

Economics, politics and culture: the global politics of uneven development

OSISA, Module 8, lecture 3

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24th July 2013

[Plan]

- 1) The concept of 'uneven development' and social and economic inequality
- 2) The economics
- 3) The politics
- 4) A case study of African representation
- 5) The place of culture in historical explanations of poverty.
- 6) Culture in development
- 7) Conclusion

[1) Uneven development]

- In modernisation theory
 - cultural, economic and political 'backwardness' are seen as coeval
 - 'progress' is a linear standardised journey
- In contemporary mainstream development
 - every country has a 'modern' culture
 - economic hierarchies accepted as inevitable [but the word 'backwardness' is unfashionable]
 - Political development mapped to democratisation
 - Democratisation seen as linked to higher levels of GDP (but contested)

1.1 Uneven development

cont

- In Marxian theory ‘combined and uneven development’ refers to the diversity of levels and pace of development
- But also how development is not linear as *under imperialism* less developed countries experience ‘*development of underdevelopment*’
 - A modern sector often foreign-owned and enclaved
 - Traditional sector, primitive, or controlled by merchant class
 - Puts a damper on growth and undermines laissez-faire theory of catching up
 - Industrialisation thwarted
 - Accumulated money capital diverted from industry to real estate speculation, usury and hoarding

[see Lenin, 1916, *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*; Trotsky, 1932. *History of the Russian Revolution*;

1.2 post-structuralist

- Development is a 'political technology' a **constructed collective discourse** which aligns and subjects individuals to capitalist discipline and compromised political sovereignty
- Capitalism is an historically embedded political economy which can be measured **empirically**, with 'economic growth', a widely used proxy for capitalist historical change

1.3 postcolonial diversity

- African reality multiconditioned by the past, and its continuing structural inheritance within the present.
- “governable subjects emerge out of legacies of conquest, dispossession, and radical inequalities of rights” (Moore, 2005: 13)
- “Axes of inequality, differences of identity, and power relations make places subject to multiple experiences, not a unitary, evenly shared “sense”. Within any one place, social actors become *subjected* to multiple matrices of power” (Moore, 2005: 21, author emph)

1.4 postcolonial legacies in development discourse

| State | Economy | Society |
|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| postcolonial | Indebted | subjected |
| Feeble institutions | informalised | Co-opted |
| centralised | bifucated | Iron triangle |
| repressive | Resource cursed | Culturally challenged |
| corrupt | cronyist | patrimonial |
| Hollowed out | Remittance dependent | migrated |
| Party/state fusion | State sponsored | coerced |
| extraverted | Racially stratified | abjected |

2. The economic

- Most common proxy is a GDP as a measure of status
 - Gross domestic product measures the output produced by factors of production located in the domestic economy regardless of ownership GDP measures the value of output produced within the economy
- Most common measure of change is growth rate of GDP, as a proxy for development
 - Growth rate is the percentage change per annum

(Begg, Fischer and Dornbusch, 1994: 345)

2.1 Economic deprivation

Involves

“an economy of desired goods that are known, that may sometimes be seen, that one wants to enjoy, but to which one will never have material access”

Mbembe, 2002: 271; cited in Ferguson, 2006: 192

2.2 The macro-economic

- *Neoclassical* economic data in numeric and graphical form creates intelligibility in abstract historical manner
 - progress can be represented without illuminating the deleterious base of measurement
 - Association between rationality and individualism
 - Politics exogenous
- Actual economic institutions and agents are obscured
- Poverty reduction derivative of capitalist growth [not reduction of inequality]

[3. The politics]

- Traditional political science has categorised poor people as living in environments which lack democratic norms of representation and accountability
 - Freedom House terms, societies which are 'partly free' or 'unfree'
- Arguments can quickly become circular: a lack of power leads to poverty, poor people have a lack of power
- A theory of political development began in the United States in 1954, in the *Social Science Research Council's Committee on Comparative Politics*.
 - To develop the third world people enough to be able 'to cope with' democracy

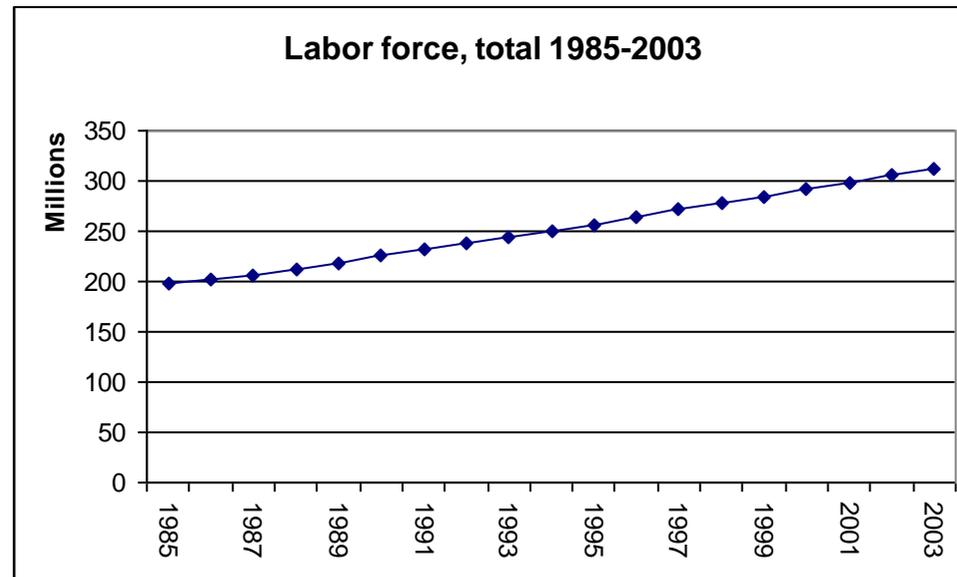
3.1 The political

| <i>Classical liberal nation-state</i> | <i>Late state formations</i> |
|--|--|
| Meritocratic/skills based | Paternalist |
| Entitlement based demands/rights | clientelist demand model |
| Independent community leadership/free associational life | Co-option of community leadership/civil society |
| Votes cast for performance | Votes bought for resources |
| Leadership roles defined and achievable | Leadership responsibilities individual/arbitrary |
| Resource allocation choices accountable to community | Resource allocation personal |

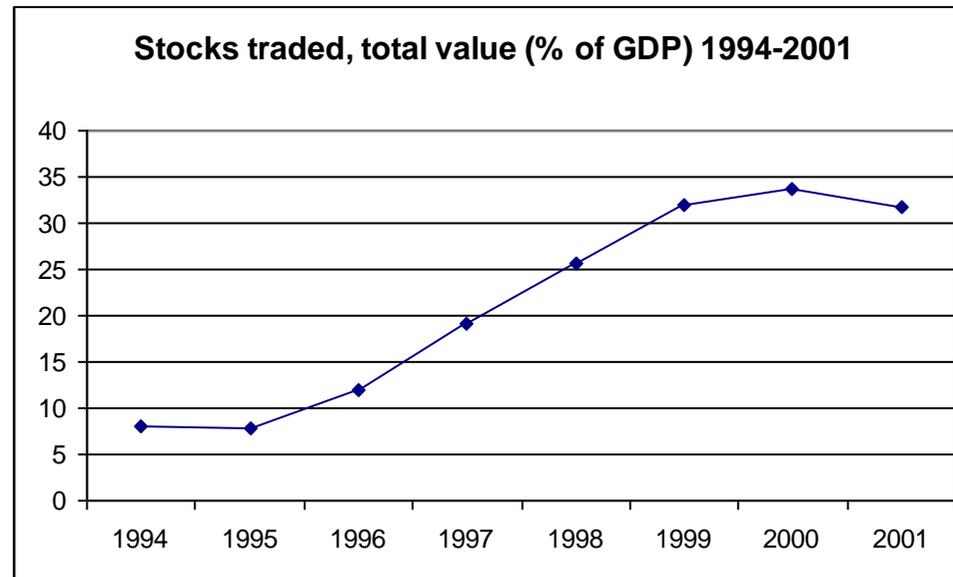
4 Representing African political economy

- So what are the ‘facts’ represented by numbers?
 - Extreme poverty
 - Moderate but progressive indicators of growth
 - Labour force and value of stocks rising
 - Gross capital formation and domestic savings stagnant
(Review of all WDI, 2005)
- Temporal, contradictory existence of destitution and growth
- Incremental positive change, not African crisis at macro-level (despite political pathology)
- High regional profitability

[4.1 Labour]



[4.2 Capital]



4.3 More 'indicators'

- In the HDI 2007/2008, the lowest ranking 24 countries were in Africa, and of the lowest fifty, 38 were African
- incoming private investment in 2005 was in single figures or negative (Angola) in all of the bottom 20 African countries by HDI ranking (except Chad, where it was 12.9 % of GDP)
- In the table of African countries as a whole FDI was in double figures in 2005 in only 5 – Seychelles (11.9%), Equatorial Guinea (57.6%), Congo (14.2%), Gambia (11.3%) and Chad (12.9%)₆

4.4 Expendable people?

- “What is it about Africa that allows the world to write off so many people – to make people expendable – when all the money needed is found for war on Iraq?”
 - Stephen Lewis, UN special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, Mail and Guardian, 29 November – 5 December, 2002; cited in Jones, 2004: 385

- "..... Africa currently loses over 8 million people a year mainly to TB, HIV, Malaria, maternal mortality,..... this tragic loss which is the equivalent of whole countries dying out and greater than losses from all modern conflicts combined is a result of weak or collapsed public health systems"
 - Africa Public Health Development Trust, cited at Justice Africa, 2008

5 The place of culture in historical explanations of poverty.

- Poverty is about (perceived) relational distance
 - Woolcock (2007, 4), 'distance reduces elective affinity and sense of shared interests'
- The poor are often confined to discrete cultural and social networks, which nonetheless form the basis of their survival (cf Fafchamps 2006)
- often in remote rural areas, where their social exclusion is spatially secured from the relatively wealthier.

5.1 A failure of relief as poverty 'culturalised'?

- Relief failure: due to distal relationship?
 - largely richer, 'whiter' people excuse failure through maintaining emotional and spacial distance
- Only 1.65 of the 6.5 million people in need of antiretroviral treatment, had access to it in June 2006 (UNAIDS, 2008a, citing WHO, June 2006).
- In a somewhat anodyne summary, UNAIDS comment, after listing the 'wide range of care and support needs' of people living with HIV, that
 - "the vast majority of people around the world do not yet have access to such services. Reaching out to them is a global priority (sic)" (UNAIDS, 2008b)

5.2 What prevents relationship?

- Racial 'Othering'
- Clumsy accounts of cultural difference
- Blaming culture for 'irrational' behaviour in the face of (otherwise) 'scientific' intervention
- An overly 'cultural turn' which occludes poverty and insists on plurality of experience (Ferguson, 2006)
- Romanticism of African aspiration which over emphasises 'culture' (also Ferguson, 2006?) **Tested in our sample below**

Or,

- The simple logistics of poverty which prevent poor people from doing 'recognisable' things which prompt relationship

5.3 Culture and development

- Clumsy accounts of cultural distance create an abjected 'other soul', whose likeness to European and North American humanity is only partial and incomplete.
- A common flaw is the extrapolation of the rural 'state of nature African' (the 'noble savage') into a numerous and ubiquitous group who pose problems for 'modern' social intervention and policy
- The conclusion then becomes that solving poverty is about forcing behavioural change through imposed modernity

6. Culture and development

- In culture in development there are identifiable genres:

methodologically

6.1 ‘just add culture for the complete picture’ (like a jigsaw)

6.2 ‘just add culture and mix’ (like a cake)

epistemologically

6.3 Do it by culturalism (fix it as backward or ‘wannabe’)

6.4 The culture of the ‘moving now’, contingent, shifting

paradigmatically

6.5 Reading culture from postcolonialism

6.6 Ferguson’s *Global Shadows* thesis: desired participation but abjection, a social exclusion paradigm.

[see Bracking, 2009, ‘Poverty in Africa: the parable of the broken television’, *Afriche e Orientali*]

[6.1 Epistemology..]

- Hall (2003: 234) identified two types of ‘cultural identity’:
 - A collective ‘one true self’ through shared history and ancestry, fixed and fundamental, atavistic (culturalism, can draw off political positions directly from it, and also causes/excuses for poverty)
 - Plural, unstable, ‘fragmented and fractured’ , contradictory, socially constructed, contingent, embedded in time and space (the ‘moving now’)

6.12 ‘just add culture for the complete picture’

- Much multidisciplinary work on poverty is organised such that ‘soft’ social sciences are ‘added’ to ‘hard’ economic accounts
- This method tends to readings of culture where it is assumed to be fixed and essential – the first reading above

UNDP, *Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*,
HDR, 2004

- “But there are also real opportunities. The overarching message of the Report is to highlight the vast potential of building a more peaceful, prosperous world by bringing issues of culture to the mainstream of development thinking and practise. Not to substitute for more traditional priorities that will remain our bread and butter – but to complement and strengthen them”.

6.2 'just add culture and mix'

- In this genre, culture is added only selectively
- It is the culture of the ethnographic local and the 'Other',
 - (rather than of the expedient consumerism of the North)
- The adding of culture here is like that of an exotic spice or essence, to give a flavour of local insouciance and culpability in the face of rational epidemiological fact, or public management norms.
- It is a resource to be commoditised 'for development'
- Or culture is added to give a sense of threat
 - Cf fragile states theory; securitisation of 'development'

[For example, culture as threat]

- Guaranteeing development for the poor (who are ‘often members of ethnic minorities’) means wider changes in ‘political culture’, because
 - “failing to address the grievances of marginalized groups does not just create injustice. It builds real problems for the future: unemployed, disaffected youth, angry with the status quo and demanding change, often violently. That is the challenge” (UNDP, 2004)

And as commodity: UNDP, *Cultural Liberty*
(sic)

- “The flip side of the development divide is that developing countries are often able to draw on *richer, more diverse* cultural traditions – whether captured in language, art, music or other forms – than their wealthier counterparts in the North. The globalisation of mass culture – from books to films to television – clearly poses some significant threats to these *traditional cultures*. But it also opens up opportunities, from the narrow sense of disadvantaged groups like Australian Aborigines or Arctic Inuit tapping global art markets, to the broader one of creating more vibrant, creative, exciting societies”.

6.3 A false fixity imparted by ‘culturalism’

- “But culturalists still believe firmly in the existence of such incandescent cores at the heart of cultures. Ultimately, it is this very concept that is the problem, and the word culture should incontestably be jettisoned if vocabulary were biodegradable: it inexorably lends support...to the illusion of cultural totalities and coherences when what we need to do it to express indeterminism, incompleteness, multiplicity and polyvalence” (Bayart, 1996: 109)

[For example, France's Africa policy..]

- A culturalist *imaginaire* was in operation in French policy toward Zaire which shaped their long support for Mobutu internationally:
 - “Three myths convinced Western powers – and especially France – to resign themselves to a continuation of the status quo in Zaire: the spectre of a resurgence of the rebellions of the 1960s and of the fragmentation of the country, whose position in the heart of central Africa was considered strategic; the idea that this giant state is only a mosaic of ‘ethnic groups’ ready to shatter into its component pieces; and the conviction that ‘African culture’ is incompatible with political pluralism because it is based on primacy of the chief” (Bayart, 1996: 25)

For eg., ‘Culturalised’ poverty and HIV

- For example, in HIV’s association with the poor a tired litany of developmentalist excuses are invoked which adopt a culturalist mode:
 - the money is there, but the governments are **corrupt**;
 - the resources are there, but delivery capacity is frail and health infrastructure is under-funded because of **poor governance** ;
 - despite the best efforts of heroic health workers and NGOs the ‘local’ people are infallibly resistant to changing their behaviour and are wedded to **backward social and cultural practices.**

[For example..]

“For many rural Africans....engaging in rituals and practices that would cause grave concern to ‘modern’ public health officials is just a normal part of everyday life. Having infants fed by multiple mothers, for example, is a common practice....; witchdoctors may counsel anxious patients to ward off evil spirits by making multiple cuts with a shared razor blade. Tribal identity markings and circumcisions may be conducted in similar ways, and in countries such as Cameroon, polygamy is common (with some chiefs having as many as 30 wives).”

(Woolcock, 2007)

6.34 Problem of culturalism in poverty analysis

- To overcome poverty and relief failure is problematic because of a ‘culturalisation’ of poverty
- Culture acts in the poverty repertoire to deny relationship and excuse the materiality of poverty and inequality
- And to assign blame when it appears intractable

6.4 culture as the ‘moving now’

- “‘culture’ is less a matter of conforming or identifying than of making: making something new with something old, and sometimes also making something old with something new; making Self with the Other” (Bayart, 1996: 96)
- But these operations and strategies do not end with an essence of identity, a fixed ‘heritage’, or a precise political orientation, but a ‘moving continuity’ (Vansina, 258: 1990)
- A plurality of cultural repertoires
- Like changing radio frequencies we switch ‘programmes’ or repertoires (Paul Veyne, cited in Bayart, 1996: 109)

6.42 More on 'the moving now'

- Moreover, “To espouse a cultural representation is *ipso facto* to recreate it. Thus notions of cultural ‘survival’ or ‘dependency’, for example, have little validity. To exhume a text or a symbol from the distant past, or to import an ideology or an institution, amounts in fact to giving them a new life” (Bayart, 1996: 110)
- Compare this to development representations which recreate representations of poverty and dysfunction. How far are these performative?
- Used field research (below) to look at aspiration and poverty exit. Found no culturalised ‘essence’ but many ‘moving nows’

6.5 Postcolonial readings of culture

- “The ‘culture’ to which people appeal and on which they draw itself consists of borrowings, and exists only in relation to the Other, a relation that may or may not be one of conflict” (Bayart, 1996: 96).
- Postcolonial cultures characterised by hybridisation and invention, but also by sediments of conquest and symbolic violence
- Bricolage, creolism, acculturation
-Risk of culturalism?

6.6 Ferguson: Aspiring to global

status?

Or rejected from the club?

“we used to go to town, but now we are just stuck here”

“yes it is a good television set, but it is broken. We have many cows though”

(Chivi residents, 2005)

6.51 Survey to test Ferguson

- hypothetical question of what people wanted ‘which would make [their] life better’, within five ascending price ranges
- Some responses with no obvious economic utility:
 - ‘only God could help’
 - Scattered evidence of philanthropic intent, such as ‘would run an orphanage programme’.
- Attempt to ameliorate social exclusion were evident and desires to be included in modern globalised culture: labelled goods features even among the nutritionally deprived.
- Some wanted only exit
- Much evidence of entrepreneurial intention

6.52 Evidence for Ferguson hypothesis?

- Respondents answers can be categorised: ‘productive’; ‘consumptionist’; ‘speculative’; ‘survivalist’; ‘egress/exit’; and ‘performative/iconic cultural’
- Majority pattern is of ‘survivalist’ in lower bands, and ‘productive’, such as sewing machines, *combi* parts in higher
- Want inclusion but majority want ‘productive’ and basic commodities, not consumptive and ‘iconic’ commodities
- Demographics and current socioeconomic status affect consumption aspiration
 - ...**(only) at level of mundane commodities not cultural icons**

6.54 Examples of hypothetical goods respondents would want to receive by price bracket, categorised

| <i>Respondent</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>C</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>E</i> | <i>F</i> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Income range (Zim\$) | ‘productive’ | ‘Consumptionist’ | ‘Speculative’ | ‘survivalist/exit’ | ‘exit’ | ‘performative/cultural’ |
| < 250,000 | board a bus to Ntabazinduna | chicken | Pocket money for lunch | mealie meal and sugar | a hamburger | transport to work |
| >250,000 but < 1 mill | would send it home to my rural folk | Rice, mealie meal, cooking oil | Get a visa | maybe pay rent and rates | lunch at Steers | groceries for my party |
| > 1 mill but > 4 mill | seed for the new farming season | VCR | Buy foreign currency | clothes and sugars | emergency passport | wedding ring |
| > 4 mill but > 10 mill | fertiliser | DVD | Buy foreign currency | a ticket to South Africa | a visa | hire a wedding venue |
| > 10 mill | ox-drawn plough | decoder | Buy foreign currency | a ticket to the UK | air ticket to UK | wedding gown and hire dresses for my bridal party |

[7 It's the ~~economy~~ ^{Culture}stupid!]

- Ferguson's observation of the negative consequences of 'the cultural turn':
 - it was an achievement to recognise contemporary African culture as coeval,
 - But African critique of low socioeconomic ranking (understood through culture) has been occluded by this insistence on plurality.
- The political consequences of Ferguson's corrective is that
 - "the most challenging political demands go beyond the claims of political independence and instead involve demands for connection, and for relationship, even under conditions of inequality and dependence" (2006, 22)

[7.1 Renegotiating relationship...]

- In other words, Ferguson said more than just pointing out a yearning for inclusion through aspirations related to consumption (although these are involved)
- He said that inclusion was political! A strategic way to point out that culture is a 'moving now', that fixed categories of 'culture' are a prison and ...an excuse for poverty...

James Ferguson, (2006) *Global Shadows*, Duke University Press

African aspiration to ‘likeness’ “forces an unsettling shift from a question of cultural *difference* to the question of material *inequality*” (2006, 20),

“yearnings for cultural convergence with an imagined global standardcan mark not simply mental colonization or capitulation to cultural imperialism, but an aspiration to overcome categorical subordination. The persistence of cultural difference, meanwhile..... can come to appear as the token notof brave cultural resistance, but of social and economic subjection (where a “traditional African way of life” is simply a polite name for poverty).” (2006, 20-21)

7.2 A role for 'culture' in de-development?

- But where is 'likeness' in development? Surely, development
 - relies on hierarchical difference
 - recreates distance by the practice of intervention
 - racialises aspiration
 - culturalises poverty
 - insists on 'unlikeness' to excuse itself
 - Sets back claims to coeval modernity and rewrites them as ongoing efforts to develop
 - Sometimes abjects societies to enforce its rule
 - creates an 'illusion of inclusion', with the excuse of culture when materiality invades the vista – 'we are helping but the subject is a stubborn one....'

[So, the appearance (but deceit, or illusion) of inclusion..]

Development involves an appearance of social inclusion in the global village, evidenced in donor rhetoric and ‘resolutionism’*, which can be contrasted to the social exclusion of the poor in practice. This includes giving the appearance of a global response to HIV, while in practice largely failing to assist

...a broken TV is a metaphor for global social and economic exclusion

*‘Thursday Postcard’

[A Challenge]

- “How should we understand such cultural practices, which are often exuberant and constantly changing, without reifying them in a series of clichés regarding the economic and political mentalities of a people?” (Bayart, 1996: 5)
- “How can we (6) avoid thinking of acculturation and globalisation as a simple zero-sum game in which adherence to foreign representations and customs inevitably leads to a loss of substance and authenticity?” (Bayart, 1996: 5-6)