

# Preface

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The 1980s marked a distinctly new phase in the socio-economic experience of many countries, not least for the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. The impacts of the ascendance of Neoliberalism—the ‘Washington Consensus’—created a familiar but heightened narrowing of policy space for many countries. The global impact of stabilization and liberalization policies might in the North have had the effect of reining in collective social welfare provisioning and restraining the labour movements. In the South, and most pointedly in sub-Saharan Africa, it meant the closing down of the space for what Samir Amin called (in this volume) a “sovereign project” of seeking an autonomous development path, severe state retrenchment, and social dislocations. The effort (and it could only be an effort) to commoditize every conceivable domain of socio-economic life, placed the market at the heart of resource allocation and social provisioning. The most ambitious effort by African states to redress the crisis of inherited colonial political economy, the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos (1980) was countered by the Berg Report (1981).<sup>1</sup> The Report claims to build on the Lagos Plan of Action, but nothing could be further from the truth.

The next two decades would witness the dismantling of the embryonic efforts at collective social provisioning, and the retrenchment of national institutions focused on a semblance of autonomous development. A new army of functionaries of the Bretton Woods Institutions, bilateral agencies, and consultants would turn inside out the policymaking space and public institutions on the continent. It was like watching a colonial scenery all over again but without the political responsibility of administering the territory for the colonizing force. Alongside the closing of economic space was a

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank, *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action* ( Washington DC.: The World Bank, 1981).

fundamental restructuring of mechanisms for knowledge production and dissemination—all immersed in the logic that there is no alternative to the market and the liberal ordering of society. From the fledgling efforts at constructing developmental states in many countries the restructuring of the state into the "night-watchman state" focused on easing the "burden of doing business." New regimes of trade regulation and investment protection in the context of a unipolar international order operated in tandem with more brazen efforts of the Western powers to impose their will on other countries militarily and by covert efforts, and increased intellectual hegemony. Most explicit in Economics but evident in other fields as well, the plurality of public discourse became narrow and constrained. Market hegemony was coupled with the perceived death of the emancipatory project. The fracturing and subordination were not simply between countries but deep within national boundaries, as well.

The features were both familiar and new. Kwame Nkrumah's *Neocolonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965)<sup>2</sup> sums up quite well some of the multi-dimensional aspects of what would later be described as Dependency and more recently Coloniality—the end of colonial rule did not mark the end of colonial domination. "The methods of neo-colonialists are subtle and varied. They operate not only in the economic field but also in the political, religious, ideological and cultural spheres." Neither is the mechanism of neo-colonialism at the level of state-to-state relations; it covers the operations of transnational corporate entities, cultural entities, etc. The book, it should be recalled, was published while Nkrumah was the sitting president of Ghana; it earned a prompt rebuke from the US State Department and the cancellation of "\$25million of American 'aid' to Ghana."<sup>3</sup>

For many countries, the restructuring that emerged would tilt back to commodity production (mineral and non-mineral) and de-industrialization of the limited effort at industrialization. For all the claim of renewed economic performance from sub-Saharan Africa<sup>4</sup> to Brazil, much of this was hitched to the commodity super-cycle. The engine for this might be the resurgent China, but the implications for the location of these economies in the global economic order (peripheral and extraverted) could not be more obvious. If the pre-neoliberal era involved attempts at internalizing the growth engines of many of these countries, the neoliberal era has been a period of heightened extraversion.

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<sup>2</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Panaf, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1472039.Neo\\_Colonialism](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1472039.Neo_Colonialism) (Accessed 20 May 2017).

<sup>4</sup> In December 2011, *The Economist* proclaims "Africa Rising"—"the hopeful continent"—after declaring the continent "Hopeless Africa" eleven years earlier (11 May 2000 issue of *The Economist*).

But there are new mechanisms of enforcing compliance. Beyond gunboat diplomacy and ideational domination, transnational capital's regime of structuring the global economy involves rating agencies as instruments for restraining autonomous policymaking. The more integrated and interlocking the domestic economy is with the centres of the global finance the more the leverage on countries that are in the positions of the so-called "sub-imperial powers."

Paradoxically, at a time when the core arguments of the Dependency framework are most pertinent, they disappeared from mainstream debates on "globalization" and the academic curricula. It is in this context that the inspiration for this collection of interviews with some of the leading scholars around the world is most welcome. The project of rethinking the world order, and the Young Scholars Initiative to explore the Dependency framework through the interviews, opens an earlier archive to a new generation of intellectuals, activists, and policymakers (hopefully).

As is evident from the interviews in this volume, Dependency was never a 'theory' and both its characterisation and critique can be quite clichéd. Its intellectual heritage stretched back to the 19th-century resistance against colonialism; its 20th-century proponents range from Raúl Prebisch to Adebayo Adedeji. The diversity of the framework (eloquently summarised by Samir Amin in this volume) shared a common premise of historical analysis and an understanding of the object of analysis as global. The differential location of countries within the system helps in understanding not only the global flow of value but other domains of dependence. The different strands—as the interviews in this volume demonstrate—provide different levels of understanding of the mechanisms of dependence and the feasibility of overcoming it. The forces driving and entrenching dependence are not only global or metropolitan; they are local as well. If in the 1960s and the 1970s, the contention was between socialism and national bourgeois development ('dependent development') in resolving the crisis of dependence, Samir Amin's enunciation on the "sovereign project" remains central. Here, Ian Taylor's elaboration (in this volume) of Amin's idea of "delinking" should help mitigate against the casual denunciation of the notion. It takes us beyond the pessimism of absolutes. History is not destiny, and policy space exists that can and should be explored, as it does for addressing racism, sexism, and epistemic dependence. Ideas matter so do policy and leadership.

As noted earlier, for a new generation of scholars and students, this volume should be a key that opens the door to an archive and a new way of reasoning about the current global order. The solution to a problem starts with an in-depth understanding of the nature of the problem. However, this goes beyond "new economic thinking." As Ramón

Grosfoguel, (in this volume) shows and Nkrumah (as cited earlier) understands, what is at stake is more than the economic. What is required is thinking and acting on the multi-dimensional faces of dependence and what Grosfoguel called the “civilizational crisis.” The dependence is as much economic, as it is political, sociational, and epistemic, among others. It would require confronting the different dimensions of domination and dependence.

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