

## Editorial

### Editor's Note:

*This was the inaugural Editorial Prof. Abdalla Bujra wrote for the first issue of Africa Development, Vol. 1, no. 1, 1976.*  
*Africa Development has grown into a premier social science research journal that is currently in its 51<sup>st</sup> year of publication.*  
*The Article is available at <https://doi.org/10.57054/ad.v1i1>*

This is the first, and hopefully the only, editorial that will appear in this journal. However, since this is the first issue, a statement about the objectives of the journal and the sponsoring organization is both necessary and appropriate.

**Abdallah S. Bujra**

CODESRIA  
Second Executive Secretary

*Africa Development* is a journal of the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA).<sup>1</sup> The main purpose of the journal is to provide a forum for African (and non-African) scholars to critically analyse the problems emanating from the continuous process of underdevelopment, past and present, taking place in Africa.

That underdevelopment of the African continent is a long-standing historical process that began *even before the advent of formal colonialism*, is now grudgingly accepted even by conservative scholars. The so-called Africanists had, until recently, presented us with a simplistic and factually incorrect view of the African past as being suspended in a 'traditional timelessness' where, since time immemorial, the varied social systems of African societies existed in a perfect, almost mechanical, harmony. At one point, European Africanists were arrogantly stating that African societies had no history (before colonization) because such societies did not possess a script with which to record events. (And in any case, since such societies were structurally harmonious and unchanging, i.e. not developing, there were no important events and processes worth recording! So even if some societies had an alphabet, this would have been used mainly to record marriage ceremonies, and to draw up genealogies!) This extreme, unscientific view has now of course been abandoned. It has been replaced by a more sophisticated school which holds that each African society in fact had its particular and glorious history. This

African history, however, consists of tribal migration, tribal warfare and the building up of political institutions, from kinship to kingship.

Tribal historians now abound in Africa, and needless to say the majority are Africans. This school of history

is obviously an advance from the earlier ahistorical school. The historical process is immensely complex in any continent and there is an obvious need to record and explain past migrations as well as the evolution of political institutions. But this is only one aspect of Africa's historical development and, as some would argue, it is not the critical and fundamental aspect of Africa's history. Thus over-emphasis on tribal histories, however brilliant some of the individual studies may be, is a form of mystification and a diversion from the proper understanding of Africa's real history.

Path-breaking historical studies have recently been made and these are having a profound effect on our understanding of Africa's past. Removing such false and unscientific conceptual blinkers as 'traditional', 'unchanging', 'harmonious system', these studies have looked\* at Africa's past in terms of technological and economic systems that were being developed in different areas; how such developments (or the lack of them) were affecting specific social formations, the creation of surplus, the emergence of internal trade and inter-African (long distance) trade, and so on. In other words, Africa, like any other continent, was undergoing a process of technological, economic and social development, within specific historical epochs. Some have indeed persuasively argued that Africa's own indigenous independent technological and economic development was destroyed and distorted some centuries ago by the intervention of Europe in Africa. This intervention in the name of 'trade' and over a period of

some two or three centuries, laid the groundwork for the formal colonization of Africa by European powers.

Research on Africa's past is now being conducted by both the 'tribal history' school and, if I may call it this, the 'mode of production' school. Research findings by either school which are capable of giving us a better understanding of the process of development and underdevelopment of Africa in the past will be welcomed. It is indeed part of CODESRIA's objectives to encourage such research. We would, however, insist that authors who submit papers to this journal clearly state their assumptions or theoretical framework of reference.

If it is necessary and useful to research the pre-colonial past of Africa in order to have a proper historical perspective of the process of development and underdevelopment, it is in our opinion even more essential to carry out detailed research of Africa's immediate colonial past. Indeed the immediate colonial past is encapsulated in the present – this is often referred to as the colonial heritage – and any meaningful understanding of the present so-called development problems must therefore relate to this immediate past.

The literature on the colonial period (by both Africans and non-Africans) is considerable and often brilliant in its ethnographic details. It is however not too harsh a judgement to say that most of the literature tells us more about the writers than the fundamental nature of the colonial reality (with of course a few noble exceptions). A careful examination of the writings of anthropologists, sociologists, economists, political scientists, and so on, shows that they are all operating within the ubiquitous school of functionalism. Partly because of this and partly because of the researchers' ideological position, most of the literature carefully avoids the fundamental issues of colonial oppression and exploitation, and the resultant economic and social structures that were being deliberately developed by the colonial powers in the colonies. As a result, a number of so-called theories were propounded. The anthropologists and sociologists propounded a series of 'theories' known as 'culture contact', 'social change', 'modernization'. Some of the writing belonging to these schools had interesting insights and considerable detail on the 'borrowing' by Africans of the European's material culture, on the changing kinship and kingship rules of various African societies, on how successfully or unsuccessfully the emerging African élite was modelling itself on its metropolitan counterpart, etc. The assumption behind the stories

was that what was happening in Africa was good, and in its own African way this was progress and social development. The economists also told a similar rosy story using, as they say, 'hard facts'. Metropolitan powers had invested considerable capital in the colonies - in laying down physical infra-structure, in starting industries, in opening up plantations and cash crop farming by Africans - all this investment, so it was argued, was economic development and for the benefit of the Africans! Most of the social scientists however, failed to point out the three fundamental aspects of the colonial situation, namely the distorted nature of the colonial economy, the considerable return to the metropolitan power from its so-called 'investment', and the concomitant distorted social structure that was being deliberately created by the colonial state. Thus, the 'social change-modernization' literature on African societies which is still predominant even today (the 'culture contact' school, originating from the US became dysfunctional and was dropped towards the end of the colonial period), was basically diversionary and performed the function of mystification. Such literature had very little scientific value in terms of explaining the fundamental process of underdevelopment that has taken place in Africa during the first half of this century.

And what of the last fifteen years since independence? African studies programmes have mushroomed during the 1960s in North America and Europe. In Africa itself, institutes of African studies and of development studies also sprang up all over the place. Research projects, carried out by individuals or by teams originating from North America and Europe or from within Africa itself, have vastly increased in number. All conceivable aspects of African societies – 'traditional' and 'modern' – are being studied. Research projects on topics as varied as the 'role of witchcraft as an obstacle to economic development', 'traditional beliefs and family size', 'strategies for industrial development' or 'the role of foreign capital in economic development', are now being churned out in large numbers from African universities themselves as well as from outside. As a result, the quantity of the so-called 'development' literature on Africa has, over the past fifteen years, vastly increased. The sheer volume of literature, however, has not proved to be any more enlightening on the fundamental nature of the development process since the 1960s.

Considerations of space do not allow us to make more than a cursory examination of the epistemology of that literature. Nevertheless, a few very brief comments

must be made even at the risk of oversimplification. The quality of some of that literature has been very low even when measured by the minimal standard of 'information gathering'. On the other hand, part of it has been good in terms of the insight it has given us on micro details of the social life of particular groups. On the whole, however, there have been very few intelligent analyses of the basic nature of the economic structures of African countries, and very little on the determining role of the international context in African economies. There is hardly any information and no research on the critical area of ownership of economic undertakings (in industry, commerce and agriculture) and of real estate; no research showing the continuity of the colonial economies to the post-independence neo-colonial societies. Indeed one of the most notable gaps in the so-called development literature has been the lack of research on the social and class structure of African countries. The class structure that was being deliberately created during the colonial period, its continuation, expansion and consolidation over the past fifteen years, has not been researched into and examined scientifically. The omissions in this literature clearly indicate the political nature of the research organizations and the researchers themselves. There are, of course, striking exceptions to this characterization. There have been some African and non-African scholars who have consistently and often brilliantly drawn attention to the basic and central issues concerning Africa's development processes. However, these exceptions prove the rule. Indeed the literature from these exceptional researchers has often been very difficult to come by and was rarely available in African universities, libraries or bookshops.

If we are to understand the process of Africa's development, there are a number of important areas which need thorough and scientific analysis. Firstly, Africa's position in the international economic order and more particularly, a deeper analysis of a specific country's external economic relations and their implications in the development process. All the general issues discussed in terms of the international level – raw materials, transfer of technology, etc. – need to be studied and related to the contexts of specific countries. Secondly, strategies for development vary and the differences are always related to the overall social system. In a recent speech<sup>2</sup> President Nyerere of Tanzania, pointed out that African countries are faced with *only two* alternative paths of development; that of capitalist or of socialist development. Though Nyerere's preference is for the socialist path, he correctly points out

that the objectives, strategies and the problems to be encountered will depend very much on which path is chosen by a given country. The contrast of strategies and so-called implementation problems is very sharp between African countries developing within a capitalist or socialist framework. The specificity of each type of development within the African context must be studied thoroughly in all its ramifications and in all sectors of society. For example, little scientific study has been made of the objectives, strategies and problems of rural development in, say, Guinea compared with those of Ivory Coast. Thirdly, it is now absolutely necessary to carry out a serious analysis of the class structure and its dynamics in African countries. This is not to minimize the contribution of recent debate on the theoretical aspects of classes in Africa. It is simply to say that focusing on definitional problems of classes misses the main point of relating so-called development to the class structure (however 'embryonic' or 'proto' the classes may be). It also misses the even more important issue of class alliances internally and externally, as well as the mechanism whereby such alliances are maintained, and the mechanism for controlling the 'commanding institutions' in society through state machinery. All these are aspects of the social structures of African societies, whatever the label of the social system – socialist or capitalist. At present, there is very little serious research on these aspects of African societies. We hope more will be forthcoming.

The list of important but neglected areas of research in Africa is long. The main purpose of this journal is to draw attention to this and to provide a forum for African (and non-African) scholars to debate on important issues as well as to make known the findings of their researches. In this way, we hope to encourage more relevant and policy-oriented research within an African perspective. The ultimate objective is to provide an opportunity for African scholars to contribute to the general development of the continent through vigorous discussion of existing development strategies, problems and alternatives. I am an optimist and therefore am sure that this challenge will be taken up by African social scientists.

The fourth meeting of UNCTAD will take place in Africa (Nairobi, Kenya) in May 1976. At that meeting the problems of the present international economic order will be discussed in detail and measures for changing it to a new order, an order that will help Third World countries to develop, will also be discussed and hopefully adopted. Because the first issue of *Africa Development* is coming out in May [1976], we thought it



appropriate to focus on the problem of the new international economic order and Africa's role within it. We hope that future issues of the journal will focus on other equally important themes relating to Africa's development. In this issue we also have articles on Eastern and Southern Africa discussing the findings of specific research projects. These are good examples of the kind of scientific article based on solid research that we look forward to publishing. Another and equally important aspect of the journal is that of information on African research institutes.

In this issue we have a description of the history and aims of two important institutes, one Francophone and one Anglophone, from West and East Africa respectively. In this way we hope to bridge, in however small a way, the linguistic and regional gaps in our continent

even if it is only at the level of information. Thus, we hope other research institutes will respond and send us articles of a similar nature. We hope in the near future to publish this journal in both English and French. We have started with one language because our resources are at the moment limited. Nevertheless, we accept articles in both languages.

### Notes

1. CODESRIA activities are described in its brochure, Basic Information, which is available on request. For more information, please write to: Executive Secretary, CODESRIA, B.P. 3304, Dakar, Senegal
2. J.K. Nyerere, 'The Rational Choice', in *Freedom and Development*, O.U.P., Dar es Salaam, 1973, pp. 379-390.

**Abdalla Bujra's tribute published in *Africana*,  
Vol. 1, No. 4, 1980 upon receiving the news of the murder of Walter Rodney,  
his former colleague at the University of Dar es Salaam**

### WALTER RODNEY

Walter Rodney, was a distinguished widely respected and well-known scholar. He was also a member of the Editorial Board of *AFRICA DEVELOPMENT*. His murder shocked not only his personal friends, but also all the people who read and appreciated his writings. *AFRICANA NEWSLETTER* is publishing three documents relating to the murder of Walter Rodney (a) A letter of appeal from Mrs. Patricia Rodney requesting people to send her, Walter's unpublished writings and speeches for the proposed Rodney Library. (b) A letter, signed by many African Caribbean Scholars in Nigeria, to the Secretary General of the O.A.U. on the murder of Walter Rodney. (c) A resolution unanimously passed by an interna-

tional conference organized by CODESRIA in December 1981 in Dakar.

Justinean Rweyemamu and I were personal friends of Walter Rodney when we worked together, for a number of years, at the University of Dar-es-Salaam we are writing a brief appreciation on Walter Rodney which will be published in the next issue of *AFRICANA NEWSLETTER*. Brief statements from friends and colleagues concerning Walter's life and work will be welcomed and maybe taken into account in the writing of the appreciation.

**Abdalla S. BUJRA,**  
Editor, Africa Development,  
Executive Secretary of CODESRIA,  
B.P. 3304, Dakar/SENEGAL.