



Introduction: Early Post-Independence Progressive Policies – Insights for our Times

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If Africa's history is understood according to the continent's shifting relationship with the global economy, then the early post-independence era largely stands apart, in retrospect at least, as a time when policy and leadership were centred on the assertion and pursuit of political and economic agency from the hegemonic imperatives of the global North. The broad nationalist and emancipatory orientation that defined this period stands in contrast with the contemporary neoliberal era, which is characterised by a determined effort to reassert colonialist impulses, processes and policies in African countries.

Buoyed by the independence struggles, early post-independence leaders invested themselves in the task of securing the newly-won freedom of their countries through policies that were designed, among other things, to promote autonomous development processes anchored on the demands and needs of a home market. They shared a resolve to grow the home market in their quest to reduce dependence and overcome underdevelopment. They also committed themselves to empowering and increasing the social mobility of their citizens where it had been denied or constrained under colonialism.

The contrast between the political and policy thrust of the early post-independence period and the neoliberal phase ushered in in the 1980s

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is captured by Tanzania's independence leader, Julius Nyerere, when he recalled at a meeting at the World Bank in 1999:

The first question they asked me was 'how did you fail?' I responded that we took over a country with 85 percent of its adult population illiterate. The British ruled us for 43 years. When they left, there were 2 trained engineers and 12 doctors. This is the country we inherited. When I stepped down there was 91-per-cent literacy and nearly every child was in school. We trained thousands of engineers and doctors and teachers. In 1988 Tanzania's per-capita income was \$280. Now, in 1998, it is \$140. So I asked the World Bank people what went wrong. Because for the last ten years Tanzania has been signing on the dotted line and doing everything the IMF and the World Bank wanted. Enrolment in school has plummeted to 63 per cent and conditions in health and other social services have deteriorated. I asked them again: 'what went wrong?' These people just sat there looking at me. Then they asked, what could they do? I told them 'have some humility' (Bunting 1999).

Embedded in Nyerere's account is one of the issues at the heart of the neoliberal project: the deliberate attempt to discredit the experience of the first two decades of post-independence development in Africa by casting it as an unmitigated failure. The World Bank even proclaimed those post-independence decades 'lost years'. The narrative of failure was constructed in a manner that sought to question the foundational principles of autonomous and autochthonous development, which was the overarching framework for the policy choices made by post-independence political leaders. The narrative was also spun as part of the neoliberal campaign against state interventionism on the simple logic that if the early post-independence development experience was delegitimised, then, ipso facto, the quest for the promotion of the so-called free and untrammelled market would be easier to legitimise. The structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank and the IMF were packaged and presented, when they began to be rolled out, as the remedy for the alleged failure of the early post-independence years.

In the articles that follow, six African activist-intellectuals, working under the auspices of the Post-Colonialisms Today (PCT) project, examine the policies and thinking of early post-independence African governments and their relevance for Africa's contemporary development challenges. They show, through their findings, that the narrative of uniform and all-round failure opportunistically promoted by neoliberals is a deliberately misleading one, not founded in evidence or grounded in historical context. Indeed, compared to the massive economic and social reversals that followed structural adjustment, the first two decades of independence were far more promising for the progress of the continent. In rolling back most of the early post-independence policies producing marked improvement in

socio-economic indicators – even if at an uneven and unequal pace – the adjustment years failed to deliver on the promised market-driven progress and became veritable lost years of African post-independence development (Mkandawire 2015; Mkandawire and Soludo 1998).

At the dawn of independence, leaders like Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Sékou Touré, Modibo Keita, Ahmed Ben Bella, Kenneth Kaunda, Jomo Kenyatta, Hastings Kamuzu Banda and more were confronted with profound problems of political, social and economic fragmentation, and primary commodity export dependence, all inherited from colonial rule. By every definition, Africa, after decades of colonial rule, was in a state of acute underdevelopment and extreme dependence that required all the commitment, skills, goodwill and good luck to manage and reverse. The post-independence leaders rightly saw Africa's subordinate position in the global political-economic system as the abiding issue of Africa's economic structures, and securing the continent's political and economic agency as the critical and urgent task on the path towards a more autochthonous process of development.

Although the early postcolonial period saw a diversity of approaches to stemming dependence, all the governments shared a broad commitment to development and nation-building, industrialisation, economic and agricultural diversification, pan-Africanism and the construction of a new international order. And as Nyerere outlined to the World Bank, in retrospect, despite the discontents associated with them, the policies of this period produced better outcomes for African peoples than the subsequent neoliberal period, including in terms of 'growth' and capital accumulation, social provisioning, and national cohesion and inclusion (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998; UNCTAD 2010b: 123–5).

The imposition of neoliberalism, through the structural adjustment programmes, was further entrenched into the unequal global political-economic system via trade and financial liberalisation, conditional loans, privatisation and austerity. This resulted in political and economic capture by the powerful states and corporations of the global North; the externalisation of policymaking; stalled industrialisation; hollowed out state and public services; and the continued extraction of Africa's wealth and resources to enrich global North economies. This contemporary rearticulation of colonial relationships represents the reproduction of a problem that early post-independence leaders had begun to grapple with in their times. Nkrumah, in *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, warned that 'the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside' (1967: 1).

Today, over four decades of neoliberalism in Africa have obfuscated the fundamental issues at the heart of the continent's economic and political realities. Even in the face of its manifest failure, neoliberalism continues to dominate, with policymaking constrained by the notorious Thatcherite claim that 'there is no alternative'. Today, neoliberal assumptions even act as the point of departure in the search for policy alternatives. As Julius Nyerere observed in his earlier quoted interview, the 'independence of the former colonies has suited the interests of the industrial world for bigger profits at less cost. Independence made it cheaper for them to exploit us. We became neo-colonies' (Bunting 1999).

The articles in this collection challenge the continued hegemony of neoliberalism in policymaking in Africa. They do so by offering insights from the early post-independence period as an alternative point of departure, when a generation of Africans were grappling with the role of economic dependence in development. The articles represent a timely excavation of the policies and thinking of that period, asking what worked; what their limitations were, including with regard to the inclusion of women; and how they can be adapted through a feminist lens to bolster the contemporary search for alternatives.

This introductory article unpacks the profound economic, social and political impacts of primary commodity export dependence (PCED) whose foundations and workings were violently established under colonialism. The article also revisits the approaches adopted by the early post-independence governments and leaders towards development and nation-building, industrialisation, economic and agricultural diversification, and pan-Africanism and constructing a new global order; the gains and limits of these policies, which sets an agenda for their reimagining; the current context of neoliberalism and neo-colonialism; and finally the PCT project, which shaped the research and analysis presented in this issue.

Primary Commodity Export Dependence

PCED is one of the fundamental driving features of the majority of contemporary African economies, one that sharply distinguishes them from most economies on other continents. The key characteristics of PCED, described by Third World Network-Africa (TWN-Africa), centre 'on the export of (a narrow basket of hardly processed) primary mineral and agricultural commodities, with little or no domestic manufacturing industrial capacity, and the stagnation of the rural economy ... [leaving] Africa with the low-value end, while the high values are captured outside these economies' (TWN-Africa 2015: 9–12).

The consequences of primary commodity dependence are wide and far-reaching: with primary commodity exports ‘done in exchange for imported manufactured products, this sets up exchange relations characterised by imbalanced terms of trade and losses ... [and] the domination of foreign investment ... With this goes further externalisation of the economic surplus that is generated in Africa’s economies.’ Fragmentation between regions and major economic sectors like agriculture and industry ‘is in turn expressed in the small, narrow and shallow nature of domestic markets.’ And ‘the combined effect of all these is undermining the fundamental conditions of domestic resource accumulation. Such externalisation of accumulation undermines the availability of resources of the scale and type needed for investment in building the domestic economy and its capacities’ (*ibid.*; Ake 1981).

The defining impact of primary commodity export dependence as a key determinant of the developmental fortunes of African countries is no longer in doubt. PCED is now widely acknowledged as a key hurdle to development, both by more progressive-leaning policy institutions like the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and, in more recent years on the face of things, even by neoliberal institutions like the World Bank and IMF. Overcoming its adverse consequences for development has even attained the status of official policy in intergovernmental agreements: in January 2015, African Heads of State adopted Agenda 2063, which seeks to build ‘shared prosperity ... through social and economic transformation of the continent through manufacturing, value addition and science and technology-driven innovation’ (African Union Commission 2015: 6).

Naturally, however, there is disagreement between neoliberal and progressive-leaning policy actors as to what moving away from primary commodity dependence constitutes and how this ‘structural transformation’ must be delivered. For the World Bank/IMF and other proponents of neoliberalism, the market is the main motor, so the problem of PCED is framed narrowly as the need for African countries to move up the value-chain using, for example, market-based ‘solutions’ centred on ‘sunshine industries’ able to plug into local comparative advantage. This has obscured the fact that escaping PCED requires active public policy and economic interventions to, for example, foster new industries, develop intermediate inputs, and generate economic linkages between sectors.

Additionally, the ultimately superficial market-based ‘solutions’ favoured by the neoliberals mask how the global North has an immense interest in keeping Africa dependent on primary commodity exports as this benefits their own accumulation and development, for example by providing cheap raw material inputs for the North’s industrial production, and dependent/

captive markets where they can export their high-value goods – something Samir Amin (1974: 20) understood as ‘a single process which is at once a process of development at the centre and a process of underdevelopment [at the periphery].’ These neoliberal initiatives, as such, work to preserve and reproduce the power imbalances between Africa and the global North, as well as the extractive relationships underlying it.

On the other hand, progressive-leaning policy actors like UNCTAD and bodies such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) have long-championed the need for structural economic transformation driven by the manufacturing industry and the development of domestic productive capabilities via state-driven public policy (see UNCTAD 2008; 2010b; 2006; 2010a; 2015; UNECA 2013a; 2013b; 2014; 1980; 1990). Suggested mechanisms include, among others, the smart use of tariffs, exports, interest rate and exchange rate policies to foster domestic processing of raw materials, the provision of enabling infrastructure, the creation of development corridors and industrial parks, the establishment of public enterprises to steer the commanding heights of the economy, the creation of joint venture industrial projects, the encouragement of the growth of a domestic investment and business class, investments in the development and supply of skilled labour, the deepening of domestic markets, incentives for fostering inter-sectoral linkages, the introduction of basic foundational social policies for the citizenry, and the nurturing of a broad research and development base.

Both neoliberal and mainstream progressive approaches are fundamentally limited by narrow understandings of the far-reaching nature of PCED in the socio-economic and political formation of African countries. They tend to share an operative definition of structural economic transformation where the following is typical:

Four essential and interrelated processes define structural transformation in the economy: a declining share of agriculture in GDP and employment; a rural-to-urban migration underpinned by rural and urban development; the rise of a modern industrial and service economy; and a demographic transition from high rates of births and deaths (common in underdeveloped and rural areas) to low rates of births and deaths (associated with better health standards in developed and urban areas). Economic and structural transformation is also associated with rising agricultural productivity, an integrated economy and rising per capita growth rates (UNECA 2013a: 3).

As well as the ‘neutral’ technical terms in which it is couched, behind this conception of structural economic transformation – like the narrow processes of inter-sectoral economic changes with accompanying changes

in productivity and demography – is a similarly economistic definition of primary commodity dependence as inter-sectoral compositions of outputs and exports and so on. Hidden, therefore, are the broader, economy-wide relations among people as producers and as occupants in different territorial spaces, and the distribution of resources and power. So too are the issues that arise from the fact that the totality of production and exchange within a political economic space is geared towards, and subordinated to, external needs, demands and tastes, specifically of Western industrial societies. It equally excludes the concerns of nation-building, inclusion, national pride, and identity, which concerned early post-independence policymakers as legitimate matters of development (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998).

The PCED economy, constructed through colonialism, and then reproduced and sustained through neoliberalism, is a product of the brutal disruption and dissipation of pre-existing socio-economic and political systems and processes across Africa that were driven by their own internal dynamics, including production arrangements that functioned to meet their material and ‘spiritual’ needs. The reconfiguration of these formations – as fragmented parts of globalised ‘value-chains’ that are external to them and beyond their control, and which serve to advance European industrialisation – carried profound implications for forms and patterns of production and consumption. Immediate post-independence governments understood the multiple dimensions of the development challenges posed by PCED and committed themselves to tackling the challenges.

Historicising PCED: Pre-colonial African Economies

To grapple with the pervasive impact of PCED in Africa, it is critical to historicise and politicise it. In pre-colonial Africa, societies were producing mining and agricultural outputs at a level comparable to other ‘civilisations’ at the time. According to Lanning and Mueller (1979), the production of minerals on the continent took place ‘by Africans for other African societies’, and ‘the scale and techniques of mining and metal working in Africa were clearly comparable with those both in Europe and in the great civilisations of India and China – at least until towards the end of the seventeenth century’.¹ Even in the nineteenth century, David Livingstone reported that the African iron ore workers of Mozambique considered English iron ‘rotten’. He took some hoes back to England; and they were ‘found of such good quality that a friend of mine has made an Enfield rifle out of them’ (see also Graham 2010). As Graham noted, even after many years of influx of European products into Africa, most African societies still produced their ‘own iron or obtained its products from neighbouring communities through

local trade.' In fact, up until 1904, there were as many as 1,500 iron smelting furnaces still in production in Yetenga, in modern day Burkina Faso (ibid.: 1–2; Rodney 2012).

Pre-colonial African economies were also not defined by production for external imperatives. Production based on highly developed technological capacity was exchanged across geo-ecological zones via 'intra-continental trade along the well-established routes which criss-crossed the continent' (Lanning and Mueller 1979: 27) and even international trade (Rowan University n.d.). These trade routes carried a variety of mineral products, from gold to salt, as well as agricultural and pastoral produce, all of which constituted the vibrant intra-African economy (Davidson 1972: 84–9; Rodney 2012; Davidson 1992).

Most importantly, the purposes and object of production, the organisation of labour and labour relations, and cultural practices and procedures, comprised the total system of production. Minerals were not simply dug up and carted away into trade, as would become the case later under colonialism, they were formed into products for use in other spheres of the local economy. They became spears and arrow-heads for hunting; axes and cutlasses in agriculture; ornaments whose decorative function combined with the religious dimension of relationship with the gods, which have an active presence in the daily travails of the societies. The attendant skills and crafts of farmers, hunters, iron smelters and blacksmiths were, on the one hand, part of the processes of economic diversification and specialisation that thereby increased the productive capabilities available to the societies and formations, and at the same time part of the totality of the community economy (Rodney 2012: 33–48). Mining related activities, hunting and agriculture involved specific functions with skills, however they often went hand in hand, sometimes as complementary seasonal activities.

The actual exercise of labour combined – in different ways across different contexts – the skills and capacities of a wide range of human resources available across genders and age-groups, from the production of iron (Graham 2010: 2) to agriculture (Rodney 2012: 33–48). With colonisation and specialisation however, these complementary functions and skills were separated and dissociated under primary commodity production. Some became associated with commercial processes while the rest remained in the domestic sphere. This enhanced the separation between commercial and domestic work, and with this separation the domestic became associated with women and unpaid labour while men provided wage labour. This holds clues to the evolution of modern-day gender roles like the relegation of women to unpaid care work, and the attendant

multiple burdens of oppression. Fused with this were the cultural practices that regulated the cycles and (daily) routines of production. This included weeks-long annual end-of-season festivals to honour ancestors and deities, to settle accumulated kinship matters, and recuperate from the year-long drudgery of work. There were daily observations, for example, in different communities in Ghana, in honour of a river goddess responsible for the whole community who required them to abstain from farming on Mondays and fishing on Tuesdays, duly becoming days of rest.

Helping to coordinate this labour and production complex were various forms and structures of ‘political’ and ‘territorial’ governance that held the networks and communities of kinship groups, clans and ethnicities together, and differed across the continent. Highly centralised state systems with specialised armies and bureaucracies existed alongside less centralised structures, for example where the High Priest of a particular deity exercised authority in the ‘political’ affairs of the society while being equally revered as a brave war-time leader (Davidson 1992). These governance structures impacted production by, for example, organising craft and occupational groups, nurturing rules of entry into different trades, building and regulating local markets, facilitating exchange, supporting external trade, and absorbing new populations to, *inter alia*, expand the pool of labour. These variegated state forms with their rising and dwindling fortunes over time existed side by side, cooperated with each other, and also fought wars, until the colonial intervention when the imperial powers, seeking to extend the reach of their authority, and copying from their adventures elsewhere, (re)created chiefs, who duly became agents for primary commodity economies (Davidson 1992). In just the same way, missionaries of the various Christian sects, side by side and in the shadows of European trading companies, delegitimised priests and their deities as primitive fetishism, including even drumming and dancing at festivals.

Violent Colonial Reconfiguration of Africa’s Economies

Colonialism was at heart an extractive project. It sought to extract as much value from the colonies as possible for the consolidation of the industrial revolution and the economic power of empire. Towards this end, the colonial destruction and re-composition of African societies occurred along several interrelated axes. First, what was once exploited and developed as inputs into complex and complementary ‘activities firmly located and integrated in a local economy’ was radically (UNECA 2011: 12) reconfigured as sources of wealth to be extracted and exported out of the local economy. This began with minerals, where the rapacious demand of capitalist industries of the

North for these resources outstripped the scale of extraction. The high scale of investment required to meet the scale of extraction, together with capitalist competition for profit, led to the domination of colonial capital at the expense of African enterprise, creating the conditions in which even today 'foreign-owned mining enclaves [dominate] most colonial African economies' (*ibid.*).

Agricultural crops were introduced under colonialism as cash-crops for export, and they became a means for extracting the wealth of cheap labour employed in farms or plantations, appropriated by Europeans, and which dominated the export trade. This disruption of erstwhile economic activity in the service of the new export economy introduced the gradual process of decline of peasant-based agriculture and the rural economy that was previously the predominant source of livelihood.

Closely aligned with these processes is the construction/configuration of the colonial state, with 'the centrality of mining influenc[ing] the way ... the colonial state developed' (*ibid.*: 13). The colonial state was active in providing political and legal security for the mining firms; supporting these firms to acquire and/or control the requisite African land, labour and infrastructure; and suppressing African mining enterprise, even where conditions and tradition favoured such enterprise (*ibid.*). The procurement of labour for the mines involved the extensive use of state power to compel African men off their land and the economic activities based on them, and into the mines. Taxes were imposed in order to force people into wage labour in mines, cash-crop farming, and plantation work, with whole communities and their economies turned into labour reserves for economies elsewhere. The resulting disruption and dislocation of households penalised women and relegated them to a care role that served a function of subsidising the labour costs of men to the colonial economy. Where the colonial government could not dispossess Africans of their land, they imposed such stringent regulations on the use of land so as to serve the needs of the mining companies and restrict African use. In the former Gold Coast (now Ghana), the colonial authorities made 'it even a crime to declare land for which a certificate was granted, or was subject to enquiries for such grant, as fetish land' (Hormeku-Ajei 1982: 26).

These processes by which land and labour were secured for mining and plantation agriculture not only disrupted the pre-existing economy but also had a direct political purpose and effect. Relations with the land and 'ownership' in whatever form were the basis of both community and power, as demonstrated in the Akan saying *tumi nyinaa wo asase so*, or 'all power is in the land' (Hormeku-Ajei 1982: 17). Where the land was expropriated outright, it destroyed the basis of the political power of pre-colonial

authorities. When, as in Ghana, they were unable to expropriate the land outright, the colonial authorities managed to circumscribe the power of traditional authorities in relation to land by redefining and incorporating them into the colonial state administrative apparatus. As a part of this process, disparate, hitherto autonomous political entities were brought forcibly under the common authority of the colonial state, in some cases within common boundaries where none existed previously, and, in other cases, through the cleaving in half of communities that were before one.

Alongside these economic and political disruptions was the emergence of new social-economic constituencies that found themselves pitted against each other in the emerging colonial economy over access to resources. In addition to this were the emerging wage workers in the mines, railways and docks, and urban workers in shops and offices, all created on the back of the essential sinews of the colonial export–import economy. While men were engaged as wage workers in the formal economy, women, who were working side by side with them in the rural areas, were prevented from coming to urban areas and participating in wage labour. Women either stayed in their villages or when they came to urban centres ended up doing informal or domestic work to support the meagre incomes of their households.

What started as the rapid decomposition of the local economy through a colonially-driven process of commercialisation – with men compelled to work as forced labourers or wage workers – was reinforced by women being prevented from leaving rural areas or, when they did come, being prevented from getting jobs in the formal sector therefore having to engage in the informal sector. This differentiation is the precursor of the modern informal economy where women continue to be predominantly in the informal sector (Parpart 2001; Tsikata 2009). The profound disruptions caused by colonialism continue to circumscribe the scope and character of Africa's economic and political systems and social configurations. Transforming PCED in the contemporary period must therefore encompass policies that go beyond narrow economic interventions, a fact that was uniquely understood by early post-independence governments.

Early Post-independence Development Projects

African governments in the immediate post-independence period, many of which were brought into power through popular struggles of varying intensities, sought to address the limits imposed by Africa's colonial experience and fulfil the material, cultural and spiritual aspirations that drove the independence movements. Development was one of the key galvanising forces around which the various nationalists' efforts could unite, whether

they were moderate or radical. In contrast with the contemporary period – in which policy has been externalised to Northern-dominated multilateral institutions like the World Bank/IMF and the WTO, and bilateral donors via conditionality-based financing – governments responded to domestic development imperatives and the aspirations of the masses of ordinary people like farmers, workers, women traders, and teachers who drove the independence movements. These imperatives were captured in the desire for national independence underpinned by a determination to recover lost ground and ‘catch up’ economically and socially. Buoyed by their legitimacy in the eyes of their populace, which – in contrast with subsequent crises of legitimacy manifested, for example, in the pervasive anti-austerity IMF riots – gave them the confidence to drive a popular mandate, setting out ambitious plans of transformation and rallying the populace behind them.

Various contextual factors across different countries, underpinned by structural imperatives that were a product of the colonial project, made certain forms of intervention by early post-independence governments inevitable. Regardless of the ideological coating they used to package their projects for citizens and the wider world, early post-independence governments enacted broadly similar development objectives, policies and programmes. The internally fragmented and externally dominated structures of their economies, societies and states inherited from colonialism imposed two interrelated challenges for meeting the material needs and social aspirations of their people. The first was to build a self-driven economy on the basis of domestically and regionally integrated national economies. The second was to build national societies that consolidated different socio-political, national and/or ethnic groups, brought together under colonialism, into a coherent nation-state with a common national identity. Governments adopted four broad approaches towards these ends, albeit with differences in the specific policies, implementation and framing.

Development and Nation-building

As outlined by Mkandawire and Soludo (1998: 28–9), post-independence governments were driven by the indivisible imperatives of ‘nation-building, legitimation, and development’, which shaped economic decisions far beyond today’s narrow neoliberal criteria of unilinear economic growth and market efficiency. As a counter to the divide and rule strategy of colonialism, the logic of economic development was tied to the logic of social cohesion and nation-building. As nation-building necessitated rebalancing internal asymmetries created between regions and ethnic groups as a result of colonialism, this included locating industries in regions that

ordinarily might not seem to make economic sense. For example, there was an understanding that if industry and services were concentrated in Nairobi at the expense of Kisumu, where the majority of the population are Luo, it would simply deepen the cleavages that colonialism exploited during the Mau Mau Rebellion.

Similarly, generating a sense of citizenship and belonging also involved the expansion of public services. Social goods such as education, health, water and electricity were important in themselves and a crucial part of the social contract between the newly independent states and their citizens; they were also a key mechanism to promote equity across internally fragmented geographical areas and communities. Given the denial of these services to the mass of citizens under colonial rule, and their reality as a form of discrimination and elite compact with the colonial state, the prioritisation of the availability and accessibility of these goods was a marker of legitimacy of the postcolonial order. Often, these services were organised through institutions that performed multiple tasks (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998). For example, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah and Houphouët-Boigny constructed post offices in remote and, in some cases, sparsely-settled communities. The post office buildings tended to be the most modern, with electricity and a courtyard, and they served as meeting points and banks where people could save and carry out financial transactions, and acted as a way for governments to pay people for their commodities.

Additionally, the modern economy required a healthy and skilled population, so investment in social services tended to be coordinated with broader economic goals for developing industry and agriculture, and the management of the state. For example, in Ghana, this involved shaping the pre-university educational curriculum to emphasise technical and administrative skills, and establishing two new universities that largely trained students in critical subjects like engineering and architecture (McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh 1975). Given the multiple crucial roles of these social goods, post-independent African governments all made considerable investments in social sectors, especially in education and health. As a result, early post-independence states saw ‘impressive improvement in levels of education and literacy ... [and] a cadre of professionals produced to administer the postcolonial states’ (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998: 16). In ‘Variations in Postcolonial Imagination’, the second article in this collection, Jimi O. Adesina contrasts the approaches of Léopold Sédar Senghor, Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah to questions of development and nation-building, finding similarities and differences in their efforts to construct macro-visions that coordinated their economic, social and political projects.

The making of development, for early post-independence governments, went beyond indicators of low inflation and austerity such as we know it today, the failure of which is perhaps evidenced by the resurgence of narrow ethnicity on the continent since the 1980s. As rural post offices were shut down during structural adjustment for supposedly being economically unviable, so too were the many functions of this institution that were integral to the fabric of these communities, and the overarching project of nation-building and citizenship. In recovering lessons from early post-independence experience, the various initiatives pursued cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather as interconnected components of a broader agenda of nation-building and development, something that does not exist today in many cases.

Industrialisation

Industrialisation was seen as integral to the transformation of Africa's predominantly agricultural economies. Unlike Japanese colonialism, which allowed manufacturing activities in places like Korea, European colonisation in Africa deliberately structured economies to supply European industry with raw material input and did not manufacture in any of the colonies. In fact, colonial policy deliberately undermined existing African cottage manufacturing activities through deliberate and discriminatory policies that rendered them unviable. In some of the worst cases, such cottage production was even declared illegal. Additionally, 'African countries, except for South Africa and Zimbabwe (then known as Rhodesia), had missed out during the import substituting industrialisation (ISI) that took place in Latin America and India under the 'natural protection' of the Great Depression and World War II' (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998: 11). As such, the post-independence industrialisation drive in Africa had to be started from scratch. In this context, the much-maligned import substitution approach became a sensible tactic that, as Hirschman (1958) and others argued, built upon the basis of known and existing markets. This tactic was linked with the quest to '[diversify] exports to abolish the inherited mono-cultural export structures' (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998: 12). There were both internal and external dimensions to this. Industrialisation was expected to dynamise the development of a 'firm and better articulated production base' for a diversified export product, especially manufactured products (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998: 12). As a result, 'the share of industry in the economy was expected to rise, generate opportunities for employment, raise levels of productivity, and raise the incomes and standards of living of the majority of the population' (*ibid.*).

Planning and other policy design institutions represented an important tool to coordinate the post-independence effort at transformation. The quest for transformation demanded a strong and active state capable of articulating and coordinating policies, playing catalytic functions, and pursuing a long-term vision beyond the immediacy of market imperatives. In the fifth article in the collection, ‘Economic Decolonisation and the Role of the Central Bank in Postcolonial Development in Tunisia’, Chafik Ben Rouine unpacks the developmentalist role charted for the Central Bank in Tunisia, which offered an important mechanism for the state to mobilise critical resources towards the national development plan, one that is largely not available under neoliberalism today. The limitations of this active and engaged state could be seen more in conjunctural terms of the mistakes that are made in the process of learning, that do not obviate the essential function of the state in the postcolonial setting.

On the basis of their commitment to a project of socio-economic transformation, early post-independence African governments of all ideological stripes launched or adopted a wide array of initiatives, including ambitious scientific research and technology development projects like the Center for Nuclear Research established by Nkrumah. They also took bold initiatives to expand the generation of electricity to power a rapid economic development process built on domestic industrialisation, like the Volta Dam initiative in Ghana and the aluminium plant associated with it. The Gezira Scheme in Sudan was probably one of the biggest and best known examples of deploying technology and engineering to irrigate vast areas of otherwise arid land in order to improve food security and expand output.

In the third article in this issue, ‘The Rocket in the Haystack’, Kareem Megahed and Omar Ghannam discuss Gamal Abdel Nasser’s industrialisation project, which included the nationalisation of foreign and domestic assets. State enterprises were the predominant form, both for nationalist reasons and, more critically, because there was little domestic private capital capable of the scale of investment required to drive an agenda of transformation. Even as they ran into crises, the industrialisation agenda and projects produced key outcomes. These include the development of technological capabilities and skills through numerous and widespread learning mechanisms, as well as individual firms that were able to upgrade and venture into export markets. Indeed, much of the private manufacturing that was developed in the era of privatisation was built on the successful state enterprises established under ISI, to the extent they were not cannibalised by new foreign private owners.

Economic and Agricultural Diversification

Another critical post-independence policy intervention was investment in the 'modernisation' of agriculture, which was meant to involve a number of forward and backward linkages with the manufacturing industry (Ghana 7-year development plan; Ghana 5-year development plan). In relation to agricultural production for the domestic market, investment was to lead to the improved supply both for households and industry, while improvement in productivity also released labour for affordable employment in industry. In return, higher earnings in agriculture would create and expand markets for domestic industrial products, both in agricultural household consumption and production inputs. Even in relation to export agriculture, while it was expected mainly to continue its foreign revenue generation function, this was improved through initial steps aimed at achieving more processing along the 'value-chain' to enhance export value while also expanding and diversifying the base of domestic industry and employment. Ultimately, this feed-back interrelationship was to serve to improve the inter-sectoral linkages and deepen and expand domestic markets.

While the specific agricultural 'modernisation' policy measures implemented differed in material detail from country to country, the range included extension services, input subsidies and support, market support measures, rural financing, and the controversial price stabilisation mechanisms through marketing boards, which are today much maligned and completely misunderstood in neoliberal ideology. Measures that indirectly impacted agricultural production by targeting rural society included improvements in social services, road and transport infrastructure, and connectivity between 'town and country' beyond the colonial networks that connected mineral and agricultural export enclaves (Karshenas 1998; Delgado 1996). In the fourth article, 'Post-independence Development Planning in Ghana and Tanzania', Akua O. Britwum considers the range of measures adopted in Ghana and Tanzania as part of their development plans, including the establishment of cooperatives and state farms, the assertion of communal user rights to land and other public resources, the provision of grants for agricultural research, and resources and facilities for the storage and marketing of agricultural products. The overall impact was that investment in agriculture in the post-independence period increased and agricultural productivity improved, contrary to the contemporary narrative of agricultural decline in that period.²

Pan-Africanism and Constructing a New Global System

In order to pursue pro-development policies, African countries had to steel themselves against interventions and political encroachment from the North by coordinating regionally as a bloc. They did this through various regional integration schemes and the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity as their overarching continental political organisation, even as they continued their debates about the depth, breadth and pace of integration necessary to secure Africa's best interests. They also forged alliances outside the continent through such bodies as the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 (G-77) countries that served as additional platforms for protecting their independence and making the case for a new world economic order that would support their quest for transformation.

Furthermore, still at the global level, they pressed the United Nations to declare two development decades in the 1960s and 1970s whilst pushing for the establishment of UNCTAD with a mandate to bring a development perspective to bear on the global trade regime under the GATT system. In 'Radical Regionalism', the sixth article in the collection, Sara Salem explores how sovereignty in the early post-independence period necessitated regional and international solidarity as the capacity of states to make policy, mobilise resources, and self-govern was constrained by the global North, including their former colonisers, via things like their dependency on foreign capital, aid, technical 'expertise', military security 'assistance', and colonial currencies.

Limits of Post-independence Policies

In discussing the gaps in early post-independence development experience, it is critically important to differentiate these critiques from the widespread mainstream misreadings of that period that were used to push structural adjustment in the 1980s and bolster contemporary neoliberal hegemony. This is an important point to make and emphasise from the outset, given that criticisms Africans themselves formulated about the performance of post-independence governance were systematically and tendentiously co-opted by international proponents of structural adjustment to promote an agenda of marketisation that was far-removed from the needs and priorities of the peoples of the continent for better government and an even more engaged and capable state.

For many Africans, amidst the broad post-independence development vision they shared, some dysfunctions became evident as the years wore on. These concerns include what most perceived as rising cases of nepotism, ethnicity and corruption, a worrying level of red tape that fed into bureaucratic

inefficiency and inertia, egregious abuses of human rights and the restriction of civil liberties following the onset of single party and military rule. Many of these challenges were captured in the writings of post-independence authors such as Ayi Kwei Amah, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Okot p'Bitek and Chinua Achebe. The essays in this issue contribute to unpacking how and why the various projects of post-independence transformation became vulnerable – including the challenges of financing economic transformation, strategic gaps in industrial and agricultural policy, and challenges related to gender, class and democracy – sharply diverging from the usual narratives that simply serve to justify and strengthen neoliberal policy.

The Paradox of Financing Economic Transformation

One of the fundamental questions in the early post-independence quest to transform Africa's PCED was how to generate the resources necessary to re-organise economic relations and productive capabilities. A more specific dimension of this question – which equally confronted economies in Africa and Asia, where the strategic entry point for broader economic transformation was the diversification of export structures from traditional to industrial products – was how to 'acquire the foreign exchange earnings needed to purchase machinery and technology' (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998: 32). The basic difference between African and Asian countries as they both pursued state-driven ISI strategies was that Asia met its foreign exchange needs through cheap labour-based exports, while African countries depended more on mineral and agricultural exports.

Compared to their 'labour-abundant' and 'land-constrained' Asian counterparts, Africa's land-abundant and labour-short economies faced difficulty rapidly mobilising workers for cheap labour-based industrial exports to generate the scale of foreign exchange resources needed to 'kick-start' industrialisation (short of adopting the kind of apartheid and/or colonial-based labour devices, which, even if acceptable, were not available to them; see Karshenas 1998). Given the abundance of mineral resources and agricultural exports that formed their export earnings, Africa came to rely on their 'comparative advantage'. For instance, Nkrumah's government, for which industrialisation was the cornerstone of economic policy, doubled Ghana's output of cocoa between 1957 and 1966 to increase foreign-exchange availability. The choice was based on existing capacity and projections of future prices for raw materials that, as it turned out, were wide of the mark (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998: 32). The global terms of trade were loaded against African primary commodity production; and they continue to penalise the continent to this day on account of the unequal exchange built into the international trading system.

The paradox of financing the restructuring of PCED economies through the export of mineral and agricultural commodities was stark given that one of the arguments for diversification was the volatility and decline of primary commodity prices against manufactured products and the long-term imbalance of the terms of trade (ibid.). With all the 'predictable' difficulties (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998: 31–5) of resource-based exports, the problems of this choice of initial path could have been countered with two strategic counter-measures. First was the development of mineral-based linkages with the rest of the economy, now widely recognised. For instance, the most relevant example of this is the Africa Mining Vision elaborated and adopted at the highest level by African heads of state (UNECA 2011; Morris, Kaplinsky and Kaplan 2011). This was not available as conventional economic thinking at the time did not favour it and commodity exports were dominated by transnational capital. The second was a strategic plan for improving labour-based exports, but this took too long in coming as it was only prioritised during the commodity price collapse in the 1970s.

The global commodity price collapse of the 1970s brought to bear the key problems of the choice to base the financing of industrialisation on commodity export earnings, and was the main context in which African industrialisation strategy began to unravel. This was exacerbated by the fact that rather than react with necessary internal adjustment and restructuring, most African countries, for a plethora of reasons, chose to finance their way out of the crisis by taking on what seemed at the time to be petrodollar loans, also subject to the same global economic declines behind the commodity price collapse. Debt accumulation was then piled onto existing structural problems. This allowed the Bretton Woods institutions, armed with a new and narrower type of neo-classical thinking and empowered by the anti-state agenda of conservative forces then in power across the Western industrial world, to foist a neoliberal programme of adjustment, further deepening PCED.

Strategic Gaps in Agriculture and Industrial Policy

In addition to the challenges of financing economic transformation through primary commodity exports, many of the expectations underpinning post-independence agricultural and industrial policy failed to materialise due, in hindsight, to key strategic gaps. Agriculture stagnated after the high point of 1975, particularly agricultural production for the domestic market. A key factor was that a disproportionate share of agricultural investment went to the export commodity sector. Even a fraction of the research and development, technological and input support, and public financing

that went into export crop agriculture could have improved agricultural production for the domestic market. Furthermore with better organised linkages and clustering, some of that support could have been organised on a broader basis to benefit other agro-allied activities (Karshenas 1998: 51–6). Secondly, the typically scattered nature of rural populations in the land-abundant agrarian societies in Africa meant that without inducing better concentration in rural/agricultural economies, investments undertaken were spread too thin (*ibid.*). Pan-territorial pricing mechanisms and commodity boards – very wrongly maligned for exploiting the peasantry – did have pumped surplus resources from the agrarian economy, but they also received considerable investment from other sectors, particularly the mining sector (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998: 15; Karshenas 1998). Additionally, agricultural investment was partially used to address intra-national distributional inequity, which partially contributed to the low-level impact of investment, but was critical to maintaining social conditions of production and reproduction (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998).

Strategic gaps in industrialisation policy included reliance on the import of related inputs and technology, and the associated problems of financing, foreign exchange, and balance of payments (*ibid.*: 11); reliance on existing imported product markets, reinforcing narrow consumption patterns rather than a broad market base with possible linkages to other sectors of the domestic economy (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998; Seidman 1974); and ultimately, the very process itself discouraging export diversification as producers stayed in the comfort and high profitability of the domestic space, however inefficient (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998). According to Mkandawire and Soludo, ‘this lack of strategy for export competitiveness, rather than import substitution per se, was the central problem of African industrialisation. What eventually penalised Africa was the naive expectation that industry would somehow transform itself to achieve export diversification without explicit measures to push industry in this direction’ (*ibid.*: 13).

The gaps could have been addressed if the industrial strategy had an ultimate export drive built on domestic diversification, inter-sectoral and wider linkage building, and capacity, but this was either absent or formulated too late. Nevertheless, neoliberal policymakers would focus on strategic gaps in agricultural and industrial policy to rationalise the dismantling of the entire development project, ignoring the integrated and multi-purpose nature of different initiatives, ultimately to the detriment of agriculture and industry in Africa.

Against all evidence, and for purely doctrinaire and propaganda reasons, the World Bank and others were to ignore all evidence and proclaim the

first two decades of African independence ‘wasted years’. At the heart of this waste, according to them, was the state-led model of development allegedly built on market-distorting interventionist policies that purportedly penalised the rural majority and the agricultural sector for the benefit of an urban minority of elites. Integral to the distortion of markets was a rampant system of patron-clientelism that governing elites institutionalised as a means of both bolstering their power and securing their legitimacy. In time, a neopatrimonial logic came to overcome the economy and policy processes, making it impossible for rational decision-making to take place. The solution? Dismantling the state-led model of development and launching a determined effort to replace it with an alternative built on the principle of free and unfettered markets. Ironically, the market-based approach favoured by the neoliberals turned out to become the source of more problems for the African continent, plunging its economies into a prolonged period of stagnation and decline on a scale never before witnessed since independence (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998).

Gender, Class and Democracy Deficits

The anti-colonial struggle that gathered pace after the Second World War involved women and youth as active participants. Indeed, without the mobilisation of women, the nationalist independence project might not have gathered traction as quickly and massively as it did. Both through the exercise of a direct role in resisting colonial oppression from an early stage (the Aba Women’s Uprising of 1929 is a good example) and in their role in the women’s wings of various anti-colonial organisations, women were torchbearers of the vision of a postcolonial world that could usher in a more just and equitable order.

Early post-independence investments in social policy (education and health) and agriculture, given their universalism, benefited women and girls as evidenced by the generalised improvements in the social indicators of women, alongside progressive changes in the broader indicators for society. However, as the social movements that helped underwrite the anti-colonial struggle gradually got demobilised after independence, including women’s organisations, their representation and participation in political processes also were rolled back to a point of becoming examples of routine marginalisation. Within the ambit of the single party state that came to predominate where the military was not already at the centre of power, women became decorative appendages in the political system, providing entertainment at rallies and reduced to ‘social’ portfolios in political parties and government.

Akua O. Britwum's two-country case study contribution in this collection notes correctly that though there were various affirmative action policies implemented in both Ghana and Tanzania, women were largely marginalised, which undermined how effectively post-independence plans addressed the specific challenges of women in this period and, consequently, the development outcomes they expected. The key mechanisms through which women were marginalised included the demobilisation of independent women's organisations through their absorption into the state machinery, and the de-politicisation or disempowerment of these women's sections and instruments by limiting their scope to very few issues. Similarly, as Kareem Magahed and Omar Ghannam point out, 'state feminism' in Egypt sought to promote women's liberation through policies that expanded women's employment and state responsibility for social reproduction (e.g. through paid maternity leave). Despite succeeding in many notable ways to facilitate the economic participation of women, it largely instrumentalised women for the industrialisation project and therefore reproduced many patriarchal patterns.

Class dynamics were also at play in the postcolonial period, building on class formation processes unleashed by colonialism. With the majority of the population immersed in the smallholder/peasant agricultural sector, post-independence governments, as part of their commitment to transforming the economies they inherited, advanced policies that gradually expanded the ranks of the urban working class even as measures were pursued to nurture a domestic private-sector business elite as part of efforts of indigenisation. With the state creating public enterprises and Africanising the civil service, a local middle class of professionals was also growing in numbers. Managing class dynamics in post-independence Africa, especially as contradictions built up, required more than an appeal to patriotism. Most governments attempted to manage increasingly militant workers' demands by either seeking to proscribe or co-opt trade unions. Peasant movements staking claims for better remuneration, though few and far-between, were often met with repressive responses. The failure of post-independence governments to put in place a stable and predictable mechanism for negotiating and reconciling competing class interests contributed to a gradual erosion of the anti-colonial coalition that struggled for independence and set the stage for oppositional challenges to the postcolonial state. Some of these challenges fed into the military coups d'état that were to take place during the 1960s.

The politics of consolidation of power by the nationalists who inherited state power was accompanied by spirited attempts at eroding political pluralism, undermining autonomous social movements, and concentrating

and centralising power and decision-making. The one-party state movement that gathered momentum soon after independence fed into the logic of the concentration and centralisation of power even if the original thinking behind its introduction may have been informed by a desire to consolidate national unity. Opposition became gradually delegitimised and in time, amidst real and imagined threats to regime survival, including externally-fomented machinations, state repression increased as security services were expanded and exercised their functions almost unchecked. Post-independence development, which was built on a foundation of popular participation and spirit of democratic inclusion, was eventually to become characterised by repression. In a large number of countries, military intervention became inevitable as internal contestations became violent, threatening systemic breakdown. Military rule itself was, by definition, anti-democratic and few were the soldiers in power who made any pretence at being guided by democratic values and ethos (see Olukoshi and Laakso 1996; Olukoshi 1998).

If the quest for rapid and comprehensive structural transformation was widely shared by various groups in the newly independent countries of Africa, disagreement and discontent were rife about the best way to achieve the goal. The system of one-party rule that eventually prevailed was justified on the grounds that it would avoid the fragmenting, attention-diverting and energy-dissipating effect and consequences of electoral pluralism and competitive politics. However, if on the face of things, the arguments for single party rule may have seemed attractive, the practice of the system was far from being satisfactory. Apart from the authoritarianism and repressiveness that became part and parcel of its practice, the system also rested on and reproduced narrow ethnic identities and nepotistic practices that did little to enhance national identity and a sense of belonging. Resistance propelled by the discontents of the one-party system aroused regime paranoia and created defensive insularity which translated into a dynamic of intolerance of opposition, demobilisation of popular forces and movements, erosion of legitimacy, and, ultimately, the coup d'état (*ibid.*).

Neoliberal Rollback

With the Bretton Woods institutions acting as a vehicle for Western governments and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet alternative for both financial support and ideological rationalisation, African governments found themselves confronted with an anti-state, pro-market agenda of reform. Insisting that their kind of 'reform was the only feasible alternative and better than any other conceivable option' (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998: 40), the

World Bank/IMF, in the form of policy conditionality, took various interrelated steps to enforce the now notorious Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). What came to be implemented was the wholesale dismantling of early post-independence development initiatives and their reconstruction in line with the imperatives and logic of the market as idealised in neo-classical theory of production functions. The global context in the early 1980s had also shifted from that of the 1960s and 1970s, which was favourable to state-led or facilitated frameworks of economic activity informed by various hybrids of economic theories from Keynes to Marx (1954). Instead, political attacks on big government combined with beliefs in the superiority of markets had powered the election of conservative governments in the major industrial countries of the US, the UK, Germany, Australia and Canada. Keynesianism had lost favour to neo-classical economics and its nostrums of market rationality and efficiency. Neoliberalism in Africa constituted a range of sectoral and economy-wide reforms.

Trade Liberalisation

Imports and exports were liberalised through the elimination of import and export restrictions, and import quotas were transformed into duties and were eliminated or reduced to a minimum. This was promoted using the idea that African countries should harness their 'comparative advantage' and focus on exporting primary commodities and importing manufactured goods rather than continue to pursue industrialisation via ISI. As a consequence, domestic enterprises were exposed to overwhelming, unequal competition from imports produced under far more favourable conditions, sometimes with state subsidies, killing off most of these enterprises. Export liberalisation did not provide a compensating balance. In export markets, African products faced a battery of protective mechanisms despite the WTO, including tariff peaks and escalations, abuse of sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and subsidies, which the Bretton Woods institutions had no intent or capacity to remove.

So, while African countries experienced a surge in imports, they could only increase the export of primary commodities like agricultural crops and minerals, the prices of which were volatile, resulting in semi-permanent trade imbalances and deficits. Together with industry, agriculture was a key sector on which the World Bank concentrated its indictment of state intervention. Unleashing the market to allocate prices meant the removal of input subsidies, price support mechanisms, pan-territorial pricing, commodity boards, and agricultural credit institutions. Forced to face the full force of the market, most small-scale agricultural producers, the main-

stay of production for the domestic market, collapsed, a situation that was reinforced by the upsurge in food imports. Four decades later, domestic agricultural production has yet to recover.

Financial liberalisation

Neoliberal reforms dismantled the finance policies through which African governments attempted to mobilise and direct resources to specific development targets such as industry and agriculture. This included liberalising interest rates; reducing or removing 'direct and indirect taxation of financial institutions through reserve requirements, mandatory credit ceilings, and credit allocation guidelines' (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998: 46); privatising state-owned banks particularly to encourage foreign-owned banks; and establishing financial markets, stock exchanges and markets for the range of financial instruments. While these reforms increased financial sector activity, they have not translated into better financing of production, as domestic producers in agriculture and industry still lack credit, which is skewed to the import and trade of manufactured consumables.

Additionally, reforms have opened channels for resource transfer outside economies. The World Bank sought to shift African governments towards 'maximising tax revenues from mining over the long term, rather than pursuing other economic or political objectives such as control of resources or enhancement of employment ... by focus[ing] on industry regulation and promotion and private companies taking the lead in operating, managing and owning mineral enterprises' (World Bank 1992). To attract foreign investment to the mineral sector and boost production, the fiscal approach emphasised minimal tax burdens, generous incentives, and minimal regulation, undermining early post-independent efforts to manage the difficulties of resource-based export financing of economic activity.

State Retrenchment

As the market replaced ISI as the key determinant of industrial activity, state enterprises were transferred into private hands and the policy regimes they operated in were dismantled. SAPs pushed for the retrenchment of the state in most of its previous functions except in 'law and order'. The focus on 'macroeconomic prudence' and expenditure cut back on the state's investment in social provision and thus undermined key aspects of the postcolonial social contract between the state and its citizens (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998: 75). The civil/public service bore the brunt of this through wage and salary freezes, leading to the drain of expertise and skills

to the private sector and international organisations. This reinforced the use of highly paid, mostly foreign consultants paid at competitive rates in foreign currency to execute tasks related to structural adjustment, bypassing local staff pay and remuneration (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998: 76–7).

Outcomes

African countries performed worse during the structural adjustment years than in the early post-independence period across most key indicators, including education, health, investment, capital formation and growth (World Bank 2005: 3 quoted in Mkandawire 2015: 9). When faced with the failures of privatisation and liberalisation despite the implementation of governance reforms, debt relief, high levels of aid, and a relatively supportive external climate, Bretton Woods institutions and Northern governments responded with a variety of different explanations that often attributed blame to the countries themselves. This included claims that the policies were not implemented correctly, to issues of institutions and institutional character, external environments, or geographical location. The importance of these factors has been denied by neoliberals and Bretton Woods institutions in their rush to blame the policy regime in Africa as the main culprit for the failure of African development (Mkandawire 2015: 5–7).³

While the World Bank/IMF were reluctant to examine the role of the policies they promoted in the bad outcomes observed, others were more straightforward. UNCTAD noted that among the ‘several reasons for [the] disappointing performance’ of African economies, ‘nearly all the countries pursued orthodox macroeconomic policies advocated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, both of which played a major if not decisive role in their policy-making. During nearly half of the 1990–2009 period, the governments of 46 sub-Saharan countries were managing their economies with IMF assistance’ (UNCTAD 2010b: 122).

Through the imposition of neoliberal policies, African economies returned to the colonial economic relations that early post-independence governments were working to escape, characterised by fragmented economies dependent on exporting primary commodities to fuel the economies of the global North. Perhaps the most critical indicator has been the persistent inability to transcend the constraints imposed by this political–economic structure. Low output growth due to fluctuations in global commodity prices, stagnation in GDP growth and labour productivity, high unemployment, and manufacturing slump led UNCTAD to declare that ‘by the end of the 1990s the production structure of the subregion had become reminiscent of the colonial period, consisting overwhelmingly of agriculture and mining’ (*ibid.*).

Today, African countries are contending with the effects of this structure and its developmental constraints in a more hostile international political economy, more demanding domestic conditions, and new demands imposed by the imperatives of living in harmony with the planet. All of this is made even more difficult by the fact that neoliberalism has constituted a powerful ideological attack that has elevated its internal assumptions to the level of fact and fragmented progressive spaces of learning and action. For example, in the early post-independence period, the Cocoa Marketing Board in Ghana had a mandate to raise money and fund tertiary education through scholarships for students. The dismantling of this funding under neoliberalism coincided with pressures on universities to raise money from other sources, including private, which ultimately, over time, had an impact on defining the curriculum. With the additional reshaping of knowledge creating institutions like the Council of Scientific Research, originally established by Nkrumah, neoliberalism has been able to present itself as a common-sense way of understanding the world, replacing the spirit and hope of the early post-independence period through a process of depoliticisation. The PCT project seeks to unravel this ‘common sense’ by revisiting the immediate post-independence period in Africa as an anchor for alternatives.

Post-Colonialisms Today

PCT is a research and advocacy project working to bolster the contemporary struggle for progressive policy on the continent by recovering progressive policies of the immediate post-independence period – many of which have been dismantled and erased from the popular consciousness – and reimagining them through a feminist lens. PCT was born over four intensive meetings between June 2017 and June 2018 (in Addis Ababa, Rabat, New York and Santiago), in which a community of prominent African activist-intellectuals convened to engage present-day challenges by re-reading Africa’s past. Since then, the project has grown to include a Working Group, Advisors and researchers from across the continent, grappling with false, politically-driven narratives of the first two decades of independence that have allowed neoliberalism to cement its hegemony. PCT is housed in Regions Refocus, an organisation working to build cross-regional, cross-movement solidarity in the struggle for progressive and feminist economic policy.

This collection of articles is the product of a deeply collaborative process that is ultimately oriented towards challenging mainstream notions of the successes and failures of the immediate post-independence period, using the thinking and policies of that period as an anchor for research, activism and advocacy for alternatives to neoliberalism. The five research projects

were selected through an open call for proposals and guided by the PCT Working Group and Advisors to recover key policies from the immediate post-independence period. They cover topics such as development planning and the agricultural sector in Ghana and Tanzania; developmentalist central bank policies in Tunisia; pan-African and international conceptions of sovereignty; overlapping and contrasting ideological features; and industrialisation policies in Egypt. This research has formed the basis of an intergenerational dialogue in Dar es Salaam between older generations active in early post-independence social movements and policy processes and activists engaged in contemporary struggles on the continent; advocacy events on PCED, the Covid-19 crisis, industrialisation and monetary sovereignty; and articles in popular media outlets.

The articles here set out to explore the range of social and economic policies pursued by immediate post-independence African governments, the institutions constructed in support of the realisation of these policies, and the cultural initiatives and forms developed as part of the processes of giving expression to African agency and needs in national economic development. Together, they explore the challenges of structural economic transformation in the post-independence context (nationally, regionally and globally), and the different and contested strategies of various leaders in relation to the socio-economic and political structures inherited from colonialism.

Notes

1. As elaborated in Graham, with the seventeenth century began the disruptions by the slave trade of 'the normal circuits of production, knowledge sharing and technological development in many African societies' (2010: 1).
2. 'In fact, until 1970/71, the trend in per capita production was upward. Studies cited by Delgado (1996) showed that from 1965 to 1973, both labour and land productivity grew, with labour-productivity growth exceeding land-productivity growth. In all the subregions, total factor productivity grew in the 1960s by an average of 1.4% but began to stagnate in the early 1970s.' (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998: 14)
3. Mkandawire gives his usual masterful critique of the various ways in which these are in effect backhanded ways of admission of failure by the Bretton Woods institutions themselves.

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