THINKING BEYOND DEVELOPMENT:
THE FUTURE OF POST-DEVELOPMENT THEORY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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Abstract:

This paper examines how post-development theory can inform current debates on development and the search for alternatives to the post-WWII development paradigm. With few exceptions, global economic growth and increasing exploitation of human and natural environments for profit has not produced broad-based socioeconomic development in post-colonial societies that is any way sustainable. The paper begins by outlining central tenets of post-development theory, how they have been rejected and marginalized by critics in the development community, and the difficulty of translating the post-development idea of moving away from development based on ever-increasing growth, accumulation and consumption into actual politics and policy. This is however an urgent task: what is perceived as the great failure of Africa to live up to its post-independence challenge in terms of development and emancipation has resulted in a debilitating ‘Afro-pessimism’ in both scholarly and popular commentaries on the continent. As externally imposed solutions to underdevelopment in Africa have for a variety of reasons been considered failures, post-development theory constitutes a conceptual and theoretical vessel through which new solutions for improving well-being, as well as coping with the pressures of globalization in African societies, can emerge. The paper continues by considering how the Southern African value system ubuntu can serve as a central concept around which to organize a debate on how to move ‘beyond development’. Moving beyond the confines of orthodox development requires a genuinely communal effort to re-imagine and reinvent goals and aspirations for a better future, as well as finding a resolution to the two key forms of alienation experienced as a result of the modern drive to develop: the alienation of man from nature and the alienation of human beings from each other. Finally the paper considers how post-development theory could form the basis for a greater ‘South-South’ dialogue on alternatives to the modern development paradigm.
Our society has been captured by a rapacious individualism which is corroding our social cohesion, which is repudiating the value and practice of human solidarity, and which totally rejects the fundamental precept of Ubuntu. – Thabo Mbeki

We believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in the field of human relationships. – Steve Biko

A modern predicament
Speaking at the eighth annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture in Cape Town in September 2007, South African’s President Mbeki provided a sombre and rather frank assessment of disturbing levels of fragmentation and dysfunction in post-apartheid society. According to Mbeki, the problem of ‘rapacious and venal individualism’ – which the neo-liberal policies of his government have been accused of exacerbating (e.g., Bond 2000; Marais 2001) – will only be resolved by a rediscovery of ‘African identity’ and the building of a society that is ‘new not only in its economic arrangements, but also in terms of the values it upholds’, namely the ‘Ubuntu value system’ (Mbeki 2007: 16-17).1 The notion that development entails more than socio-economic and technological (i.e., material) change is thus keenly felt and recognized at the highest level of political office.

The sentiments expressed by President Mbeki and Steve Biko, the founder of South Africa’s Black Consciousness Movement who was beaten to death by police during interrogation in 1977, suggest an established mode of thinking which holds that the way in which South Africa has developed, indeed the way in which it has become Africa’s most Westernized and modern state, has produced serious social ills that impede genuine development of human potential and emancipation (anchored in African values and tradition). Most obvious among these ills are murder and sexual violence rates that are among the highest in the world and the world’s greatest number of people suffering from HIV/AIDS. These criminal and health crises are both a cause and consequence of a deteriorating societal fabric, as much as a result of
Nevertheless, prominent (and therefore influential) debates on how to pursue development in Southern Africa tend to leave questions regarding culture, identity, individualism, community and belonging aside, in favour of paying attention to more easily measurable (and conceivable) issues, such as how to promote economic growth, greater economic redistribution and the political means by which access to the productive output of the region’s economies can be broadened.

Across the ideological spectrum, from radical and socialist to liberal and conservative, the key debate on Southern Africa’s future revolves around the question of how, given the region’s difficult socio-economic circumstances and a highly competitive and rather unforgiving global economy, development can most effectively be pursued. Regional particularities, such as the need to pursue development within the framework of a National Democratic Revolution and Black Economic Empowerment in South Africa, the politics of ‘indigenization’ alongside state-society breakdown in Zimbabwe and an urgent need to promote development with diversification in Botswana, provide debates on development in each country with their own distinct character. Still, the debate is first and foremost about how regional productive capabilities can be enhanced and harnessed more efficiently, so that the region’s overwhelmingly poor inhabitants can increase their consumption and improve their well-being (e.g., Lee 2003; Hentz 2005; Taylor 2007). This is seen as particularly urgent in the context of increasing hardships associated with the strictures of structural adjustment policies (whether externally ‘imposed’ or home-grown), limited success with broadening the benefits of economic growth and the devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic. In its most basic, and powerful, manifestation Southern Africa’s debate on development remains safely anchored in the orthodox conceptualization of development predicated on ever-increasing (economic) growth, accumulation and consumption that has defined both liberal and socialist paradigms since the industrial revolution and which, since the end of WWII and the onset of the Cold War, has constituted the ‘era of development’ (cf. Rist 2002).³

Given the very urgent material needs of Southern Africa’s inhabitants – ranging most obviously from access to adequate nutrition and medical care to decent housing, education and employment – it is not surprising that scholarly critique of fundamental problems inherent in orthodox understandings and pursuits of development, in this
case post-development theory (to be outlined in the next section), has not featured prominently in African debates, either at the level of elite policy-making or in civil society (Matthews 2004). Instead, there exists a disturbing, counter-productive and therefore dangerous cognitive dissonance in debates on development in contemporary Africa. In its simplest form, this dissonance stems from the lack (or dismissal), among politicians, policy-makers and social commentators alike, of a sophisticated understanding of the particular historical, social, political and economic contexts in which development has successfully been pursued in the past, most notably in the West and later among East Asia’s so-called Tigers.

Few, if any, of the important factors facilitating developmental states in East Asia: national and social cohesion, a favourable global strategic and economic environment and stable state-business-labour relations (Woo-Cummings 1999), are present in Southern Africa today – Botswana’s stable state-market-society relations, partially a consequence of a weak civil society, is the exception – suggesting that countries in the region do not, at present, possess the basic foundations on which development along the lines of the ‘developmental state’ can be built (Andreasson 2007). At a more fundamental level, there is little if any serious consideration given to the notion that even a ‘successful’ pursuit of an orthodox form of development, whether of state-interventionist or largely market-oriented kind, that produces a sustained trajectory of economic growth and increases in aggregate levels of production and consumption, may in fact exacerbate already disturbing levels of stress placed on social, environmental and cultural/spiritual dimensions of contemporary Southern African societies.

Contributions of post-development theory to debates on development have been largely ignored by politicians and scholars alike in Southern Africa. Matthews (2004: 377) notes that no African scholar is linked prominently with the post-development school of thought; indeed, ‘the African situation has not featured prominently in discussions by [post-development] theorists’. However, given the argument to be put forth in this paper – that post-development theory identifies serious shortcomings and contradictions inherent in mainstream liberal and social democratic blueprints for development – it is useful to examine ways in which post-developmental thinking can contribute to more genuine and sustainable (socially, culturally, environmentally)
improvements in human and natural well-being. To do so, the paper proceeds as follows.

First, central tenets of post-development theory and their relevance to debates on development in Africa are outlined. Main criticisms of post-development theory are identified and the need to make post-development theory more directly relevant to political and economic processes in Southern Africa explained.

Second, the ‘Afro-pessimist scenario’ is examined. This is the scenario where, given current conditions in Southern Africa, all paths to development are exhausted and proven unworkable, thus giving rise to a dangerous mix of despair, cynicism and fatalism regarding the region’s future among both its local inhabitants and external actors with an interest in the region’s affairs. Within the context of this pessimistic and disabling scenario, post-developmental concerns may seem utopian at best, containing little of concrete value to contemporary political processes and the immediate (material) interests of neither key political and economic actors driving regional developments nor the region’s poor majorities desperately in need of improvements in living conditions.

Third, an examination of post-developmental thinking in the context of ubuntu, as that concept has been harnessed by both politicians and civil society in Southern Africa to represent a community-centred, traditionally anchored approach to social and spiritual well-being on which any workable solution to politics in the post-colonial era of an anticipated ‘African Renaissance’ must be based, will be undertaken. Linking post-development with the concept of ubuntu provides a theoretical and conceptual means to transcend the mental cul-de-sac of ‘Afro-pessimism’ and a pragmatic means of aligning a fundamental criticism of the orthodox development project as pursued throughout the modern era with the social, political and economic realities of contemporary Southern Africa.

Fourth, the paper concludes by considering prospects for basing a new ‘South-South’ dialogue on development in the twenty-first century on post-developmental thinking. While such an ideologically pluralistic and inclusive dialogue might seem far-fetched, given the great enthusiasm with which leaders and peoples across the Global South
embrace orthodox development thinking and the industrial processes of production and consumption as a means to that development, it will be argued that post-development theory contains potential solutions for those interested in contributing to a future in which dependency on the Western experience, notably its legacy of industrial production and divisive economic and political ideologies, is lessened in favour of a holistic approach to improving well-being in which indigenous tradition and knowledge plays a central role.

Post-development theory redux
The key assertion of post-development theory is that development as it is conceptualized and pursued within an orthodox, modern development framework is not sustainable, that it produces a range of deleterious effects on man, society and nature, and that the promise that a Western-style mass-consumption lifestyle can be achieved for a majority of the world’s population is simply a ‘deceitful mirage’ (Rahnema 1997a: x; cf. Nederveen Pieterse 1998: 360). Rist defines the central problem with development as follows:

“Development” consists of a set of practices, sometimes appearing to conflict with one another, which require—for the reproduction of society—the general transformation and destruction of the natural environment and of social relations. Its aim is to increase the production of commodities (goods and services) geared, by way of exchange, to effective demand (Rist 2002: 13).

As it stands, the promise of development thus allows for the destructive effects of industrial, growth-led development to continue unabated and a dangerously unequal and blatantly unjust status quo, in terms of the global order shaped in the wake of the industrial revolution and exacerbated in the post-colonial era, to be maintained. Unequal and unjust because benefits of (neo-liberal) development remain relatively concentrated and narrow while the poor bear the brunt of costs of development, whether these are costs associated with increasing economic volatility prompted by financial mobility and speculation (Koelble and LiPuma 2006) or the environmental degradation which, according to a recent Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change report, is mainly contributed to by the wealthy North while by far affecting poor countries in the South the worst (Revkin 2007).
While the promises held out by agents of development, from governments to NGOs and multinationals, to the world’s poor fail to materialise time and time again (for a variety of complex reasons), the notion that ‘development for all’ must be possible remains a desperate article of faith.

The spectacular enrichment of the well-offs fuels hopes of a possible redistribution among those left out in the cold. People cling to these hopes all the more tightly in that some advance signs seem to be visible… In essence, however, the scenario barely changes: some ‘develop’, others are left out. Whereas the main dividing line has so far run between North and South, it is now establishing itself within each nation-state… To avoid having to admit that ‘development’ can never become general, a pretence is made of believing that it is simply far away (Rist 2002: 238-239).

Because achieving development for the world’s poor that is general constitutes a formidable task, including huge obstacles such as lack of state capacity, corruption, mismanagement and even the ‘selfish’ nature of man as Homo Oeconomicus (never mind a global economy constituted so that it is geared towards narrow enrichment rather than broad-based redistribution), then it is not difficult to see that it will take a great deal of time to achieve. Nowhere is general development so far away as it is in Africa. And as long as it is far away, rather than impossible to achieve within global economic and political frameworks as currently constituted, then arguments in favour of a radical reconceptualization of development, and of what it means to enhance human and natural well-being, can be dismissed as being unrealistic, irresponsible and all too eager to throw the proverbial baby (of limited success with development) out with the bathwater (of the many failed and outright counterproductive developmental projects worldwide). In this situation, the insistence on ‘keeping hope alive’ (insisting that there is no acceptable alternative to development) produces an intellectual environment conducive to strengthening arguments in favour of the status quo while marginalizing any alternatives.

The core criticism of development by post-development theory revolves around the key premise that assumptions underpinning the orthodox concept of development are
fundamentally flawed. *Pace* structuralism and the Dependency School, post-development theory holds that success with development in some parts of the world, and always for a small minority of the global population, is directly linked, indeed a contributing factor, to underdevelopment elsewhere (Baran 1957; Frank 1966; Wallerstein 1974). From this point of view, problems of underdevelopment are not merely a consequence of failing to adopt policies that have been successful elsewhere; contra the neo-liberal International Relations theory conceptualization of politics in, for example, studies of international trade or inter-state relations more generally (e.g., Keohane and Nye 1977), development is not a positive-sum game. Following ‘traditionalists’ – not always representative of what Ziai (2004) terms ‘neo-populism’ – who emphasize the destruction of local cultures and identities by modernization grafted onto traditional societies by Western countries seeking to promote their own economic and political interests, post-developmental thinkers, wary of modern and secular hubris, argue that developmental policies that are not, or cannot become, anchored in local and national cultures, thereby gaining a necessary level of legitimacy, are bound to fail. Along with environmentalists, post-development recognizes the impossibility of combining rapacious resource usage with a sustainable future. Like communitarian political philosophers, post-development is sceptical of individualism as the organizing principle of society, its politics and economics.

What is unique about the post-development critique, in terms of its engagement with the political economy of development literature, is the insistence on not merely pursuing reform within an existing development paradigm, and of the global economy and political systems on which that paradigm rests, nor on simply achieving development by a radical shift from one system (capitalist) to another (socialist). Nor is ‘delinking’, a severing of deeply exploitative economic and social ties between the West and developing regions (Amin 1990), considered a panacea. Rather it is the suggestion that modern civilization in its entirety must be rethought, and an entirely different way of thinking about what it means to ‘develop’ pursued, that constitutes a unique theoretical contribution. This is also why the task as set out by post-development theory is bound to be a very difficult one, especially in terms of producing a shift in economic and political practice, as opposed to ‘merely’ affecting a modest shift in academic discourse, regarding these issues.
In both its socialist and liberal ideological guise (the two ‘progressive’ currents of modern thought, as opposed to conservatism of various kinds), development predicated on ever increasing economic growth, material accumulation, technological innovation and mass-consumption fails to take account of limits to ever-increasing resource usage that our biosphere simply cannot sustain. From pollution by industrial emissions to deforestation and depletion of natural resources and increasingly rapid extinction of species, the evidence of an ever increasing stress on the environment is everywhere visible, most obviously so in those more rapidly developing regions of the world, for instance Brazil, Russia, India and China (the ‘BRIC’ nations) where industrial development is harnessed with ever-increasing urgency so as to narrow the gap in material well-being between less and more developed regions of the world. And developmental success on one hand creates new problems on the other.

A competitive advantage in growing soybeans and supplying ethanol as a ‘green’ bio-fuel to the world market depletes the Amazon rain forest in Brazil. Increasing industrial production, fuelled by what is uniformly considered ‘successful’ economic growth (ignoring negative externalities), in China and India produces intensified competition for oil and other basic industrial inputs worldwide, with the poorest countries least able to secure access to such resources on decent, affordable terms. The increasing prosperity of growing middle classes across the Global South entails rapidly increasing per capita use (and waste) of clean water, with the result that those who remain very poor, and number many millions more, see their access to clean water decline. As a consequence, water may well replace oil as the natural resource most likely to trigger conflict in the future. However, the post-development critique of the post-WWII ‘era of development’, and of the idea of progress and the attendant ‘modern project’ in its entirety (e.g., Illich 1970; Shanin 1997), goes far beyond merely a ‘green’ critique of the environmentally disastrous effects of industrial development which still forms the basis of any large-scale attempt to lift developing regions out of poverty.

In addition to the problem of large-scale development running up against real natural limits, post-developmental thinkers have emphasized the damage to local cultures, and the ways in which man relates to other human beings and the natural world of which he of course is an integral part, in an age of increasing commodification,
individualism, competition and, consequently, alienation (e.g., Nandy 1987; Shiva 1989; Escobar 1995). In addition to economic exploitation leading to impoverishment of Africa and Africa’s incorporation into the global economy on very unfavourable terms (Rodney 1982; Bond 2006), its peoples have long suffered from social and spiritual degradation rooted in the long-standing demeaning of Africans and their history by the racist prejudices and cultural chauvinism according to which the continent’s subjugation was justified. This form of mental ‘enslavement’ has produced a debilitating legacy, in Africa as well as in its diaspora, which, for the sake of development and emancipation, will be as important to overcome as Africa’s economic dependency and political dysfunction (Fanon 1986; Memmi 2003; cf. Andreasson 2005a: 974). Here, the post-development critique differs from Marxist critiques of immiseration and alienation within a capitalist world order in that it does not offer a solution based on simply a reorganization of the mode of production whereby the developmental dilemma of our capitalist age will be transcended – for Marxists, the advent of a socialist mode of production and ensuing communist society (cf. Rist 2002: 121).

Whereas the Marxist scenario progresses from inevitable class conflict to the transcending of capitalism, post-development theory posits a wholly open-ended scenario, where any combination of dynamics and incentives given by pre-modern, capitalist and socialist modes of socio-economic organization may combine to offer new alternatives to the status quo. Socially and politically speaking, a ‘sustainable’ outcome of a transition from the current ‘era of development’ could be ‘regressive’ (i.e., drawing on tradition and pre-modern sentiments) as well as ‘progressive. Moreover, post-development theory does not insist that a ‘better life’ necessarily will mean improvements on measurements such as life expectancy, purchasing power and education (the basic components of the United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Index, or HDI). It may well be that in contexts where, for a variety of reasons, this is not possible or ‘allowed’ for by circumstances beyond the immediate control of suffering peoples themselves – e.g., an increasingly commodified and privatized world in which ‘development space’ is steadily shrinking (Wade 2003; cf. Andreasson 2006) – a better life may simply mean a more bearable life. A bearable life in the sense of an ability by people suffering, for example, lack of proper nutrition, health care and education – a lack, therefore, of the means by which
to pursue greater aspirations in life as according to Sen’s (1999) concept of ‘freedom to’ – to somehow accommodate themselves to the suffering they have to endure in the knowledge that it will not be alleviated in the foreseeable future.

The somewhat disturbing analogy here is of course with the practice of palliative care: easing symptoms without curing an underlying cause; hence a subject matter to be approached with great care and delicacy. This, the notion of recognizing, let alone cultivating, an ‘art of suffering’, present in meditations on human existence from the Stoics to Gandhi, is perhaps the most controversial and delicate contention of post-development (cf. Illich 1976; Esteva 1995). There is indeed a fine line between a notion of how to best accommodate suffering (that may be inevitable) on one hand, and a cynical neglect of genuine alternatives or a fatalist capitulation in the face of immense obstacles – Saul’s (2003: 190) ‘pessimism of the intellect’ – that condemns people to a fate that is unacceptable in the view of any standard argument regarding (global) justice. Any such notions of reconciling oneself to suffering, or even emphasizing the idea of coping mechanisms, are of course anathema to the Promethean idea of Progress and therefore play no role whatsoever in orthodox debates on development.

Post-development theory and its critics
Given that the post-development critique of development casts doubt not merely on dominant modes of political and economic thinking as they shape policy-making on development, but also questions the very philosophical and cultural basis on which our understanding of development rests, i.e., rationality, progress, modernity (the Western trajectory), it has been roundly criticized on several grounds. Because of an antipathy towards much of that which is generally celebrated as modern, post-development scholars are suspected of harbouring longings for the confines of traditional societies (with grave implications for individual rights, the rights of women, our ability to generate scientific knowledge and many other things besides) and thereby constitute a reactionary ideological force.

Post-development theory is also criticized for not producing ‘credible’ or ‘feasible’ alternatives to existing development frameworks; in other words, it is not a constructive theory. This resembles criticisms of Marx’s vision of a better world: that
it is long on the problems with the current capitalist system and short on solutions and
the details of alternative visions (for Marx, communism). If the industrialization-
based route to development is problematic and unsustainable, then what are leaders of
developing countries and the poor peoples who constitute a majority of the world’s
population (a great majority of all Africans) to do? They could, presumably, wait for
appropriately sustainable technologies to be developed in advanced countries and
then, via a process of ‘diffusion’, adopt those technologies according to local needs.
However, the socio-economic marginalization of Africa suggests this will continue to
be difficult and therefore unlikely. Moreover, how can scholars (who themselves
consist of a privileged group in society) quarrelling about abstract understandings of
development possibly suggest what the needs and aspirations of poor and oftentimes
desperate people ought to be? This line of argumentation basically rejects post-
development theory on grounds of being irresponsible (i.e., offering no alternative
route to development for people suffering greatly from material deprivation) and, in
some of its more radical manifestations, also misanthropic and even nihilistic.14

Environmentalists, often concerned with the problem of overpopulation, are also
subjected to similar accusations of misanthropy.

The critique of post-colonialism more generally (with which post-development is not
synonymous but shares affinities as well as an intellectual heritage) by mainstream
scholars, largely in the West, interested in Africa (‘Africanists’) emphasizes similar
concerns.

[Post]colonialism is regarded as too theoretical and too preoccupied with
textuality and discourse to have anything meaningful to contribute… The
study of African politics, particularly in its Anglophone version, has
constituted itself as a largely empirical discipline, dedicated to assisting and
facilitating [Africa’s] economic and political development … since the 1980s
perceptions of the ‘African crisis’ have led to calls that scholarship should be
dedicated first and foremost to solving that crisis. To this end, postcolonialism
is deemed ineffective … perceived to be a cultural product of the West …
[and] perceived as politically passive, and perhaps ultimately politically
conservative (Abrahamsen 2003: 190).
Nederveen Pieterse’s (1998; 2000) critique of post-development theory has perhaps been the most influential one. It describes post-development as a ‘radical reaction to the impasse of development theory and policy’, a reaction based on ‘[p]erplexity and extreme disaffection with business-as-usual and standard development rhetoric and practice’ (Nederveen Pieterse 1998: 360). The general thrust of post-development as articulated by Escobar (1995), one of its most prominent advocates, contains ‘exaggerated claims sustained by weak examples … His perspective on actual development is flimsy and confused, with more rhetoric than logic’; in the end, post-development ‘reflects both a hunger for a new era and a nostalgia for the politics of romanticism, glorification of the local, grassroots, community with conservative overtones (Nederveen Pieterse 1998: 364). Of course, this ‘hunger’ can also be interpreted as a willingness to both look ahead and think anew about how to improve on existing socio-economic arrangements, as well as a ‘nostalgic’ awareness of the importance of looking back (as much as the notion of a ‘backward’ orientation seems to violate the spirit of progress), fully conscious of the importance of historical experience and tradition in providing solid foundations for the future.

A brief, but succinct, critique of post-development by Storey (2000: 42-44) argues that post-development fails on four specific fronts: 1) it promotes an overly generalized view of what development actually is and it neglects real developmental achievements such as increases in life expectancies worldwide; 2) it fails to demonstrate that a state of existence ‘beyond development’ is either feasible or indeed desirable by the world’s poor, and furthermore fails to properly engage with the fact that so many people in the world actually want what development is understood to offer; 3) the social movements upon which most post-development arguments for how social change can be achieved are based may in many cases be reactionary and authoritarian, nor do they always ‘occupy a space outside’ capitalist structures and developmental ideology; 4) these oftentimes fragmented and narrowly focused social movements and related groups are in most cases ‘no match’ for the power wielded by global capital and other actors seeking to maintain status quo in terms of global socio-economic organization and approaches to development.

These are important criticisms, which in some cases have brought much needed attention to flaws, and carelessness, in post-developmental arguments. Moreover,
these apt critics had, by the turn of the last century, largely managed to dismantle the radical aspirations of post-developmental theorists and to effectively marginalize their potential input in wider debates on development and the question of alternatives. This was a feat well-recognised by those who now wish to carefully bring back to the debate some key notions of post-development theory, and who recognise that the first generation of post-developmental thinkers perhaps let caution to the wind in an attempt to bravely undermine a hegemonic ideology, thereby leaving themselves open to sharp criticism and in need of refinement of their ambitious claims and daring arguments (e.g., Ziai 2004). It is therefore crucial to explain what is different about current scholarly debates on the notion of moving ‘beyond development’, debates that continue to engage critically with a hegemonic development paradigm and that still retain some of the core criticisms put forth by an earlier generation of post-developmental thinkers.

The first point to make in response to the critics of post-development theory is to note that while a total rejection of development has been articulated in some post-developmental writings (e.g., Esteva 1985; Rahnema 1997b), this ‘radical’ position is not the only one encompassed by post-development theory. Ziai (2004) identifies two main strands of post-development theory: one he labels ‘sceptical’ and the other ‘neo-populist’. While neo-populism lends itself to a less nuanced, and sometimes exaggerated, criticism of development – it is indeed an ‘anti-development’ position – and is also prone to romanticize tradition and community, the ‘sceptical’ approach lends itself to a more nuanced criticism of development that may facilitate the emergence of a ‘radical democratic’ approach in the field of development studies, where a fundamental criticism of development remains cognizant of the political and economic power structures within which any constructive debate on radical alternatives to the status quo must be located. The sceptical strand of post-development theory, which is the one relevant to the argument developed in this paper, does not require a politics in which development as traditionally understood can play no part, nor does it unquestioningly embrace tradition, community and the local as necessarily opposed to modernity, individualism and globalization.

The idea, then, in spite of ‘development’, is to organize and invent new ways of life – between modernization, with its sufferings but also some advantages,
and a tradition from which people may derive inspiration while knowing that it can never be revived (Rist 2002: 244, emphases added).

A similar recognition of the mixed, if ultimately disappointing, legacy of orthodox development, is echoed by Hoogvelt (2001: 172): ‘[p]ostdevelopment … is different from anti-development … in that it does not deny globalization or modernity, but wants to find some ways of living with it and imaginatively transcending it’.

Secondly, while post-development faces a challenge in linking its arguments about the problems of development to a clear-cut politics of change, and whereas it is true that translating post-development theory into real politics given the powerful vested interests in business and politics that are not interested in such ideas, it does not follow that post-development theory has ‘nothing to offer’. Simply put, the degree of difficulty in promoting a point of view is not indicative of its inherent value, ‘correctness’, or ultimate utility. Institutions such as slavery, colonialism and the market, all at one time supported by powerful interests, have been challenged (the first two successfully) by radical arguments that have, in the end, produced significant change in both political and economic spheres. Development as an ideology and organizing principle of social change has had a great influence on peoples worldwide in the post-WWII era, and should post-developmental arguments ‘take root’ – first at the levels of heterodox scholarship and traditionally-oriented social movements, then perhaps at the level of conventional politics – then they will undoubtedly have a profound impact on societal change similar to that of radical ideas in the past. In the end, mainstream thinking on development in Africa has so far not been able to significantly dent the debilitating effects of a pervasive ‘Afro-pessimism’ that pervades the international view, and oftentimes also that of Africans themselves, of Africa’s overall disappointing post-independence trajectories.

The ‘Afro-pessimist’ scenario

The Minister's eyes were like egg yolks, an aftereffect of some of the many illnesses, malaria especially, endemic in his country. There was also an irrefutable sadness in his eyes. He spoke in a slow and creaking voice, the voice of hope about to expire. Flame trees, coconut palms, and a ballpoint-
blue Atlantic composed the background. None of it seemed beautiful, though (Kaplan 1994: 44).

The failure and of many state-led development projects (some Keynesian, others socialist) and the stagnation of African economies and polities more generally in post-independence Africa (Sandbrook 1985), coupled with the onset of the deeply debilitating 1980s debt crisis (Parfitt and Riley 1989), made scholarship on Africa and development in the 1990s prone to severe criticism of the politics that produced such miserable failure. While the responsibility of external actors in Africa’s unravelling was oftentimes acknowledged, it was on Africa’s own leaders and institutions that the critics focused (e.g., Zartman 1995; Reno 1998; Ayittey 1999). The nature of African states received notable attention, being described as ‘criminalized’ (Bayart et al. 1999) and even ‘vampire states’ (Frimpong-Ansah 1992). In terms of economic reforms intended to promote economic development, African states have been the major obstacle (van de Walle 2001). Implicit in all these arguments is the notion that African’s attempts at development have failed on a comprehensive range of issues, and on all ideological and political fronts. The influences of both external and domestic actors have undermined the post-independence political systems and consequently the possibilities for sustained economic development and democratization. Where genuine efforts have been made to promote development, by African governments themselves in partnership with helpful international partners, they have in the face of the enormous obstacles created by social and political instability, patronage, authoritarianism and corruption fallen hopelessly short of what is needed.

Seemingly endemic corruption has caused outrage not only among external donors, Western governments eager to lecture Africans on the need for ‘good governance’ and progressive social forces on the continent itself (cf. Abrahamsen 2000). Standard texts on African politics consider neo-patrimonialism to be a key aspect of African politics, indeed a phenomenon endemic in African cultures (e.g., Hydén 2006). Even African leaders with a poor record in these matters have expressed exasperation with the tangled web of conflict, mismanagement and crisis management in which leaders and subjects alike seem caught. Speaking to the governing party’s Central Committee in Harare in 2004, Zimbabwe’s President Robert Mugabe lashed out at those who
subvert the cause of economic transformation and indigenization in an effort to enrich themselves (a problem appropriately recognized, even though in denial of his own government’s contribution thereto).

We have seen the effects of corruption and how it erodes and collapsed [people’s] welfare because of ill-gotten affluence. We have all seen how riches that come easily through devious ways translate into arrogant flamboyance and wastefulness … [W]e thought these men were leading business luminaries of our country! They have cheated us and deserve their punishment … Some have sought to defeat [the government’s anti-corruption] campaign by pleading the cause of indigenization. Let them remember that indigenization does not, and shall never, mean empowering crooks who cut business corners and thrive on dirty deals. Certainly, it does not mean putting your shameless indigenous finger into the national till (Mugabe, 2004).

Some discontents have taken the criticism further and have, like Etounga-Manguelle (2000), placed ultimate blame for Africa’s misery on African culture: given it’s ‘progress resistant’ culture, Africa needs to undergo a ‘cultural adjustment programme’ so as to become compatible with modernity and the structural adjustment programmes that have been devised for it. The idea of African culture being ultimately incapable of facilitating development, or indeed to sustain modernity, strikes at the heart of any post-developmental notion of harnessing indigenous knowledge and aligning political and economic programmes for change with the cultural parameters of African societies. If the inherent characteristics of African culture are thus deficient, then any solution to Africa’s problems must necessarily originate elsewhere and be imposed, or at the very least guided, by external actors such as the (Western) governments and institutions which have devised, promoted and oftentimes led the implementation of Africa’s many structural adjustment programmes.15

Clearly this line of reasoning does not entertain the notion, emphasized by Kothari (1990: 49-50, cited in Matthews 2004: 380), that a wealth of indigenous and imported cultural and religious traditions in, for example, India, constitutes a source of inspiration upon which those seeking to devise new solutions to long-standing
problems with underdevelopment can draw. If this is the case, then the cultural and religious diversity of Africa, the unique cultural hybrid which Mazrui (1986) labels Africa’s ‘triple heritage’ (of indigenous, Muslim and Christian origins), presumably amounts to something similarly positive from which novel ideas providing better solutions can be derived.

It is somewhat curious that very little of the voluminous literature on Africa’s post-independence failures, whether focussing on how Western countries have employed neo-colonial linkages to continue exploiting Africa (Bracking and Harrison 2003; Bond 2006; Bush 2007) or the failure of African countries to properly embrace modernization and the economic and political reforms necessary to succeed in a capitalist world order (World Bank 1981; Mistry 2004), has considered whether it could be the orthodox notion of how to develop that is problematic, rather than simply conclude that it is African states and societies – Africans themselves – that have failed to do so. Indeed, ‘Afro-pessimism’ suggests that there is, in the end, little that can be done with respect to Africa’s developmental impasse. Such an attitude is popularized and vulgarized in accounts like Kaplan’s (1994) The Coming Anarchy which, perhaps ironically, shares concerns about scarcity, crime, overpopulation and disease and the environment with post-developmental thinkers. This pessimistic and oftentimes resigned attitude towards the continent produces serious side-effects for Africa in terms of legitimizing existing prejudices about Africans, exacerbating ‘donor fatigue’, discouraging international investment and, given Africa’s deep (and self-inflicted) deprivations, the need to treat the continent’s people with respect and decency in affairs both public and private.

Most importantly, ‘Afro-pessimism’ suggests that there is little in terms of Africa’s own history, its cultural and social legacy, to be retrieved and built upon for the purposes of overcoming the developmental impasse that has produced misery across Africa in the post-independence era. This situation entails a serious handicap for the African continent as a whole. It has long been recognized that developmental trajectories across the Western world, specifically in terms of the development of capitalism, have diverged according to cultural setting; hence the rise of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and social-democratic versions of the modern capitalist state (e.g., Dore 2000; Hall and Soskice 2001). More fundamentally, the rise of the East Asian ‘Tigers’
recognizes the importance of anchoring development in a historical context and cultural legacy very different from that of the West. Similarly, debates on development in China and India (still largely rural and impoverished) recognize the importance of each country’s ‘civilizational legacy’ in producing a modern form of development, or at least a globally competitive form of capitalism.

For Africa, however, the importance and potential usefulness of a non-Western legacy is much less evident, and a much more straightforward debate on how Africa most easily can import an appropriate Western set of attitudes (ranging from the intellectual and cultural to the political and economic) is the common standard. In part this reflects a sense (sometimes expressed as a historically informed regret, other times as an aggressively articulated prejudice) that Africa lacks a proper history of civilization, thus making it necessary for its peoples to acquire the useful tools bequeathed by civilization from elsewhere. While it is of course true that Africa’s history differs in many important respects to that of Europe, India and China, and while it is also true that no country or region has developed in isolation from important cultural, technological and scientific advances elsewhere, the development as modernization discourse becomes so focussed on ‘what has worked elsewhere’ that it neglects the importance of finding what may be conducive to a better future in African experiences and values themselves. Post-development, on the other hand, makes the simple assumption that the quest for a way forward begins at home.

Modernity, alienation and ubuntu

Following from the post-development critique of development and the need to somehow resolve Africa’s developmental impasse, two key arguments will be pursued here. The first argument is that nothing short of a genuinely communal effort – i.e., society in dialogue, and in awareness of, its constituent parts and common interests – to re-imagine, and where necessary re-invent, goals and aspirations of Southern African societies must begin before any radical transformation of these societies can be achieved, or even properly contemplated. An emphasis on the region’s political economy alone will not suffice; the debate on how to reform politics and economic policy must be anchored in a greater societal debate about what the headlong rush to embrace orthodox development policies have entailed for societal cohesion and sustainability (social and natural). On the whole, mainstream
indicators of development are down (most notably HDI trends in Southern Africa) while levels of societal fragmentation (violent crime, xenophobia, HIV/AIDS) have been on the rise. Simply focusing on political issues and processes (who will replace President Mbeki and what role will Zanu-PF play when Mugabe is no longer President) and economic policy (might ASGISA produce better macroeconomic outcomes than GEAR and how will ‘indigenization’ of businesses in Zimbabwe affect economic growth?) without also addressing the enormous rupture caused in Southern African societies by the settler colonial systems and the compromised transitions that followed is an exercise bound to produce temporary solutions at best, and never a genuine transcendence of the key problems afflicting the region today.

The second argument is that two types of alienation must be resolved in order to move ‘beyond development’ as it is commonly understood: alienation of man from nature (a theological and philosophical issue, with roots in the Book of Genesis and Descartes and thus emblematic of modern industrial civilization) and alienation of human beings from society in general as well as each other (whether understood in terms of Marx’s ‘alienation’ or Durkheim’s ‘anomie’).

Man alienated from nature prevents a holistic conceptualization of environmental problems that will increasingly feature as a key concern in any debate on development and the improvement of people’s living conditions, given that countries in developing regions pay a disproportionately high burden of the costs associated with global environmental degradation. The uprooting of traditional societies such as the San of the Kalahari to make way for tourism and mining in Botswana, the widespread poaching and destruction of wildlife in the wake of land invasions and the violent expulsion of urban dwellers from their homes during the Zimbabwean government’s ruthless Operation Murambatsvina (‘drive out trash’), and the very high levels of industrial pollution, stress on natural habitats and increasingly violent government response to popular protest against the lack of service delivery in South Africa are all deeply problematic manifestations of an underlying malaise that reinforces the importance of a rethink on matters of both environment and human relations, and the necessity of a holistic approach to these issues. The alienation of human beings from each other, which inevitably produces fragmentation, instability and ultimately violence, is symptomatic of a ‘Darwinian’ market-society, disembedded from local
culture and social cohesion, and which in the case of Southern Africa runs counter to communitarian understandings of human nature, including moral and social obligations and responsibilities embodied in the traditional concept and philosophy of ubuntu (outlined below).

The problem, from the point of view of these two arguments, is that the modern development paradigm neglects precisely that which needs to be resolved. Modern development concerns itself with institutions, politics and economics; it does not in any meaningful way engage with greater social debates on how human beings may aspire to a different Good Life. The alienation of man from nature is central to the modern notion of man moulding his environment for his own needs. This goes far beyond simply recognizing that devising ways to grow better crops and reduce exposure to malaria is a good thing in terms of improving living conditions; it also entails an ever increasing exploitation of resources, both natural and human, in the quest for enrichment and advantage – Tawney’s ‘acquisitive society’ run amok. The alienation of human beings from each other is also a key foundation upon which modern development rests. The rational and self-interested individual, Homo Oeconomicus, and the question of how to most effectively unleash his potential as manifest in development and progress in the wake of Schumpeterian ‘creative destruction’, forms the basis for any modern development policy framework, from the Keynesian to the neo-liberal. This fundamental problem with the origins and nature of orthodox development suggests that any new thinking on how to proceed would benefit from anchoring that thinking in a different socio-cultural framework. That framework, in the Southern African context, is ubuntu.

The ubuntu value system
The concept of ubuntu stems from the traditional African aphorism, umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (isiZulu), or motho ke motho ka batho (seSotho), which essentially means ‘a person is a person through other persons’. The central concept of ubuntu translates as ‘humanity’, ‘humanness’, or even ‘humaneness’; importantly, it is not merely a factual description of human nature, but constitutes also a rule of conduct and social ethic (Louw 2001: 15; cf. Ramose 2003b). In terms of societal relations, ubuntu can be understood as
a metaphor that describes the significance of group solidarity, on survival issues, that is so central to the survival of African communities, who as a result of the poverty and deprivation have to survive through brotherly group care and not individual self-reliance (Mbigi and Maree 1995: 1).

Moreover, the notion of ‘personhood’ in *ubuntu* entails a process of *becoming* a person; personhood is not automatically granted (i.e., not all human beings are persons) but dependent on a recognition of and acting in a way that is commensurate with recognizing the humanness of others (Louw 2001: 17).

Although the concept of *ubuntu* is African in origin (and related to the concept of ‘Afrocentricity’19) and its focus is on an essentially communal humanity, it does not promote essentialization of difference and exclusion. Attempts to justify social exclusion (as in some forms of nationalism) and xenophobia are not commensurate with a proper understanding and usage of *ubuntu* as it ‘is not necessarily limited by biological ancestry, nationality or actual place of residence’ (van Binsbergen 2001: 60). Nor does the strong emphasis on community and consensus (an issue of great significance for the nature of political and economic reform in post-liberation Southern Africa) mean that adherence to *ubuntu* must deteriorate into what Sono (1994, cited in Louw 2001: 19) describes as ‘tyrannical custom’ and ‘totalitarian communalism’. This is obviously one potential consequence of a Machiavellian misuse of *ubuntu* by elites wishing to justify repression of opposition and dissent, a danger than must be recognized given post-independence Africa’s recurrent problems with erosion of democratic principles and the emergence of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes.

Despite its strong emphasis on solidarity and community, Bhengu (1996) suggests that *ubuntu* constitutes the ‘essence’ of (African) democracy. Moreover,

> [u]buntu as an effort to reach consensus or agreement should thus not be confused with outmoded and suspect cravings for (an oppressive) universal sameness, often associated with so-called teleological or “modernistic” attempts at the final resolution of differences (cf. Ramose 1999: 131, 132; van der Merwe 1996: 12). True Ubuntu takes plurality seriously. While it
constitutes personhood through other persons, it appreciates the fact that “other persons” are so called, precisely because we can ultimately never quite “stand in their shoes” or “see through their eyes”. When Ubuntuists read “solidarity” and “consensus”, s/he therefore also reads “alterity”, “autonomy”, and “co-operation” (note: not “co-optation”) (Louw 2001: 21).

The origins of ubuntu in the thought and traditions of pre-modern Southern African village life means that the concept has in some instances become a philosophical tool for Africanist scholars wishing to reconstruct (or invent) an ‘unadulterated’ form of African village life as it supposedly existed before European conquest (van Binsbergen 2001: 53).

The self-proclaimed experts on ubuntu form a globally-informed, Southern African intellectual elite who, remote in place and social practice from the emic expressions at the village level which they seek to capture, have officially coined the concept of ubuntu as a cornerstone Southern African self-reflexive ethnography (van Binsbergen 2001: 70).

The concept of ubuntu has also been appropriated in a wide variety of literatures beyond its usage in African philosophy, ranging from research on management and business practices in Africa (Karsten and Illa 2005) to South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Murithi 2006). Ubuntu has also become an issue in relation to government policy. At the suggestion of President Mbeki, South Africa’s National Heritage Council convened its first National Imbizo on Ubuntu and Nation-building in South Africa (imbizo is a gathering, a forum for interaction and dialogue) to debate ‘the notion of Ubuntu and how it should filter into the policies of government’.20 Indeed, the concept has been evoked as the philosophical underpinning of the ‘African Renaissance’ as promoted by Mbeki (Vale and Maseko 1998; van Kessel 2001), with that Renaissance in turn informing continent-wide policy initiatives such as The New Economic Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) (Bongma 2004).21

While this wide-spread usage of ubuntu indicates a great desire and need to find alternatives to the Western logic of modernity as the foundation for post-liberation
Southern African societies, it is at the same time necessary to note that the great majority of Southern Africans today do not live in, or have the experience of, a culture where *ubuntu* constitutes a central organizing principle. The way of life that is derived from the concept of *ubuntu* ‘is not within easy reach of the globalised urban population that has become standard in Southern Africa. Outside contemporary village contexts, it is only selectively and superficially communicated to the Southern African population at large’ (van Binsbergen 2001: 61).

According van Binsbergen (2001), *ubuntu* is therefore most usefully understood as a means, social as well as philosophical in nature, by which people can retrieve a sense of belonging and comprehension in an environment where various pressures – economic, political, cultural – relating to the impact of globalization and underdevelopment on Southern African societies has produced dangerous levels of stress and dysfunction, what in some cases can be described as a ‘profound existential crisis’. In this sense *ubuntu* constitutes ‘the creation of a moral community of people concerned about the present and future of Southern Africa’, and the fact that this community will have to be retrieved, indeed re-constructed, from a past with which many Southern Africans are no longer directly connected and then adapted to the reality of globalization (meaning that no culture can now be successfully maintained in isolation from outside influences) means that an excessive emphasis on the philosophical and historical purity or authenticity of the concept is unnecessary:

[...] it does not really matter whether the ethnological and linguistic underpinnings of *ubuntu* philosophy are empirically and epistemologically impeccable … [given that *ubuntu* is] an exhortative instrument at the service of modern urban society at large … [seeking] to address fundamental ills in the make-up of urban, globalised Southern Africa (van Binsbergen 2001: 73).

If this understanding of *ubuntu* prevails and can become the philosophical and cultural context in which discourse on development is anchored and legitimized, we can then see how *ubuntu* as a culture-specific concept in a regional context is compatible with post-development theory as an intellectual process of looking back (‘nostalgia’) at tradition and experience as well as looking ahead, embracing new but also ‘culturally compatible’ ways of thinking in the search for alternatives to development as
traditionally understood. In the end, the revival of traditional concepts such as *ubuntu*, will be strengthened if it can be linked to broader international debates on the organization of the world economy, social justice and how to resolve the dilemma of continued poverty and marginalization for the many combined with ever increasing wealth for the few – the developmental impasse for which orthodox development has so far not provided a solution.

**Concluding thoughts on a ‘South-South’ dialogue moving beyond development**

So far, thoughts like these originating in scholarly debates on post-development, specifically the question of how to move ‘beyond development’ for the sake of improving the lives of people and the environment in which they exist, have been received sometimes politely, often hostilely and never enthusiastically by the mainstream development community. Nor have the main tenets of post-development theory been translated in any significant way into policy-making in developing countries. The idea of moving ‘beyond development’ may seem hopelessly ephemeral in contrast with a well established and accepted modernist worldview informing (and justifying) powerful economic and political interests that drive politics and business as usual.

How, then, could an emerging ‘South-South’ dialogue on development in the twenty-first century possibly become based on, or at least influenced by, post-developmental thinking? Recent writings on how to foster a new debate on development between Southern Africa and other countries in the Global South do not explicitly argue for a post-development approach (e.g., Neocosmos 2006). Research by the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) Special Unit for South-South Cooperation and by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) concentrates primarily on how to best facilitate orthodox development policies. While Malaysian President Mahathir and other Asian leaders have urged Africa to ‘Look East’ for a more appropriate model for development, Mugabe’s announcement of a ‘Look East’ policy for Zimbabwe, somewhat generously interpreted by Youde (2007), has generally been interpreted as little else than a desperate attempt by the Zimbabwean regime to curry favour with the regime’s financial backers (most notably China) in the wake of its increasing international isolation (e.g., Mashingaidze 2006: 71).
Given the great enthusiasm with developing countries embrace orthodox development thinking, and the industrial processes of production and consumption as a means to that development, an ideologically pluralistic and inclusive dialogue that can accommodate and engage with the contentions of post-development theory might seem far-fetched. On the other hand, given the manifest failures of the ‘era of development’ and the clearly detrimental effects that many policies, from the Right and Left, intending to bring about development are having on poor communities with little ability to shield themselves from the overwhelming disruptions caused in the name of modernization, could the ideas informed by post-development theory not in the end find reception among leaders as well as peoples looking for a way out of the developmental impasse? Do the social majorities worst affected by failures of modern development, and the elites purporting to represent them (themselves increasingly vulnerable to popular discontent because of continued failure to ‘deliver’ development), really have much to lose by taking seriously the post-developmental critique and the implications for socio-economic organization thereof?

Since post-development entails a major shift in thinking about both means and ends as traditionally conceptualized within the development paradigm, the most important question here is, arguably, whether a post-developmental ‘turn’ in elite and popular political discourse, and eventually policy-making processes, risks a worsening of condition for the poor by turning attention away from the traditional aims of orthodox development. That this will not be the case remains a key responsibility for those articulating a move ‘beyond development’ to ensure. In the end, post-development theory constitutes a sufficiently coherent and comprehensive intellectual project for those who wish to steer the debate on development in a different direction – to a future in which dependency on the Western experience, notably its legacy of industrial production and divisive economic and political ideologies, is overcome in favour of a holistic approach to improving well-being in which the tradition, values and experience of people in the Global South plays a central role. The immediate task ahead is how to translate the promise of post-development into a politics of change.
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Endnotes


2 That factors beyond simply poverty and associated indicators of underdevelopment play a significant role in the aggressive onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Southern Africa is evident from the fact that countries in Southern Africa have HIV prevalence rates that are eighteen times higher than in countries elsewhere with similar levels of poverty and inequality (Marks 2007: 863).

3 The ‘age of development’ is generally understood to originate with ‘Point Four’ of U.S. President Harry Truman’s inaugural speech on January 20, 1949. In addition to points articulating U.S. backing of the United Nations, support of the Marshall Plan, and the creation of NATO, a fourth point was adopted regarding the need for the U.S. to extend technical assistance to parts of Latin America and other poor countries, since ‘for the first time in history, humanity possess the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of these people’ (Truman, cited in Rist 2002: 71, cf. Andreasson 2005b).

4 Post-development as a ‘total rejection of development’ coalesced around the journal *Development: Seeds for Change* in the 1980s and has been most prominently represented by scholars in Latin America and India; in Europe it is primarily a small group of French, Swiss, German and English scholars that have promoted post-development theory (Nederveen Pieterse 1998: 361).

5 According to Seers’ (1963) thesis, the *general case* is the one of underdevelopment in the Third World, while the *special case* is that of development and prosperity in the West. The problem with the modern development paradigm is that the historical context and socio-political dynamics which produced the special case of development are used as the model in attempts to understand the general case as well.

6 The acquisitive and self-interested nature of a Promethean *Homo Oeconomicus*, or ‘economic man’, is understood in wholly positive terms in liberal economic accounts from Adam Smith onwards. The post-WWII development paradigm entails a more
nuanced view on the individual pursuit of self-interest. Although the degree to which market-reliance features prominently in blueprints for development increases over time, and becomes the dominant vision in relation to Africa’s development following the World Bank’s 1981 *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action* report, there is also a recognition of the need for effective (state) institutions and resilient communities, the basis of which is not solely dependent on the classical or neo-liberal economic conceptualization of the (asocial and ‘ahistorical’) individual. See Landes (1969) for a classic example of the Promethean allegory in accounts of development, in this case the social and technological changes giving rise to the Industrial Revolution in Britain. As for the power of ideas, Keynes argued in an oft-cited passage of *The General Theory* that the world is indeed ‘governed by little else’.

A ‘mere’ shift in thinking can itself have significant political and economic consequences. A recent example would be the decline of Keynesian economic thought and the resurgence of classical liberal economics that produced the Thatcherite revolution of the 1980s (e.g., Blyth 2002; Gray 2002), the consequences of which were truly global.

If, however, technological innovation could *consistently* outpace the destructive consequences of growth-based development, the question of approaching what are likely definite limits to the biosphere’s ‘carrying capacity’ would be moot. Evidence of such a consistent capacity of technology to lead, and thereby resolve the current problems associated with (industrial) development does not, as far as this author is aware, exist.

The degree to which these middles classes in developing regions are really growing is apparently unclear. The Asian Development Bank has released revised data, based on purchasing power parity (PPP) measures, which suggest that China’s economy is perhaps 40 per cent smaller than previously estimated. More importantly, the data suggests that China has perhaps 300 million people living below the Bank’s one dollar-a-day poverty line, which are three times as many as previously estimated. The Bank also estimates that India has twice as many people living below the poverty line
as previously thought, perhaps close to 800 million rather than 400 million (Kiedel 2007).

10 In terms of Africa’s relations with the western world, ideas of civilization and progress featured prominently in arguments underpinning the entire colonial endeavour. They did so in specific instances such as the General Act of the Berlin Conference (which saw Africa carved up and parcelled out to colonizing states according to European expediency) and the League of Nations Covenant. The latter followed the Kiplingesque logic of a ‘white man’s burden’ by placing the burden of administering nations ‘not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world’ onto the already ‘advanced’ nations, following which earlier forms of biological racism were eventually replaced by ‘an equally pernicious form of cultural racism which based its judgements of superiority and inferiority on essentially ethnocentric norms’ (Tucker 1999: 5).

11 Although we do not know what, exactly, the natural limits to increasing resource-usage related human activities are, it is increasingly evident that we are pushing against those limits in the twenty-first century. This is, furthermore, done in a manner both quantitatively and qualitatively different from the nature of pressures produced by human activity in the nineteenth century in which Malthus (1970) articulated some of the proto-post-developmental arguments.

12 On the global consequences of Western racism and cultural chauvinism more generally, see Lindqvist (1996) and Bessis (2003).

13 Find the United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Index website at http://hdr.undp.org/. Moreover, when ‘more’ always means ‘better’ we end up with a situation where the drive to grow and accumulate ever more cannot be interrupted without endangering economic interests of those who benefit from it. Hence a process that becomes ‘entirely focused on production of the maximum rather than the optimum’ (Rist 2002: 16).
Given the important role accorded to education in development, Illich’s (1970) criticism of schooling in poor countries is a good example of a post-developmental line of reasoning that becomes a prime target for the accusation of irresponsibility: ‘The higher the dose of schooling an individual has received, the more depressing his experience of withdrawal … The schools of the Third World administer their opium with much more effect than the churches of other epochs. As the mind of a society is progressively schooled, step by step individuals lose their sense that it might be possible to live without being inferior to others … [The] hereditary inferiority of the peon is replaced by the inferiority of the school dropout who is held personally responsible for his failure. Schools rationalize the divine origin of social stratification with much more rigour than Churches have ever done’ (quoted in Rahnema and Bawtree 1997: 98). An appropriately nuanced approach would not reject education, but rather emphasize ways in which this form of potential alienation can be coped with. For a quite different criticism of modernity in his more recent works, John Gray has been accused by fellow philosopher Kateb (2006) and others of being a nihilist.

For an elaboration of these arguments, see Andreasson (2005a).

On Africa’s history and civilization, see Davidson (1990) and the ‘Black Athena’ controversy (Bernal 1987; Lefkowitz and MacLean Rogers 1996).

In Bhutan, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck coined the term Gross National Happiness (GNH) in 1972 in an attempt to produce a society and an economy compatible with the spiritual values of Buddhism and the particular needs and aspirations of Bhutanese people. The GNH indicates how people actually perceive their overall lot in life as opposed to measures which may only indicate what the ‘average’ person can consume, even though there at some basic level of course will be a correlation between ability to consume, survival and, indeed, ‘happiness’. Donnelly (2004) operationalizes and measures GNH along eight ‘happiness categories’: ‘guaranteed life security’, ‘healthy body and mind’, ‘warm families’, ‘strong communities’, ‘good environment’, ‘freedom’, ‘pride’, and ‘living in harmony with nature and mankind’. According to Bakshi (2004), GNH ‘pertains to quality of
nutrition, housing, education, health care and community life’. These components link the GNH to material, ecological and mental/spiritual components of well-being.

18 On the concept of ‘alienation’ in Marxist theory, see Ollman (1971); on ‘anomie’, see Durkheim (1984).


20 For the National Heritage Council’s reporting on the ubuntu imbizo, see http://www.uhurucom.co.za/root_article.html and Mlambo-Ngcuka (2006).

21 For the philosophical origins of the concept of an African Renaissance, see Ramose (2003a).

22 On the issue of ‘culturally compatible’ politics (democracy) and development in post-independence Africa, see Osabu-Kle (2000).

23 Both Ramose (1999) and, somewhat reluctantly, van Binsbergen (2001) acknowledge that the intellectual and political process of appropriating ubuntu for purposes of government in Southern Africa could be extended to inform debates on problems associated with globalization.


25 The Malaysian experience with sustaining economic development in a divided society has received considerable attention in South Africa (e.g., van der Westhuizen 2002).