

# **Indigenous Discourses on Knowledge and Development in Africa**

**Edited by Edward Shizha and Ali A. Abdi**

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# 10 International Corporate Politics and the Hubris of Development Discourses

*Desmond Ikenna Odugu*

## INTRODUCTION

In early summer of 2009, a prominent Nigerian education policymaker in the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) in Abuja made two striking admissions to me: first, that his office relies heavily on international organizations (IOs), (especially the UN Education Science and Cultural Organization, [UNESCO]) for most policymaking ideas and standards; and second, that any policy initiative from donor agencies passes much faster than those generated domestically. Earlier that year in New Delhi, a major player in the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) scheme, India's version of *Education for All* (EFA), gleefully informed me that his grassroots affiliates worked with UNESCO and UNICEF to push the government to adopt a pro-multilingual education policy. In five countries throughout that field research, public policy actors within and outside governments unequivocally resounded the convictions that intellectual and financial resources from IOs drive most domestic policies (Odugu, 2011).

Remarkably, many governments take for granted the role of IOs in creating and sharing ideas, resources and norms across cultures. Not only is their legitimacy assumed from the onset, but they also serve as legitimating bodies for entities seeking international recognition. This legitimacy is founded on three overlapping mandates: IOs (a) provide forums for negotiation among countries; (b) set norms for multilateral and international engagements; and (c) provide assistance, when possible, in several domains, including security and development (Coicaud, 2001). Not until the recent globalization discourse (in which nearly anything "international" is cast in serious doubt) did scholars begin to seriously reexamine the legitimacy of international regimes broadly (Breitmeier, 2008), and in specific domains such as international law (Wolfrum & Röben, 2008), education and development (Jones & Coleman, 2005) and security (Hurd, 2007). Insofar as these critiques of legitimacy offer loose architectonics for interventions in politics, economy and culture, their engagement in the discourses and processes of 'development' needs to clarify the grounds on which IOs' development visions are anchored.

Starting with the post-World War II reconstruction and meliorist interventionism in emerging states, this chapter briefly outlines contested histories of IOs and the forces responsible for their current 'legitimacy'. Contrary to the popularized 'glorifying' account, forces less benign and ominous in outcome underlie the philosophical foundations and operational dynamics of most IOs. Implicit in this process were assumptions of neutrality and objectivity about IOs' capacity to articulate, modulate and stimulate social *change* along definitive (West-centric) paths. While corroborating this more critical account, this chapter outlines a convergence of ideas between mainstream historiographers of IOs' legitimacy and their critics in that they assume a purely materialist conception of development and accept the primacy of the state as a viable agent of positive social change. To demonstrate the inadequacy of these ideas (and the intellectual hubris of ascribing IOs with objectivity and neutrality), I emphasize the neo-liberal ideological underpinnings of IOs' governance structures.

### CONTESTED LEGACIES AND DUAL HISTORIOGRAPHIES

Understanding the sources of IOs' legitimacy entails grappling with two discordant historiographies of politico-economic ideologies imbricated in globalization discourses. In his penetrating analysis, *Bad Samaritans: The Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism*, Ha-Joon Chang (2008) offers two narratives of the history of globalization. The 'official' history involves the economic success of Britain's 18th-century free-market and free-trade policies that triggered worldwide trade liberalization and domestic economic deregulation. As the champion of liberal economics around 1870, the British hegemony epitomized the liberal world order embodied by domestic *laissez-faire* industrial policies, limited barriers to international flows of goods, capital and labor and macroeconomic stability. However, the economic instability heralded by World War I pressured countries to retreat imprudently to *dirigisme*, such that by 1932, even Britain had abandoned the free-trade logic for stiff tariffs. Exacerbated by World War II, this contraction and instability finally annihilated any remnants of the first liberal world order (Chang, 2008).

Whereas early General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATTs) negotiations in the mid-century saw growing momentum around trade liberalization among wealthy countries, 'developing' and communist countries continued to adhere strictly to protectionism and state intervention. The failures of *dirigisme* in the 1970s gave impetus to the rise of neo-liberalism. Jolted by the 1982 Third World debt crisis and the free-trade oriented economic miracle of East Asia, developing countries quickly abandoned protectionism and interventionism for neo-liberalism. This shift was hastened by transformations in transport and communications technologies, which in turn strengthened the structures of global economic governance. In 1995, GATT was transformed into the World Trade Organization (WTO) to advance liberalization in trade,

foreign investment regulation and intellectual property rights. Together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) overseeing short-term financing and the World Bank (WB) in charge of long-term investments, WTO became the central global economic governance system. Under its leadership, a new global economy came to offer unprecedented opportunities for prosperity and boosted the potential for eradicating global poverty. This widely accepted account represents the 'route map' for economic planners to steer their countries towards prosperity (Chang, 2008).

The problem here is that this official account is also the history of colonialism, neo-colonialism and by historical extrapolation, the trans-Atlantic slave commerce. Thus, Chang (2008) views this official account as a misleading distortion. A more accurate account suggests that "the free movement of goods, people and money that developed under British hegemony between 1870 and 1913—the first episode of globalization—was made possible . . . by military might, rather than market forces" (Chang, 2008, p. 24). Rather than voluntary adoption of the free-market ideology, most free-market actors were weaker societies compelled by colonial forces and unequal treaties, such as the Nanking Treaty that resulted from the infamous Opium War. Such treaties, emboldened by centuries of slave traffic and subsequently the apportionment of Africa among European powers at the 1884 Berlin conference, represent more accurately the forces of economic shifts ignored in popularized historiographies of a benign global integration. Although the histories of trans-Atlantic slavery, colonialism and their concomitant economic machineries are well-documented, including them in this discussion is necessary precisely because of efforts to mute their significance in the official historiography. Indeed, apologists of the 'official' history reckon colonial plunders as unfortunate but ultimately positive economic exercises beneficial to all (D'Souza, 2002). As Chang (2008) demonstrates, "[t]he outcome for countries under colonialism and unequal treaties was dismal. Whereas *per capita* income between 1870 and 1913 in Western Europe (1.3%) and the US (1.8%) suggested significant growth, the figures for Africa (0.6%) and Asia, excluding Japan, (0.4%) indicate bleaker outcomes" (p. 25).

During this period in which rich countries imposed free trade on weaker ones, they typically maintained stiff tariffs and strong protectionist postures. Even Britain's earlier attempts at free trade gradually imploded in the face of competition from countries, such as the United States, which deployed protectionist policies in developing domestic industries. According to the official history, economic integration among wealthy nations accelerated after World War II but witnessed weaker participation from poorer countries to their detriment. Protectionism was bad business in the globalizing market. Although rich countries yielded to 'global market forces' and lowered tariffs, they pursued nationalist socio-economic policies (such as government investment in research and development and regulated subsidized public enterprises), which produced significant gains that were reversed as they adopted neo-liberal policies (Chang, 2008).

The corresponding economic disasters of poorer countries, the official history claimed, were primarily outcomes of their 'wrong' choice of economic ideologies (protectionism). In the euphoria of post-colonial independence, nationalist leaders assumed that their nationalist interests could defy ontologically superior global economic principles. Popular opinion about the supremacy of neo-liberalism was so strong that Gustavo Franco, former president of the Brazilian Central Bank (1997–1999), argued that the only choice of economic ideology was "to be neo-liberal or neo-idiotic" (Palma, 2003, as cited in Chang, 2008, p. 27). Yet, economic growth in so-called developing countries during the 1960s and 1970s, when they pursued these 'wrong' policies, was relatively high (3.0%). Like their Western counterparts, this growth only slowed to 1.7% after they implemented the 'superior' neo-liberal ideologies (Chang, 2008). What is often left out here is that these poorer countries were trying to 'develop' using insitutionalized economic tools contrived to expropriate their local resources. Their dismal performance under the strict control of the IMF/WB, champions of the free-market regime, is a scathing commentary on neo-liberalism.

Nobel laureate and former World Bank vice-president Joseph Stiglitz (see Diaz, 2008) argues that not only are these economic 'theories' flawed because they did not lead to economic growth, they also highlight the important role of IOs' *interests* in shaping ideological options in economic development. A dramatic example is the logic of capital market liberalization, which recommends opening up capital markets to the free flow of short-term capital. The IMF attempted to change its charter in September 1997 to force countries to liberalize and open up their capital markets when there was no evidence that it would promote economic growth but that it would actually lead to more instability. Because the Washington Consensus out of which these theories were born was not a consensus among the world nations but between the U.S. Treasury and the WB/IMF, Stiglitz draws the inference that they pursued this capital market liberalization only because "Wall Street wanted it" (Diaz, 2008). The trickle-down economic model, which suggests that more wealth must be created before it is distributed, even if it entails exacerbating inequalities, poverty and economic instability, was never evidentially justified. Given this unethical economic profligacy and corresponding dismal performance, it is doubly striking that IOs continue to dominate global socio-economic discourses and processes. To understand IOs' enduring influence calls for an appreciation of the evolution of development discourse within the competing historiographies outlined earlier.

#### GLOBAL INTEGRATION AND FABRICATIONS OF DEVELOPMENT

Development *ab ovo* is about processes of change. Human history is rife with transformations resulting from deliberate attempts to adjust to

shifting natural conditions. Planned social change prior to the 20th century occurred mostly within particular societies and across relatively small-scale trans-cultural networks. This is true even without rejecting the notion that globalization has 'archaic' (not 'modern') origins (Bayly, 2004)—as captured in what was typologically stylized 'thick' vs. 'thin' globalization (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999)—in attempts to capture primeval transnational networks of earlier empires. However, earlier patterns of small-scale planned social change gave way to highly intensive and more impactful global order due partly to the emergence of IOs. Development, under the nascent global order overseen by IOs, took on a definitively econometric character. Development discourse also assumed a purely Western genealogy out of which IOs emerged as a rational aspiration for a more democratic and internationally integrated world order after the two world wars. Philosophical foundations of international relations that undergird this integration were supposedly outlined in Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and other European philosophers of the Enlightenment (Burchill, et al., 2009).

Contrary to this Eurocentric ancestry, recent accounts suggest that global integration emerged due to contending and converging forces that sought universal categorizations of human realities. Amrith and Sluga (2008) argue that this contention and convergence of competing universalisms extend beyond Western traditions and include the influence of anti-colonial nationalists in Asia, Africa and Latin America, who embodied similar universal idealism as the popular Western Enlightenment and humanist traditions in which they were schooled, and who adapted their views to exigent socio-political contingencies of their respective non-Western societies. Indeed, Anderson (2006) provocatively argues that without these anti-colonial thinkers who appropriated elements of European Enlightenment thoughts but transcended their inherent racial exclusivity, the existence of IOs such as the UN would be unthinkable (see Amrith & Sluga, 2008). The result of these amalgam 'universalisms' is the creation and declaration of universal rights *nominally* protected under international charters and conventions.

It is not surprising, therefore, that while still in their formative years, most IOs shifted emphasis from post-war reconstruction to 'development' in less-industrialized societies. By extending international conventions to a universal humanity, the principle of human rights (hypocritically) ensconced in earlier national politico-philosophic discourses, such as found in Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson (Slaughter, 2005) took on a widened scope that both required and legitimated international regulation of social norms. To be sure, this unification and universalization was possible, not because of the supremacy of the principles of universal human rights—many slavery operatives were schooled in the canons of Enlightenment—but due to the strategic integration of *decoupling* in IOs' operational principles. Human rights conventions lacked enforceability (and, therefore, became non-threatening) within domestic jurisdictions. Member states may adopt

them on the international level but effectively abandon them under the dicta of domestic interests (Mazower, 2004).

Decoupling is a strategic product and *raison d'être* of the primacy of nation-states in IOs' circles. For instance, reacting to violations of individual and community rights, IOs previously focused significant attention on individual rights as inviolable, not even by a benevolent state. Human rights could not be subject to the calculi of collective interests. Indeed, this 'rights' ethical awakening resulted partly from widespread anti-colonial and civil rights campaigns against competing European ascendancies for which economic development entailed the impoverishment of societies through colonial expropriations and exploitations, enslavement and racial oppression that left millions decimated through genocides and holocausts. By the 1960s, however, IOs had shifted their focus from individual rights to economic development and national self-determination. Pressured by civil rights movements worldwide to respond to continued waves of racial and economic oppression, the UN and other IOs paradoxically reaffirmed the primacy of the state, the prime detractor of human rights, as the ultimate safeguard of human rights. The implicit legitimation of Syria's Assad regime by the international community (in the 2013 chemical weapon deal) on occasion of mass killings of civilians emphasizes this tendentious prioritization of state over individual rights. Earlier, the UN emphasized individual rights due partly to lessons from the interwar period and state abuses of minority rights. But the shift to economic development supplanted individual rights with state sovereignty. When IOs intervened in peacekeeping and security, the overriding interest continued to be that of protecting and perpetuating state sovereignty (Amrith & Sluga, 2008). Amitav Ghosh (2002) captures this in an insightful commentary on the 1993 UN's peacekeeping intervention in Cambodia, under the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC):

[T]he UN represents the totality of the world's recognized nation-states, and the fundamental logic of its functioning is to recreate the image of its members wherever it goes, so wherever the demands of democracy or humanitarianism run contrary to the exigencies of the nation-state, it is the latter that will always win out. (p. 265)

If the existence of IOs dictates asserting state supremacy, thus providing space for meretricious ethical discourse that lack structures for domestic enforcements, regulating social behavior and enforcing compliance required more ideological apparatuses. It is here that IOs have wielded enormous influence in defining norms and directions of development. By shifting from military conquest to ideological control, this cultural hegemony (*à la* Gramsci) exploits systems of knowledge production, such as education and research, to 'engineer the consent' of marginalized people (Edward Bernays, 1947, as cited in Niedzwiecki, 2006). The symbiosis between the state and IOs heralded the establishment of a vast network of specialized agencies, programs and funds to develop, finance and execute programs intended

to enhance living conditions worldwide. These organizations—IMF/WB, World Health Organization (WHO), UN Education Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Labor Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), UN Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), UN Development Programs (UNDP), UN Drug Control Program (UNDCP), World Food Program (WFP) and UN Population Fund (UNFPA)—work together through the UN to promote 'peace and prosperity' worldwide (UN, 2012). Yet, by obliging this commitment to promote human welfare worldwide, nation-states inadvertently concede the credibility of IOs in constructing benchmarks and pathways for legitimate development.

In a 1952 report revealingly entitled "Preliminary Report on the World Social Situation", the UN not only assumed this crucial responsibility of establishing development orthodoxy but more importantly, inscribed on it a Western inflection when it argued that "the general impoverishment of any area is a matter of concern to all; and that the technical experience and knowledge acquired in rapidly changing industrialized societies have somehow to be made available to those communities that are less advanced and less well equipped" (UN, 1952). With this socio-economic imagination of global (inter)dependence, the UN positioned its sundry agencies as the legitimate facilitator of these exchanges, and outlined guiding principles for its technical/development assistance through which it sought to transform the world along Western lines (Amrith & Sluga, 2008). Alternative social conditions were collectively dubbed 'underdevelopment'.

The binary portraits of development were already institutionalized and legitimated under colonialism. A category of 'underdeveloped' (later, 'developing' and "Third World") societies became necessary not only as justification for 'developed' and 'First World' ones but also as a rationalization for melioristic interventions of IOs in non-Western societies. The scope of its justificatory value extended from WHO vaccination schemes to UNESCO's educational norms and a battery of WB loan packages. Although earlier neo-colonial critiques exposed the conceptual inadequacies of this dualism, the assumption that the project of modernity for non-Western societies is necessarily tethered to Western tutelage quickly outstripped the fledgling post-colonial optimisms about self-determination. New nations quickly learned that to be accepted into the emerging global banquet of nations and to gain credibility, strict adherence to the rubrics of Westernized fabrications of development was imperative. In accepting the corresponding loan aid packages, less-industrialized societies become unwittingly complicit in sealing the fate of their societies' development. Indeed, Western delineation of development has become so paradigmatic that critics who highlight other alternatives are treated as inconsequential cynical detractors. As evident in Sachs' (2005, 2008) works, mainstream economists continue to offer Western 'philanthropic' levers to lift the most impoverished onto the lowest rung of modernity's Eurocentric ladder. The crucial point here is that the *economic* calculations of aid acceptance require a concomitant *ideological* concession to this unilineal Western imagery of development.

The legacy of the economic control and ideological manipulation of IOs are at least threefold: first, that the escalation of interests in development (redefined as Westernization) took on a new worldwide dimension is almost platitudinous. Yet, the ways in which the existence of international structures gradually became the primary tool for its own legitimation require constant reexamination. Second, this emphasis took on a particularly analytic character in that it compartmentalized arenas of development along manageable indices with empirical measures. Development was no longer a holistic exercise, but to be sought under education, health and political economics. Recent evolutions of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA) and International Development Targets (IDT) are few evidences of this trend. Third, the emergence of quantification of development indices, whether through the Human Development Index (HDI) or other crude development measures (e.g., knowledge and learning, holistic well-being and material wealth) have been reduced to narrow standardized algorithmic values for ranking societies. To rank societies, quantitative measures were necessary to create an illusion of objectivity and neutrality. Empirical data, not socially constructed ideologies, must determine which societies are developed and which need development assistance. Consequently, ascribing IOs with objectivity and neutrality, arguably, remains the most unfortunate legacy of current development discourse.

#### STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINT, NEO-LIBERAL OBLIGATION AND NEW DEVELOPMENT VISTAS

Two sets of arguments have been advanced so far: (1) that IOs have played a significant role in defining and disseminating current development norms largely as 'Westernization' through *intellectual* organizations (e.g., UNESCO) and *economic* institutions (WB/IMF); and (2) that despite the hype about fostering historicized development around the world, IOs' development profiles have so far been dismal and bore profound deleterious consequences in less industrialized societies. If IOs continue to be influential in defining development discourse and if current visions of development are narrow, one must examine their structural capabilities and ideological commitments to a new and integrative development vista. Must societies abide by prevailing materialist vision of development and its neo-liberal economic cocktails to gain equal status and legitimacy internationally? Or, can they effectively adopt development pathways fundamentally different from current consumerist monocultural materialism without attracting *ipso facto* the antagonism of dominant Western powers and their IOs' surrogates? Whereas mainstream scholarship offers a very optimistic outlook, even a cursory analysis suggests that IOs are structurally constrained and ideologically disinclined to accommodate alternative discourses on growth or development. To explore these structural and ideological barriers, I refer to two considerations that, although obvious, are often ignored in popular IOs analysis.

### Structural Constraints in International Organizational Governance

One fundamental flaw of current development practices lies in an inherent paradox. Whereas *prima facie* IOs' development initiatives are founded on principles of universal rights and freedom and purportedly uphold dialogue, their structural logic inherently operates by producing winners and losers. The prime casualties are individuals and groups forced to the margins of social and economic activities, mostly in the global South. As articulated in recent 'Occupy Movement', the economic, political and cultural activities that generated the opulence of New York's Wall Street and London's Square Mile is also responsible for the slums, ghettos and barrios spread across Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe. Contrary to dominant accounts, such economic and political polarization occurs precisely because of nation-states' and IOs' activities.

Besides ideological presuppositions of nation-state supremacy, IOs are structurally constrained because member states are represented by diplomats and politicians whose plenipotentiary powers are directly limitable only by state institutions. Consequently, their decisions reflect state priorities because policy decisions and normative positions are the prerogative of member state representatives. Whereas non-member state parties, such as intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations, may be invited as observers without voting rights, most internal strategic and operational decisions are made directly or shaped indirectly by the dominant nation-states. For instance, only the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, France and China are permanent members of the UN Security Council with only 10 additional non-permanent members elected for two-year terms. Over 70 member countries have never sat in the Security Council (UN, 2012). Both UNESCO and the WB have an Executive Board and a Board of Directors, respectively, comprised of a fraction of member state representatives. Indeed, a member state's voting power in the WB is proportionate to its financial investment in the bank, leaving the United States, Japan, Germany, France and the UK as the most dominant countries with permanent Executive Director Appointees (World Bank, 2012).

Apologists of this hegemony invoke the Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST) developed by Krasner (1999, 1985) and Kindleberger (1996) and recently advanced by Keohane (2005). HST accepts as a given the problem of collective action. With large groups, collective interests do not necessarily conduce to rational choices and collective goal-directed action. Instead, collective interest, especially among large groups engenders a situation where poorer individuals abdicate their responsibility to contribute to the public good, leaving the burden to wealthier individuals (see Olson, 1965). By defining the regulation and institutionalization of trade and finance as a public good, HST rationalizes the inevitability of a *hegemon* who, despite being motivated by domestic national interests, is required to superintend over international political economic integration.

We do not need to unveil the flaws of this logic to note that speaking of objectivity and neutrality, borne out of dialogue, under such structural hegemony is facetious.

In addition to this organizational structure, decision making within particular IOs depend largely on the same operational strategies characteristic of nation-state governance. During field research at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, my interview with a prominent UNESCO ambassador was interrupted by another delegation that was lobbying for an upcoming General Conference vote. As the ambassador later clarified, "this is how things are done here. Sometimes you have to support issues you disagree with so that others can vote in your support in areas of strategic interest" (Cabrone, 2009)<sup>1</sup>. The ensuing review of IO governance revealed, first, that IOs' governance is simply national politics writ large. Yet, national policymakers view normative positions and policy prescriptions of IOs as a product of an intellectually honest, economically sound and culturally responsive process. Second, whenever IOs enlist academics or professionals in constructing normative or policy packages, such expert recommendations are ultimately subject to the economic and political gerrymandering of IOs' governance. Even experts who win IOs' endorsements cannot guarantee the credibility of their 'expert opinion' within this highly politicized structure. Overall, any optimism about IOs' structural capabilities to accommodate alternate development discourses is naïve.

### Neo-Liberal Obligations in International Organizations Development Vista

It is not accidental that IOs purport to function as impartial development actors but uphold social and economic policies that for decades have produced dismal outcomes for the majority of the world's marginalized population. IOs' leadership structures were configured to serve entrenched interests of dominant socio-economic societies/classes. The issue here is well articulated in the recent controversy over *The End of Poverty*, the main title of both Jeffrey Sachs' (2005) book and Philippe Diaz's (2008) documentary film. The famous economist Sachs recounts a familiar tale of classical social evolution in which all societies are destined to a common teleological path (and, therefore, end) by adopting economic and social models of Western civilization as the contemporary pinnacle of social evolution. His economic remedy for eradicating extreme poverty is anchored on the basic assumption of unilineal Western economic development. Poor societies, in Sachs' account, have to be assisted by wealthier nations to step onto the lowest rung of this predetermined economic ladder. Sachs explains the existence of extreme poverty due to lack of six kinds of capital: sufficient *human capital* (e.g., health, nutrition and skills required for economic

productivity); *business capital* (machinery and transport for increased productivity); *infrastructure* that are critical inputs for business productivity; *natural capital* that provides the environmental services necessary for human society; *public institutional capital* that makes for peaceful and prosperous division of labor; and *knowledge capital* that elevates and promotes physical and natural capital.

To escape the poverty trap created by the dynamics of these exiguous capitals and to begin ascent to full humanity, extremely poor supplicants must depend on Western donor-based investment to boost their level of capital for economic productivity that meets their basic needs (Peet, 2006). According to Sachs, “[t]he key to ending extreme poverty is to enable the poorest of the poor to get their foot on the ladder of development” (2005, p. 244). To accomplish this by 2025, in keeping with visions contrived under the aegis of IOs (e.g., the UN MDGs), rich nations only need to fulfill their existing commitment to provide 0.7% of GDP as foreign aid. Indeed, Sachs argues, “*the Millennium Development Goals can be financed within the bounds of the official development assistance that the donor countries have already promised*” (2005, p. 299, emphasis in original). Once foreign aid fills this ‘financing gap’ between what a poor country needs and what it can actually produce on its own, an extremely poor society will “break out of the poverty trap and begin growing on its own” (Sachs, 2005, p. 250).

Sachs’ arguments reiterate earlier ‘Big Push’ *contra* ‘incremental reform’ controversies of the past two decades, in which shock therapy was pitted against gradualism and piecemeal reform (Easterly & Sachs, 2006). In a more recent book, *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*, Sachs (2008) extends this argument by integrating concerns about how (a) global population growth (projected at 9.2 billion at mid-century); and (b) increased rates of consumption place unsustainable pressures on natural resources and global environment. His ternary recommendations of improved sustainable technologies, population control (especially in Sub-Saharan Africa) and ending poverty should be underwritten by rich nations in their own terms. Despite Sachs’ objection to the characterization of his arguments as a ‘top-down’ global planning prescription, the role he assigns IOs and countries are revealing. In his prescriptions for ‘planning for success’, Sachs (2005, pp. 269–270) argues as follows:

The UN secretary-general, overseeing the UN agencies and the Bretton Woods Institutions (which are also part of the UN family), should oversee the entire effort. Working through the United Nations Development Program—the economic development arm of the UN system—the secretary-general, on behalf of the member nations, should ensure that the global compact is put into operation. . . . To organize country-level work, each low-income country should adopt a poverty reduction

strategy (PRS) [Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs)] specifically designed to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Thus, adopting the popularized narrative of poverty and development, Sachs places possibilities for complex social changes across divergent world societies on Western philanthropy under the supervision of IOs.

Whereas such narrow top-down economic prescriptivism appears very attractive under prevailing globalization *Zeitgeist*, critics consider Sachs ideas naïvely optimistic or ethically abhorrent. In his documentary film aptly entitle *The End of Poverty? Think Again*, Philippe Diaz (2008) highlights some significant historical inaccuracies and strategic flaws in Sachs' analysis. First, divergent outcomes in development and the corresponding escalation of extreme poverty are not the product of impartial processes of technological advancement as Sachs argues. Sachs (2005) absolves the West from centuries of exploitations of non-European societies, and insists that although 'the rich' may not be innocent, "the real story of modern economic growth has been the ability of some regions to achieve unprecedented long-term increases in total production . . . while other regions stagnated" (p. 31). Sachs appears to be aware of Europe's imperialist exploits, but the intentions behind his interpretations are questionable.

The primary lesson in Diaz's response to Sachs pertains to continuity in history; it is problematic to dissociate contemporary social conditions from previous ones and to render insignificant major historical events of the past half millennium (Gerschenkron, 1962). Diaz's arguments infuses the present with the past. First, earlier European expansionism, which Eric Toussaint calls "an extremely brutal intervention" (Peet, 2006, p. 451), involved the expropriation of natural resources from non-European societies, stripping such societies of essential natural capital that were moved to Europe to become a major source of economic growth. According to Toussaint, trade in these resources and the consequent economic growth accounts for a significant part of Europe's wealth. Resource expropriation occurred contemporaneously with exploitation of land and people (mostly as free labor), both in colonial frontiers and in the Occident. The brutal exploitation of African free labor under slavery in the entire Americas echoes the oppressive conditions under which colonized people labored and died in Asia and Africa.

Second, as the Euro-American (and later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese) economies grew at the expense of their colonies, colonial powers more and more defined capitalist rules of international economic exchanges and imposed a monoculture in which each peripheral society was assigned the role of producing particular export resources, thus creating a state of dependency under colonial control. To date, the locked economies of colonial frontiers ensure that raw materials, exported at extremely low-cost, are imported as expensive finished products. Since 1960, the price of agricultural exports from less-industrialized societies has fallen 70% compared to imports. Paradoxically, the quest to boost manufacturing in these

countries often led to massive debt and inefficient or logistically inoperable industrial plants.

Third, colonial expansion deployed both military and ideological tools to extract the consent of the colonized in their subjugation. Former European forts (e.g., Elmina Castle in Ghana and Fort Jesus in Kenya), which are among the surviving relics of European military force bear ample artillery evidence. Although military force was essential at the onset, complete control of the colonial structure required a change in mentality, religion and cultures of the colonized. To do this, European colonists rationalized an odd convergence of religion and economy by propagating a version of individualistic Christianity in association with an individualistic capitalist view of personal property, both of which had little recourse and obligation to or regard for reciprocal African indigenous communal responsibility. The resulting identity crises paved the way for external incursions into the economies and social spaces of Africa.

Fourth, as societies emerged from colonialism, their dependence extended beyond former colonial power to the emerging international economic order, which dictated conditions of 'development', and assigned resources and loans with strict conditionalities. The SAPs of the neo-liberal movement is emblematic of this neo-colonial economic and ideological control. During this period, IOs unleashed teams of Western 'experts' on emerging states, who ensured that all social policies and economic planning were aligned to this established hegemonic order. For Diaz, this new economic order birthed a structural violence that used economic 'hit men' (Perkins, 2004) to coax governments of less-industrialized societies to accede to the Western hegemonic development paradigm. The results are piling debt, loss of sovereignty and continued economic, cultural and political subjugation. When economic hitmen fail in areas of significant Western interests, a military intervention (often involving overthrow/assassination of a democratically elected leader) often follows, as was the case with Guatemala's Jacobo Arbenz, Chile's Salvador Allende, Ecuador's Jaime Roldós Aguilera and Congo's Patrice Lumumba.

Although Diaz does not highlight this sufficiently, a fifth expression of historical continuity lies in the adoption of nation-state as the 'natural' structure of society. Ontologically, nations are imagined communities (Anderson, 1991). But the adoption of national structures in ex-colonial societies took on a fundamentally problematic character due to the arbitrary splintering and amalgamation of first nations/'tribes' into new configurations that reflect little logic of internal cohesion. Even today, for a Western world whose colonial principle was *divide et impera*, persistent political disunity is auspicious for good business. Ultimately, the dominance of Western interests in current development vista and the ideological obligation to neo-liberal economic tools suggest that eliminating the aforesaid structural constraints hardly offers a more optimistic picture for expanding ideas about development.

## CONCLUSION

Using Diaz's documentary film offers ample evidence for an alternate portraiture of how Western forces bear on discourses and practices of development but also represents a symbolic response to the narrowly defined criteria for academic scholarship (see Whitehead, 2005; Appadurai, 2000). IOs continue to play a significant role in defining the discourses and processes of social change worldwide partly due to their capacity to enlist or produce academic scholarship that ignores these bodies of evidence. For IOs to pretend that they possess a neutral and objective stance on development amounts to intellectual hubris. From a more critical standpoint, any development discourse that ignores indigenous perspectives and assigns a significant role to IOs without questioning their instrumentality in the systematic exploitation of global resources is morally questionable. Ascribing the rich-help-poor 'philanthropic' solutions to the global socio-economic inequality essentially undermines the moral *locus standi* of the poor to criticize the sources of the wealth through which they were impoverished (Peet, 2006). More importantly, grassroots actors who view IOs as strategic allies either against or in alliance with national governments ought to heed Diaz's advice to 'think again'. IOs cannot and should not purport to represent a diversity of voices besides pandering to their interest.

## NOTES

1. Pseudonym used for confidentiality.

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