Introduction

The pictures show smiling children in western-style clothing, writing in school notebooks with their decorated pencils; one little girl wears a cross dangling from a silver chain and the headlines bleat "Invest in Uganda's Youth" and "Investing in Ethiopia's People." Welcome to the Africa page of the World Bank website. The World Bank is the largest international financial institution dedicated to supporting global economic development through capitalist projects. A quick glance at the World Bank website offers some insight into how institutions with the economic means to determine international aid policies define development. At the time we write this, the World Bank in Africa website offers an overview of current growth rates for sub-Saharan African economies in a section titled "Africa at-a-Glance."[1] An "Overview" distinguishes "resource-intensive" countries from those that are "non-resource-intensive" and notes that "many challenges remain" in African nations' efforts to grow their economies. Among these challenges are unemployment, poverty, and "fragility." The "Data" section of the World Bank in Africa page includes graphs showing per capita gross national income (GNI), along with population and other statistics. The "Project" section features a summary of a plan to extend access to electricity in West Africa. Other links on the website navigate to discussions of public health, violence, and challenges and opportunities for entrepreneurs. The bottom of the page highlights two "Experts" at the World Bank who are economists from

[1] www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr, accessed June 12, 2019. The plan referenced is the "West African Power Pool" project.

Egypt and Cameroon. The reports and data referenced on the front page of the World Bank in Africa website define development in narrow economic terms around resources and wealth, while the images of and stories about African children reify a particular vision of what underdevelopment looks like in Africa: poverty, poor nutrition, and limited access to schooling. This vision is based in what we call the development episteme, the knowledge system that has shaped ideas of development for Africa over the past two centuries.

While providing a broad overview of sub-Saharan Africa's social, economic, and political conditions, the World Bank narrowly defines underdeveloped economies as a problem for the global economy. The World Bank suggests this problem can be fixed through the collection of "Data" that feed into western-style scientific solutions. "Experts" then translate the scientific results into "Projects" meant to expand the national economies of African countries and thus bring Africa's youth into a future defined in terms of neoliberal capitalism and western modernity. Each piece of the World Bank in Africa website represents a piece of the development episteme that advocates this western-style modernity, a modernity that is constantly changing and thus always out of reach.

To the majority of Africans today, "development" does not necessarily mean GNI, growth rates, or statistical assessments of infrastructure in their countries. Development is both more tangible on an individual level – a measure of a mother's ability to pay school fees for her children, for example – and less concrete – such as a general sense of "moving forward" (Swahili, *maendeleo*) or embracing change. Nonetheless, the World Bank's definition of development and, in particular, the idea that some nations lag behind others, has informed and continues to inform international development policies for Africa. *The Idea of Development in Africa* offers an overview that explores where this idea of development came from and how it has shaped Africa's past, present, and visions for the future.

The title of this book is a nod to Congolese philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe's *The Idea of Africa* (1994).[2] Mudimbe argues that the "idea of Africa" now pervasive globally materialized during the era of European colonialism starting in the nineteenth century. This idea

[2] V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Indiana University Press, 1994). See also V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Indiana University Press, 1988).

became ingrained, co-opted, and reformed – though not completely transformed – by Africans themselves who inherited the language of othering from colonialism and turned it into a language of solidarity in the twentieth century. This "idea of Africa" portrays the continent and its people as stuck in the past and embroiled in poverty and, therefore, the target of necessary and justified intervention. This idea of Africa was thus inherent to the development episteme, and vice versa. The terminology has changed over time, and the speakers now include Africans as well as westerners, but the basic assumptions about the difference between those who are developed and those who need development have not changed. This book provides an overview of the historical foundations of those assumptions (the development episteme) and how it gave shape to the idea of development. Our intention is to engage readers in a conversation about how and why international development efforts in Africa have historically had ambiguous results, and why we need to challenge the basic assumptions underlying our contemporary idea of development.

THE DEVELOPMENT EPISTEME

The development episteme has been an essential component of the "idea of Africa" in western discourses since the early 1800s. The word "episteme" means knowledge system or the creation of knowledge. Episteme is not merely the creation of knowledge but the hegemony of that knowledge and the idea that a particular epistemology, or way of knowing, is the *only* way of getting at the truth. The "development episteme" thus refers to the knowledge system that claims there are real, measurable differences in "development" between nations, societies, or social groups. It is the "scientific" concept that some societies are "developed" and others are "undeveloped," "less developed," or in the process of "developing." The development episteme promotes the impression that development is the *only* lens through which one can understand African cultures and societies.[3]

Africa's modern history has been a history of development. By this, we do not mean the capitalist economic growth, the expansion of

[3] For more on the hegemony of the development discourse see Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton University Press, 2012 [1995]).

infrastructure, or the emergence of democratic nation-states that many African countries have experienced. We investigate the history of the ideas, practices, and "problems" of development as the episteme that has shaped the way westerners perceive African people, societies, and environments. Many diplomats, professionals, practitioners, and scholars assert that international development began with the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944 and the creation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) the following year.[4] According to the standard narrative, these institutions initially raised funds for Europe's recovery in the wake of World War II and then gradually shifted their attention toward development of the "Third World," or what today is often called "the global south." This book offers a different take on the history of development by examining the origins of the development episteme itself.[5]

The development episteme emerged out of Enlightenment philosophies that justified a sense of racial and cultural superiority among Europeans and instilled in them the impulse to "civilize" the rest of the world. This civilizing mission, which some people in the late nineteenth century described as the "white man's burden," laid the groundwork for many of the development discourses and practices directed toward Africa and Africans today. Assumptions about racial difference remained foundational to the development episteme between the 1880s and the 1950s, when more than 90 percent of the African continent was under European colonial control. Gradually after the Second World War, the development discourse shifted its focus from race to culture, but the othering of Africans racially, culturally, and geographically has not disappeared. This othering is not necessarily a reflection of racial biases or nefarious intentions among individuals engaged in development work – quite the opposite. Most people working toward developing Africa aim for justice and equality globally. However, the structures of the development industry nonetheless perpetuate ideological and material inequalities. The central argument of this book is that this logic of difference and differentiation is built into the foundations of the development episteme itself. We offer an overview of how the idea of development, or the development

[4] See, for example, Barrie Ireton, *Britain's International Development Policies: A History of DFID and Overseas Aid* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Corinna Unger's *International Development: A Postwar History* (Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2018).

[5] Aram Ziai, *Development Discourse and Global History: From Colonialism to Sustainable Development Goals* (Routledge, 2016).

episteme, came into being, and how this idea has shaped particular policies and practices in Africa over the past two centuries. Each chapter also provides examples of how the development episteme endures into the present day.

VERNACULAR DEVELOPMENT

While the development episteme has dominated western ideas about Africa, Africans themselves have generated their own diverse meanings of development. Vernacular development, or the words and phrases Africans have used to describe development, highlights the ways in which development became translated and redefined in African languages and cultures and how the targets of development interventions have designed their own paradigms for understanding economic, political, and social change.[6]

In the Shona language of Zimbabwe, the word *budiriro* is used as a translation for "development." *Budiriro* literally means "physical and material success." Anthropologist Erica Bornstein argues that this concept has moral implications in addition to practical ones. Success in material or physical form is not enough. One who is successful must also be humble and generous, for there is a negative connotation to *budiriro*, an underside to development that refers to the potential to corrupt by desire, greed, or envy. Thus, built into the Shona concept of development is both the idea of striving for material gain and the warning about the negative consequences this success might bring.[7]

Elsewhere, development is understood as a process of transforming from one thing into another. For example, the word for "development" in Xhosa, a language spoken in South Africa, is *uphuhliso*, which refers to renewal or improvement of a current condition. This word is also used to indicate empowerment or the ability to overcome challenges. Closer to the English word "development" in its literal sense is the Wolof word *yokute*, which comes from the root *yokk*, meaning to "add" or "increase." In the *yokute* form, however, the word takes on a new connotation. For example, Senegalese president Macky Sall has

[6] The authors thank Dr. Carolyn E. Vieira-Martinez and the Asili Collaborative Research Group for providing a list of African-language terms related to development, which was compiled from their databases.

[7] Erica Bornstein, *The Spirit of Development: Protestant NGOs, Morality, and Economics in Zimbabwe* (Routledge, 2003), 155.

employed the slogan "*Yoonu Yokute*" to describe his national development plan. *Yoonu Yokute* translates as "The Way Forward" or "The Pathway to Development." Though the Wolof root word for "development" evokes accumulation or growth – a concept that might imply personal, material success – the word *yokute* has a broader connotation referring to progress for all.[8]

"Moving forward" is a common sentiment conveyed by African-language terms for "development." As mentioned earlier, the Swahili word *maendeleo*, used widely across eastern Africa, comes from the root word *kuenda* ("to go"), as well as the word *kuendelea* ("to go on" or "to continue"). Anthropologist James Smith notes that in Kenya *maendeleo* can refer to movement in space *or* to movement in time. As such, *maendeleo* can indicate anything from an individual traveling to a foreign land to a community planning for its future.[9] Similar words and phrases referencing mobility include the Hausa term *ci gaba* used in Northern Nigeria and the Malagasy word *fampandrosoana* common in Madagascar. These phrases have different meanings in different contexts, but they all connote a general sense of heading in a certain direction toward the future. Some scholars have interpreted this as "modernity" rather than "development." Along these lines, anthropologist James Ferguson has argued that, as development appears to have failed Africa, modernity has replaced development as the goal for those who want to improve their lives and communities.[10]

African concepts of development must also be understood in terms of philosophies about humanity and social change. One common ideal in African philosophies is the notion of *ubuntu*, generally translated as "I am because we are." This idea originated from southern Africa in the nineteenth century and became widely popular across the continent in the 1950s. It celebrates communal well-being over individual prosperity. African nationalist leaders in particular embraced *ubuntu* as a symbol of pan-African solidarity, and today the word *ubuntu* appears in the names of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), religious movements, political parties, and even computer software. Africans across the continent evoke this ideal in order to explain their shared

[8] Jean Léopold Diouf, *Dictionnaire wolof-français et français-wolof* (Karthala, 2003).
[9] James Smith, *Bewitching Development: Witchcraft and the Reinvention of Development in Neoliberal Kenya* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 4–7.
[10] James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in a Neoliberal World Order* (Duke University Press, 2006).

values and goals for development and to capitalize on its global currency.[11]

Whether African-language words for development imply the amassing of wealth, globalization, individual transformation, community values, or simply heading into the future, they provide insight into the nuances of meaning Africans have brought to development ideas and practices. Alternative visions of development can also reveal some of the assumptions and misconceptions built into western ideals and top-down development policies. Comedic interpretations of international development initiatives on television or the Internet, especially by Africans, poignantly highlight common fallacies about Africa. Before he became the host of Comedy Central's *The Daily Show*, South African comedian Trevor Noah did a bit as a guest on a show called *Spot the Africa*, which poked fun at western stereotypes about African poverty and underdevelopment.[12] Other artists and activists ridicule the development industry itself. The web series entitled *The Samaritans* features a fictional NGO called "Aid for Aid" based in Nairobi, Kenya. In order to access episodes of the show, which is "about an NGO that does nothing," visitors make a small donation to fund the production of future episodes.[13] Government development organizations have even funded efforts to flip the script on the development discourse. The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation funded a student group to run an annual competition, the "Radi-Aid Award," for commercials that highlight stereotypes in NGO advertising, most famously producing a video asking Africans to send radiators to the poor freezing Norwegians because "frostbite kills too."[14] Another winning Radi-Aid video mocks people and organizations seeking to "save Africa."

The amount of money generated from development and the number of people profiting from it, however, is no joke. Development is its own multibillion-dollar industry, and has spawned what Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole has labeled the "White Savior Industrial Complex" that drives much of the western urge "to do something" in Africa.[15] For

[11] Michael Onyebuchi Eze, *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 89–192.

[12] *Spot the Africa*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHO1a1kvZGo, accessed June 12, 2019.

[13] *The Samaritans*, www.aidforaid.org/, accessed June 12, 2019.

[14] "The Rusty Radiator," http://radiaid.com/, accessed June 12, 2019.

[15] Teju Cole, "The White-Savior Industrial Complex," *The Atlantic*, March 21, 2012, www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/, accessed June 12, 2019.

well-off people in the global north who struggle with how to tackle societal problems within their own countries, offering "aid" to African countries puts distance between their own lives and those "in need" while assuaging their guilt. It is no wonder that development continues to be the primary lens through which the world sees Africa and Africans.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Development has and still is frequently packaged as a gift from the haves to the have-nots. During the nineteenth century, the humanitarian efforts of missionaries and Europeans who embraced the "white man's burden" portrayed "civilization" as a gift to Africans. This civilizing mission set the tone for colonial and postcolonial international interventions in Africa. Colonial-era development was never simply about helping Africans, but was also an ideological, economic, and political project that sought to exploit African land, labor, and resources. This is not our judgment on development, but was built into the very conceptualization of colonial development policy. The French term for colonial development in Africa was *mise en valeur*, a phrase world systems scholar Immanuel Wallerstein has pointed out literally translates as "making into value."[16] Similarly, Britain's Colonial Development Act of 1929 stated explicitly that colonial development funding must promote "commerce with and industry in the United Kingdom."[17] The colonial policies of self-sufficiency dictated that the costs of administration, infrastructure, health care, education, and other social services had to come out of local revenues rather than metropolitan resources.[18] Many colonial administrations relied on philanthropic organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Commission to offset the cost of development programs.[19]

[16] Immanuel Wallerstein, "After Development and Globalization, What?" *Social Forces* 83:3 (2005) 1263–1278 at 1263.

[17] Great Britain Colonial Office, *First Interim Report of the Colonial Development Advisory Committee Covering the Period 1st August 1929–28th February 1930* (His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1930), 7.

[18] Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (Yale University Press, 1994), 97.

[19] Edward H. Berman, *The Influence of Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy: The Ideology of Philanthropy* (State University of New York Press, 1983), 133–136.

After World War II, new development policies addressed the demands Africans, colonial officials, missionaries, and humanitarians made for more attention and funding toward "social welfare." Metropolitan funding schemes like Britain's Colonial Development and Welfare Fund, established in 1940, and France's Fonds d'investissements pour le développement économique et social (FIDES), inaugurated in 1946, funneled new life into development and welfare programs that appeared to focus more on Africa than on Europe. European imperial powers offered this "gift" of development in order to quell anticolonial sentiment and convince Africans that their European overseers had their best interests at heart. This was Europe's desperate attempt to prevent what was perhaps already a forgone conclusion, the closing chapter on colonialism. Development was repackaged once more in the postcolonial era, this time as a "gift" from wealthy nations to newly independent African countries and, in trickle-down economics fashion, from nationalist elites to their constituencies. Just like its colonial precedents, the gift of nationalist development was exposed as a broken promise in the 1970s and 1980s when the World Bank and IMF's Structural Adjustment Programs devastated African economies. Even as the policies and practices changed, the fundamental definition of development remained static.

Despite the extractive nature of development policies, Africans were adept at making development work for them. Colonial and postcolonial administrators pushed back against restrictive policies that limited spending on welfare programs. Many advocates for development in Africa believed wholeheartedly that they were altruistic endeavors to combat poverty, disease, or other calamities. However, even where development agents and policies prioritized African interests, they had to contend with the fact that, ultimately, development was required to be profitable. The "gift" of development always had strings attached.

During the nationalist era, some African political leaders debated whether international development interventions in Africa constituted a form of neocolonialism. In his 1965 book titled *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, Kwame Nkrumah defined neocolonialism as a situation in which a state is "in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty," but "[i]n reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside."[20] Some argue that neocolonialism is evident in the fact

[20] Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (Thomas Nelson, 1965), ix.

that, at the time we write this, some former French colonies' currencies and public financing are still determined by the French treasury.[21] African political leaders have also expressed concern that postcolonial international organizations such as the British Commonwealth of Nations or the Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries) (CPLP), founded in 1997, constitute cultural or political forms of neocolonialism.[22] Even where former colonial powers no longer have control over African national economies, they often attempt to influence African politics by leveraging development aid. When an anti-homosexuality bill appeared before the Ugandan parliament in 2011, Britain threatened to withdraw development funding to its former colony.[23] Other donor nations followed suit after a version of the bill passed in 2014, though they backed off when the Ugandan constitutional court revoked the law. In these ways, wealthy countries (often former colonizers) lord their financial power over poorer countries (often their former colonies). Accusations of neocolonialism in Africa were not reserved for former imperial powers. Many Africans have argued that World Bank and IMF policies have increased Africa's dependency on the global north and replicated colonial-era political relationships.

Whether referring to the colonial or postcolonial era, one of the primary aims of the development enterprise has been to make African countries look more like western ones economically, politically, and culturally. Development interventions strive to encourage neoliberal capitalist trade and investment and to pressure African leaders to

[21] The currency used in francophone West and Central Africa (the Colonies Francises d'Afrique [CFA] franc) was pegged to the French franc and later to the euro. Since 1959, the central banks of West and Central Africa have collected foreign exchange reserve funds from these territories (now independent nations) in order to pay a tax to the French treasury. In 2020, eight West African countries will stop using the CFA franc and change their currency to the eco. The nations using the eco will no longer be required to keep a portion of their foreign reserves in France. The Comoros Islands, a former French territory, also pays into this tax fund, even though it is not a member of either bank. The French government can seize these funds at any time for economic or political reasons. Anne-Marie Gulde and Charalambos Tsangarides, eds., *The CFA Franc Zone: Common Currency, Uncommon Challenges* (International Monetary Fund, 2008).

[22] Norrie Macqueen, "A Community of Illusions? Portugal, the CPLP and Peacemaking in Guiné-Bissau," *International Peacekeeping* 10:2 (2003) 2–26.

[23] "Uganda Fury at David Cameron Aid Threat over Gay Rights," BBC News, October 31, 2011, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-15524013, accessed January 12, 2018.