g. only £545,000 out of £148,000,000 that is less than one-half percent of the United Kingdom Development and Welfare Aid that was used directly for Industrial development. No meaningful industrialization was started in the colonies in order not to jeopardize the mother country's industries and the living standards of its citizens and workers.

Colonialism brought nothing good to the colonized from whatever angle one looks at it. Whatever appears as "development" be they roads railways, air and seaports were meant to serve the interests of the colonizer and Africa and Africans 'ended up unintended beneficiaries. The twin evils of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism were unmitigated disasters that African political leadership would have used as guides when they took up the leadership of the continent on the attainment of political independence by the former colonies starting from the late 1950s through the 1960s.

Post Colonial Africa: Kwame Nkrumah in his writings and numerous trips around Africa in the early 1960s in the cause of African unity and development urged his fellow African leaders to avoid colonial masters If they were to make any meaningful headway in socio-economic development of Africa. Walter Rodney published his classic — How Europe Underdeveloped Africa - to guide African leaders not only to keep a safe distance from those whose policies and actions have turned the African continent into a wasteland but also to chart a new and different course of African socio-economic development (Rodney 2018). Instead of heeding these calls, African leaders fell into the habit of obtaining loans which "rate of repayment is always on the rise, yet there is the interest on such loans to" consider too which should be added profits which come from the direct investment in the economy" (Rodney 2018, p. 44).

The result of these was that \$500 million flowed out of Africa to the developed world in 1965 (Nkrumah *et al.*, 1963). Agreed, African states enjoyed some financial benefits from the European Common Market for which African leaders like Leopold S. Senghor were grateful (Nkrumah *et al.*, 1963). But then the European Common

Market was set up primarily for the promotion of European interests, not African. Second, association member states of Africa being producers of primary products were not relating with the European Common Market as equals because the overall design of the European Common Market was to maintain the historical relationship: European industrial convector and African suppliers of primary products (Nkrumah *et al.*, 1963). Hence, whatever financial benefits, development aid African states get from the European Common Market Fund will be "outbalanced by a gradual decline in the national revenues from primary products" (Nkrumah *et al.*, 1963, p. 163). This situation explains why the nature of the African economy has remained practically unchanged "since the first European adventurer came...in the fifteenth century" (Rodney 2018, p. 38).

Even where initial steps in industrialization were taken, these factories were in such a shape that both in quality and quantity, they could not compete with those in the developed economies as the indigenization attempts in Nigeria in the early 1970s show (Ejumudo 2013). Thanks to the investment in the colonies which increased the integration of African economies into the Western capitalist system (Ejumudo 2013). During the nationalist struggle, the African political elite held out a utopia for the masses the realization of which colonialism was the blockade. Naturally, the masses eagerly awaited a rapid socio-economic transformation after independence. Regrettably, this was not to be. Hopes were dashed. In place of socio-economic development the masses were given a liberal dose of bad governance in the form of shrinking political space, nepotism, instability - In some cases civil wars and other social vices (Ejumudo 2013). Africa has lacked transformational leadership which in economic terms entail - staunch decision by leaders

to reduce imports and encourage local production of substitutes for domestic consumption and exports, a determined policy to improve the equality of education, at all levels, and a conscious decision to insert indigenous professionals, technicians, and workers at the center stage of building national development infrastructure (Nafziger & Nafziger 1988, p. 65).

Clearly, this does not involve isolation. It only asserts independence and the exercise courage in making choices in the best interests of their states within the global system of interaction. According to the recent report of Global Financial Integrity, Africa lost \$854 million between 1970 and 2008 through malpractices as "overpricing, mispricing and tax evasions by multinational corporations and by political corruption perpetrated by indigenes (Otusanya 2011). About only half of this is perpetrated by Nigerian leaders. Between (1965-1997) Mobutu Sese Seku embezzled \$5 billion; Omar Bongo of Gabon embezzled \$500 million and acquired assets particularly real estate, across France. Hussein Mubarak in thirty years in the saddle stole \$70 billion; Yoweri Museveni, Paul Biya, and Obiang T. Mbasigo have so far stolen \$11 billion, \$154 million, and \$700 million respectively (Adam 2020),

The 1995 World Bank Africa Development Indicators show that the debt profile of Sub-Saharan Africa rose from \$42 billion (1975) to \$99.597 billion (1988) to \$185.5

billion (1995). That is in less than twenty years, the debts grew over four times" (Uchendu 2020, p. 43). Much of these debts ended in the private accounts of African leaders and their cronies it was in this context that Barak Obama during his in 2009 tour of Africa warned

We must start from the simple premise that Africa's future is up to Africans (but) the true Sign of success is not whether we are a source of aid that helps people scrape by, It's whether we are partners in building the Capacity for transformational changes. No country is going to create wealth if its leaders exploit the economy to enrich themselves... with better governance, I do not doubt that Africa holds the promise for a broader base for prosperity... with the strong institution and a strong will... Africans can live their dreams... You have the power to hold your leaders accountable and build institutions that serve the people (Pham 2011, p. 76).

The job as it were, was cut out for African leaders and people as leadership involves the leader and the led. Second, the solution to Africa's socio-economic problems is not aid but a partnership of the aid giver and receiver in building the capacity for transformational change.

The cost of governance, that is remuneration of members of the legislature in Africa is not only prohibitive but also obnoxious and out of reality (Hope 2017). Kenya boasts the highest legislator in the world before a public outcry forced him to reduce his annual remuneration to \$75,000. His Nigerian counterparts - senator and member House of Representatives earn 36,999,360.00 and ₦29,479,748.00 per month respectively. This translates to a total annual remuneration of ₦443,908,350.00 and ₦353,756,988.00 for senator and member House of Representatives respectively (Hope 2017). There are 109 senators and 360 members of the House of Representatives. This means 'that the country spends ₦48,386,006,880.00 and ₦127,352,515,680.00 as remuneration for her legislators at the federal level, and this is apart from what obtains in the 36 states into which the country has been split How can a country hope to make any headway in socio-economic development with this obnoxious and unholy load? Regrettably for the country, there is yet no public outcry to make the legislators have a rethink as has happened in Kenya.

In addition to this remuneration of legislators, is the incidence of outright stealing of public funds by public and party officials. Between May 29, 2015 and May 29, 2016 the Nigerian Federal authorities recovered ₦78,325, 354,631.18, \$185,119, 504. 61, £3, 508, 355.46 and £11, 250 stolen by public officials (Hope 2017). Recoveries under interim forfeiture were put at ₦204,888,835,727.25; \$9,275,363,504.76 £5,92,803.01 and €314,649.177 (Hope 2017). While funds awaiting return from foreign jurisdiction' were put at \$324,316,726.10; £6,900,000.00 and £11,826.11 (Mazama 2007). The outright stealing of public funds by public officials is not confined to Nigeria. It is an African malaise; at a time that Sub Saharan Africa has 75% of states "in the bottom billion', 18 of the first thirty states on the failed states index, has the least possibility of achieving the Millennium Development Goals

(MDGs) by 2015, has the highest rate of food insecurity, infant and maternal mortality and has the greatest under \$1.25 a day.

An ECA report in 2007 showed that Sub Saharan Africa has a low road density and the road network was "poorly maintained because Of inadequate resource allocation" and has the highest malaria burden. Clearly, Sub Saharan Africa is in dire need of transformational leadership that will "innovate, focus on people, develop and inspire trust, have a long term perspective, show originality and challenge the status quo (Mazama 2007). As the five top states with the greatest inequality in the world are in the region (Sperling & Winthrop 2015).

CONCLUSION

It is not doubted that the transatlantic slave trade was a horrendous experience for Africa. The colonialist did not spend a kobo in the administration of his possessions that he exploited to the fullest and left devastated. Almost sixty years after independence, African socio-economic development can no longer be blamed on the slave trader and the colonialist. African political leadership since independence has been anything but self-serving and has fared trader and colonialist. African socioeconomic development appears to lie in the building of strong institutional mechanisms, robust public awareness on the part of the citizenry, liberal doses of lessons on patriotism and public morality and provision of stiff sanctions for breaches of the laws of the land particularly those that deal with financial accountability.

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