

Full Length Research Paper

The participatory structures of poverty in Africa

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Participatory structures of poverty in Africa are founded in ideology, foreign aid, guilt from colonialism, paternalism, democracy, and capitalism. The latter two are becoming more well known to the general public, forcing the subject matter to be acknowledged in diplomacy circles. Actively participating in a structure that maintains poverty, works against humanity. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1963) is quoted "No one is free until we are all free," suggesting that until we offer authentic economic freedom to the poor, we cannot reach our own peak of economic freedom. Other academic and experts have differing views of what poverty is and what structures maintain it. William Easterly's, "White Man's Burden 2006" directs the blame for poverty onto Europe and the West. Robert Bates points to heads of state in Africa as maintaining structures of poverty post-colonialism. Walter Rodney identifies the colonialists as fundamental to the "underdevelopment" of Africa. Irene Gendzier chastises the US government for pushing democracy onto third world countries cloaked as charitable support. And Thomas Carothers provides an in-depth analysis of democracy promotion at its worst. The nature and uses of political theory are wrought within this discussion, though the question at the forefront remains, 'What are the underlying causes of participatory structures of poverty?'

Key words: Development, poverty, Africa, NGO, structures, democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Participatory Structure #1 - Leadership theory of rational choice

Robert Bates has provided much research on what is considered as one of the primary structures of participatory poverty in Africa; African leadership. In *Markets and States, 1981*, Bates unveils brute datum about the agriculture industry across nine African countries; Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Sudan, Tanzania, Senegal, Zambia, Liberia, and Kenya (Rodney, 1974).

Modernization is often the route towards industrial

enterprise and global trade. Bates reveals the mechanisms of management directed by African governments that are counterproductive for the growth and wellbeing of their citizens. In efforts to protect their nascent industry, government leaders form monopsonies (government-owned businesses) that become participatory structures of poverty. African leaders want global trade but are afraid to allow Adam Smith's invisible hand to operate freely. Instead, they manipulate the market. As with governments elsewhere in the developing world, governments in Africa seek to industrialize. They

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do so in part by sheltering domestic industry from foreign competition. They also protect firms from local competition. Characteristically, industries in Africa are dominated by a few large firms, and often, the major firms are government-owned. Under such sheltered conditions, inefficient firms survive. And consumers, including farmers, pay higher prices" (Bates, 1981: 76). From production strategies (Steiner, 2019) to economic interests serving policymaking (World Bank, 2019a) at any cost, including violence, Bates explains the irrational as rational choice.

To increase output, governments finance production programs. But in doing so, they introduce characteristic distortions. Given the level of resources devoted to the programs, for example, they often create too many projects; the programs then fail because the resources have been spread too thin. Such behavior is nonsensical when analyzed solely in terms of stated objectives, but it becomes understandable once we consider the political calculations underlying the choices of governments (Bates, 1981: 5).

A different example is noted here:

In the face of shortages, governments can allow prices to rise, or they can maintain lower prices while imposing quotas. In a variety of markets that are of significance to agricultural producers, African governments choose to ration; and when they do so, they give no systematic preference to the poor. Their use of non-market mechanisms in the face of shortages reflects not their social values but their calculations of how their political interests can best be served (Bates, 1981: 5). These are but a few examples from an overabundance of data, both quantitative and qualitative, that Bates produces. He gathered information from interviews, country reports, World Bank and IBRD data, etc.

Suffice to say that African governments have led the way in supporting participatory structures that inevitably create and maintain poverty. The African bourgeois, who by definition, do not live in poverty either work in government, have family businesses, or have entered into the tourism business. It is noteworthy to point out that through the tourism business, local entrepreneurs are accessing the global market. Tourism has been the greatest anti-poverty structure and a proven economic driver in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda for their wildlife.

Bates concludes that African leaders make decisions based on self-serving options that bring them personal prosperity, a premise that supports his theory of Rational Choice. But who set up the structures of subsidies and market manipulations that Bates points out? Who structured the economies before African countries had independence? Colonialists. One must recognize the psychological oppression living under the laws of slavery and seeing white men prosper from your efforts. Slaves who worked inside the homes of their colonizers received

a first-hand account of luxury at the expense of slaves; including themselves, local children, mothers, young men, grandfathers and grandmothers. Slave demographics matter none to the colonizer, just that he receives his profit to maintain his lifestyle. Sad stories of deaths due to overbearing workloads, lynching's, or heat strokes don't matter either; the colonizer removes all emotion and demands his piece of you (Lamar, 2016). It is this cruel and selfish structure that Africans learned over 400 years as the only way to get ahead; take from others. The colonizers created the foundations of governance by greed and the Africans learned it well. In essence, colonizers created the recipe, and Africans drank the cool-aid that maintains the same participatory structure of poverty.

Participatory Structure #2 - Theory of paternalism and voluntarism

Limiting a child's autonomy for her protection is paternalistic. Rudolph Steiner's theory for children was opposite, allowing autonomous freedom to learn and explore with little direction, the Montessori Method (Steiner, 2019). According to Carol Lancaster, former deputy administrator of USAID, the paternalistic domination of Africa by the US government is directly related to power and control.

"Questioning the purposes of aid is not new among scholars of international relations. Those scholars who interpret relations between states through 'realist' lenses - that is, the states operate in an anarchic environment in which power, security, and survival are their predominant preoccupations - answer that aid is, indeed, primarily a tool of hard-headed diplomacy. (Aids' impact on the poor is incidental or instrumental - as a means of increasing the security of the donor nation, for example, through reducing the temptations of communism or terrorism.)" (Lancaster 2007: 3).

If paternalism is the driving force of US relations with Africa, then the voluntarism of African countries to accept paternalism is the explicandum for yet another participatory structure of poverty. Guiding a country towards what is meant to be a better path becomes a slippery slope between participants. Lancaster uses communism as an example and discusses foreign aid as the choice tool for paternalistic US relations.

"Foreign aid as we know it today began in the United States as a diplomatic tool to respond to the nascent Cold War in Europe." "...the United States would need to provide economic assistance to stabilize and expand their economies if their populations and their governments were to resist the pressures of communism." (Lancaster 2007: 63).

In the case of the Cold War, America's paternalism was aimed at countries considered at risk to the fall of communism. US paternalism grew less altruistic and more self-serving, but the building blocks of the participatory structure were the same foundations used for Africa; poverty and the need for economic development. Some of the "countries at risk" managed to develop, though Africa's poverty persists. The need for economic development in Africa never seems to cease, and GDP growth, in Kenya for example, moves at a stubbornly slow rate (World Bank, 2019b). Why is Africa subscribing to its own poverty?

The participatory structure of development theory and foreign aid initiatives offer relief, however, when the relief is not asked to leave, it demonstrates voluntarism. The African states voluntarily continue to accept aid even though it is detrimental to its own economy. In the case of Kenya, the country received nearly \$1.1 billion of assistance in 2018. Over \$56 million was allocated from the World Food Program (World Bank, 2019). Receiving free food destroys the capability to produce food. In 2010 after the Haitian earthquake, Haitian farmers had this to say:

"After the quake of 2010, many farmers abandoned farming. We got stuck with our goods. The crops are not intended for our personal use. They are intended for the market. Once the market is flooded there is no more demand. As a result, you lose the work for an entire year." (Poverty, Inc. Directed by Michael Matheson Miller. USA: Independent documentary filmmaker, 2014; Interview of Jacob Donatie, Haiti Rice Farmer).

Africa willingly participates in the structure of development aid; a form of voluntarism that maintains poverty. In this complexity, one can see the detriment of receiving continual aid in the statement:

"I never heard of a country that 'developed' on Aid. I've only heard of development through trade." "I don't know of a country that got so much aid, they became a 1st world country." (Poverty, Inc. Directed by Michael Matheson Miller. USA: Independent documentary filmmaker, 2014; Interview of Herman Chinery-Hesse, Ghanaian Entrepreneur).

Walter Rodney does not see the perpetual poverty of Africa as a form of voluntarism, though he does identify a structural pattern that he refers to as underdevelopment (Rodney, 1974).

"The question as to who, and what, is responsible for African underdevelopment can be answered at two levels. Firstly, the answer is that the operation of the imperialist system bears major responsibility for African economic retardation by draining African wealth and by making it impossible to develop more rapidly the resources of the

continent. Secondly, one has to deal with those who manipulated the system and those who are either agents or unwitting accomplices of the said system." (Walter Rodney 1972: introduction pg.xii).

This leads to my next and final example of a participatory structure of poverty in Africa; the structure that involves the guilt of colonialism, and capitalism.

Participatory Structure #3 - Short-lived guilt and democracy

Rodney sets the stage for the discussion best:

"The capitalists of Western Europe were the ones who actively extended their exploitation from inside Europe to cover the whole of Africa. In recent times, they were joined, and to some extent replaced, by the capitalists from the United States; and for many years now even the workers of those metropolitan countries have benefited from the exploitation and underdevelopment of Africa." (Walter Rodney, 1972: 27).

Colonialism is the most perplexing participatory structure of poverty of them all. Some in the diaspora wonder why a majority of one race would allow a minority of another race to rule over them; did blacks willingly participate? One must contemplate the crushing power of negative psychology on the psyche, and how it made you question yourself and the relevance of your race. When you are physically and mentally beat into submission, participation becomes a way to survive. For children born into slavery, they learn the participatory structure from the time they gained cognition of how things work in a slave camp. Therefore, colonialism demands participation in the structure of poverty.

To resolve the sins of colonialism and effectively relieve the burden of guilt from the West, the US government devised utopian programs that are the driving force of foreign aid.

"Why do ineffectual utopian plans dominate the debate on economic development? We have already seen that it is partly explained by the political appeal of utopian plans to rich-country politicians." (Easterly 2006: 37).

Easterly refers to the myth of rectifying the colonial wrongs as "an old legend":

"The legend dates back to the 1950s. Many things have changed since the 1950s - we now have air-conditioning, the Internet, new life-saving drugs, and sex in movies. Yet one thing is unchanged: the legend that inspired foreign aid in the 1950s is the same legend that inspires foreign aid today." "The full version goes like this: The poorest countries are in a *poverty trap* (they are poor *only*

because they started poor) from which they cannot emerge without an aid-financed *Big Push*, involving investments and actions to address all constraints to development, after which they will have a takeoff-italics into self-sustained growth, and aid will no longer be needed." (Easterly 2006: 37).

The participatory structure of relieving guilt requires equal participation from the actor who holds the guilt as a token of power - Africa. As long as Africa remains in poverty, the relationship continues; both participants enable each other. This participatory structure may be partially subconscious but eventually becomes apparent. When extemporaneous aid budgets are looming before members of Congress for approval, a new dimension in the participatory structure of poverty gets inserted - democracy and capitalism.

Irene Gendzier writes of secrecy, waste and corruption (Gendzier, "Development Against Democracy," xiii) embraced by the US government to promote democracy abroad. Gendzier believes both modernization and development theory are being used as a form of foreign policy. In essence, the participatory structure of poverty is no longer founded on a development relationship, but instead on democracy and the spread of capitalism in a top-down manner, a manner that is not beneficial to the poor.

"The reassurance offered by such roots was that the stabilization of sociopolitical systems which was an inevitable feature of modernization, would not lead to increased popular participation. Instead, in accord with the 'formative modernization period' of the 1960s, there would be support for 'limited top-down forms of democratic change [that] did not risk upsetting the traditional structures of power with which the United States has long been allied'" (Gendzier 1985: 8).

Moreover, the insertion of democracy and capitalism, act as measures to thwart the political and military security concerns of the West. This form of "soft diplomacy" provides the green light for congressmen to approve the extemporaneous aid budgets previously mentioned. Soft diplomacy adds top-down policies into foreign aid with a bi-product of keeping the poor in their place politically. Soft diplomacy turns the participatory structure of poverty into something more dangerous, a structure not to be challenged.

Thomas Carothers, an expert in democracy and the rule of law, participated in this structure of poverty from the 1970s to the 1990s. His role in the spread of capitalism and top-down politics was posited as charitable to the public, while the CIA and NSC secretly managed the parts of this participatory structure that required force. In "Essays on Democracy Promotion 2004," Carothers confesses:

"The first essay in this section, "Promoting Democracy in a Postmodern World," which I wrote in 1995, is a personal reflection on the uncomfortable disjunction between the often idealized image of democracy that Western activists promote abroad and the less shiny reality of real-life politics at home." (Carothers 2004: 146).

Although Carothers sheds light on democracy projects in Latin America and the Middle East, Africa is no different. The short-lived guilt of colonialism has transformed into a deeper participatory structure of poverty that now involves political and military long-term structures. African countries are baited with US altruism and discover that structures of democracy and top-down economics will drive their future. However, African leaders have freedom to resist leading by top-down methods, though they choose to follow the lead of the hand that feeds them and ultimately end up maintaining the participatory structure of poverty.

CONCLUSION

If we are all connected and there are no acts that relinquish anyone from the suffering of the whole, then it means we all suffer in some way. The US, in particular, is experiencing immense pain as the country bears its multi-dimensional domestic problems to the world. Manifested in the sitting president is every ill that has been texturally submerged within US citizens. Some take issue with race, others with trade, abortion, foreign aid, healthcare, climate change, immigration, jobs, equal pay, or sexual orientation just to name a few. These issues are a reflection of the same oppressive and restrictive system that led to poverty, universalist theory.

Universalism seeks to conform all into a euro-centric frame of being. The euro-centric frame is based on wealth that non-Europeans don't necessarily have. For example, the healthcare that the Latina single mother pays, at the job where she does not receive equal pay, and must hide the fact that she is actually lesbian, is the healthcare that keeps her in poverty. Participatory structures of poverty in Africa are ultimately structures of Eurocentrism. The underlying causes will not cease until diversity in policy and thought prevail in the academy of the sciences.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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