

**UNRAVELING  
THE (UNDER)  
DEVELOPMENT  
COMPLEX  
OR  
TOWARDS A  
POST-(UNDER)  
DEVELOPMENT  
INTER  
DEPENDENCE**

AN ODE TO WALTER RODNEY'S  
"HOW EUROPE UNDERDEVELOPED AFRICA"  
50 YEARS ON 1972-2022

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# CONCEPT

## ANECDOTE I

Imagine there is a pandemic that has brought Europe and America – the epitome of the “developed world” to its knees. No, that’s too absurd a thing to imagine. Imagine it is a pandemic of global scale that has brought the whole world, not to its knees, but lying on its belly – an even more absurd imagination. Just imagine hundreds of filled up trucks in Italy and other countries carrying corpses of COVID victims in search of burial grounds for them. Imagine mass graves and burials in Central Park in NY. Imagine new strains of a mutated virus emanating from South Africa, the Amazonas, England and more. Imagine a world in lockdown struggling to contain a virus gone wild. And imagine the disbelief in the minds of people of the “developed world” who are used to seeing diseases ravage other places on TV and wondering in dismay: how could this happen to us? Imagine that when this all started, the catch slogan was #weareallinthistogether. We all marvelled at the sudden compassion, the care, the sudden sense of humanity, as people in North America, Europe, or Australia begged for the world to stay in solidarity. In the midst of disaster, in an extremely dire and precarious moment, there was no longer a separation between rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped, as the virus wasn’t ready to respect man-made borders or systems of classification. In the meanwhile African states like Madagascar had started developing possible medications against Covid that were not recognised by the “developed” WHO.<sup>1</sup> But then imagine that when there was suddenly a dim light at the end of the tunnel – one, then two and more vaccines were found – then came the old deep-rooted instincts of capitalist possession. Imagine the slogan of #weareallinthistogether crumbling in its parts and the word together was no longer to be found. It was about us first. The rich first. The “developed world” first. And whether the rest of the world gets vaccines is as secondary as it can be.

In a thoroughly researched broadcast on Deutschlandfunk radio written by Anne Demmer, Marc Engelhardt and Dunja Sadaqi with the title “Global

distribution of corona vaccine – Vaccine justice remains an illusion” (Globale Verteilung von Corona-Impfstoff – Impfgerechtigkeit bleibt eine Illusion), the authors elaborate on how the WHO’s plan to fairly distribute corona vaccinations globally has already failed before it even properly started.<sup>2</sup>

The “developed” countries have reserved for themselves a large part and are still fighting for even more vaccination doses, while the “underdeveloped” countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America are deprived of the possibility of inoculating their populations. It is worth remembering that when the debate on where, how and on whom to do the initial trials for a possible covid vaccine began sometime as the pandemic was declared, many a physician in France and other “developed” countries had proposed for the tests on possible vaccines to be done in Africa. In the radio feature “Global distribution of corona vaccine - Vaccine justice remains an illusion” the authors elaborate on how the WHO had prepared for a fair vaccine distribution by demanding all countries in the world to pay into a common fund named Covax with the intention of acquiring bundled vaccines for everyone. This WHO plan was shot down the drain as “developed” countries opted to make bilateral agreements that profited their nations. In the words of WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus: “While they speak of equitable access, some states prefer bilateral agreements with vaccine manufacturers. They try to push their way forward and thus drive prices up.” As a member of the Moroccan Covid-19 scientific committee, Azeddine Ibrahim, says in the article: “All the vaccine doses that are currently being produced have already been sold – because the Americans, the Europeans have bought more than they need. Most of the vaccines have been bought from rich countries.” And Azeddine Ibrahim went on to say “The more the virus can spread in Africa, the greater the risk that new virus variants will develop against which today’s vaccinations are not effective.” This is the basis of an overt vaccination inequality orchestrated along power lines, along the gradients of “developed” to “underdeveloped”.

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**S A V V Y CONTEMPORARY**  
**THE LABORATORY OF FORM-IDEAS**

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S A V V Y Contemporary: The Laboratory of Form-Ideas Unraveling The (Under)Development Complex or: Towards a Post-(Under)Development Interdependence

<sup>1</sup> Madagascar slams WHO for not endorsing its herbal cure: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/madagascar-slams-who-for-not-endorsing-its-herbal-cure/1836905>  
<sup>2</sup> Anne Demmer, Marc Engelhardt und Dunja Sadaqi: “Globale Verteilung von Corona-Impfstoff - Impfgerechtigkeit bleibt eine Illusion”, *Deutschlandfunk*, 02.02.2021, [https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/globale-verteilung-von-corona-impfstoff-impfgerechtigkeit.724.de.html?drum:article\\_id=491870](https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/globale-verteilung-von-corona-impfstoff-impfgerechtigkeit.724.de.html?drum:article_id=491870) (Accessed: 22.02.2021).

## A N E C D O T E I I

I tried to count them. I gave up at a hundred and something.

It wasn't even a whole night's trip. Just from 4am heading to Yaoundé from Douala. And on the way back I spared myself the trouble of counting.

But thousands of tree stems, timbers – some so big they wouldn't fit in the frame of my camera and even bigger than the jeep in which I sat – are abducted from the natural forests in Cameroon and transported by trucks directly to the port to be shipped from an “underdeveloped world” to a “developed world”. From which paper, furniture or otherwise are made and sold and sometimes even exported again to the “underdeveloped world” for horrendous prices. This exploitation of the natural rain forest – sometimes trees of 700 to 1000 years old – happens under the watchful eyes of complacent citizens who care more for a beer than a lost tree, and obviously in coalition with the too often corrupt governments in power that care more for their Swiss accounts than the wellbeing of their peoples, let alone the wellbeing of planet earth. According to the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife (2018), almost 46% of Cameroon's total area consists of forests of which 0.1% is planted forest. According to timber trade portal, “forest land cover in Cameroon has declined for the last 25 years with a loss of around 1.0% forest cover per year, which is one of the highest deforestation rates in the Congo Basin.”<sup>3</sup> Let's pause to acknowledge that these are the official figures, and imagine what the real situation is like.

According to Alison Hoare and the timber trade portal, “the main drivers of deforestation in Cameroon are (i) conversion to agriculture, from both large and medium-scale plantations, as well as smallholders, (ii) fuel-wood harvesting, (iii) mining and (iv) infrastructure development. Unsustainable and illegal logging is also to blame for the degradation of Cameroon's forests. Illegal logging has long been recognised as a significant problem in Cameroon. Concerns have been raised over the misuse of certain logging permits in the country, and the lack of effective regulation and law enforcement.”<sup>4</sup> It goes without saying that the consequences of deforestation is not only catastrophic for the “underdeveloped world”, but the consequences also negate the partitioning of the world into “underdeveloped” and “developed” by manifesting its repercussions on a global scale. The echoes of the destruction of the Amazonas or the Tropical Rain Forests are heard in the North and South poles. Because of deforestation, there is a substantial loss of animal and plant species caused by the loss of their habitat. The rampant destruction of forests world-wide leads to an increase in the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, as a result of fewer trees to absorb carbon dioxide. Deforestation also means a deregulation of

the water cycle in the atmosphere, as much as it leads to soil erosion and flooding, and since the hosts and habitats of countless species, including viruses, are destroyed in the processes of deforestation, they do have to find new hosts.

Anecdotes I and II are connected for the obvious reasons stated by Jeff Tollefson in his paper “Why Deforestation and Extinctions Make Pandemics More Likely,” which showed that with deforestation some species become extinct, but those – like rats and bats – that survive have the tendency to carry dangerous pathogens to their new hosts: humans.<sup>5</sup> As Peter Daszak, zoologist at the non-governmental organization EcoHealth Alliance, points out in the article, “most efforts to prevent the spread of new diseases tend to focus on vaccine development, early diagnosis and containment, but that's like treating the symptoms without addressing the underlying cause.”<sup>6</sup>

The other common denominator of anecdotes I and II is the question of, the myth of, the consequences of the categorisation of the world in “developed” and “underdeveloped”. If there was ever any person who profoundly understood the constructs of “development” vs “underdevelopment” and the machinations of the “developed” towards the “underdeveloped” to maintain each other at their places, if there was ever anyone who understood that the concepts of “development” and “underdevelopment” were ingrained in the logics of exploitation, profit, disenfranchisement and disprivileging then it was the seminal, revolutionary and visionary Guyanese activist, academic, historian and writer Walter Anthony Rodney (23 March 1942 – 13 June 1980) who published his seminal book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* in 1972.

This project is a commemoration of this fundamental piece of critical and enlightening writing, as well as a possibility for us to deliberate on a “post-(under) development” world.

## U N D E R D E V E L O P M E N T — D E V E L O P M E N T — P O S T - D E V E L O P M E N T

To be born in a world labeled “underdeveloped” is to be born and then placed in a dilapidated coach. Not that being born in a cart is a problem, but if the horse meant to pull the coach is not only conditioned to be slow and inefficient but also tired and worn out, then the situation is what we call in West Africa “kataberre”. Even worse, there seems to be a race at stake. And the competitor in that race has not only set the rules and modalities, the playground and medium, but they are also the

referee. And by the way, the broken coach in which you find yourself was “gifted” to you by your competitor – in a gesture of “goodwill”. As if that is not enough, the competitor is in the comfort of an SSC Tuatara in the possession of 1750 horse powers. And again, as if that were still not enough, your opponent has placed themselves several miles ahead of you before the race begins.

But because your competitor is not only the one setting the rules of the game and cheating by putting themselves ahead, they are also in possession of the tools to inform the world that this situation is in fact a level playing field par excellence. All is just good. Plus, they have the sheer audacity to deprive your tired, hungry, maltreated horse of its last bucket of food, not because your competitor is hungry, but because they would prefer to use the food as bio fuel for their vehicle. In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney doesn't only lay bear the disparity of this race that was never meant to be played on a level playing ground, but also debunks the denigrating and demeaning narratives perpetuated by the opponent that accompanied the exploitation and holding back that what was later to be called “underdeveloped”. He takes the reader on a historical exposé of the African continent before the Middle Passage, before the violent and inhumane machinations of the transatlantic slave enterprise. By pointing at a vast range of examples like the Kaffa cultivators, the Khoisan hunter-gatherers, the nomadic Fulani herdsmen or the Bozo fisherman, Rodney succeeded in elaborating on a vastness and richness of African civilisations that hardly featured in the books of those who claimed a dearth of civilisations and development in Africa. In pointing at the advanced artistic practices, technological sophistication and industrial prowess, architectural accomplishments found in places like Timbuktu with renowned centres of learning and universities of the 14th century and mosques that date back to the 10th century, or the kingdom of Benin with its bronze sculptures, or Fatimid dynasty with its industries that excelled in sugar refining, porcelain-crafting, metal-works, paper-, textiles-, or leather-making, or the monumental architecture and sociological structures of Great Zimbabwe, Rodney further proved that Africa was never a terra nullius. One can safely say that before the coming of the Europeans to what is now called the Americas, Asia, Australia and the African continent, there were a plethora of civilisations and developments that only began their demise with that encounter.

*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* does not only reveal the material advancements prior to colonisation, but also elaborates on the complex sociocultural structures, some of which were not always good and perpetrated

hierarchies, class structures and exploitation. So, while Rodney identified the precocious innovations in the arts, culture, education and technology in Africa, he didn't fail to mention how powerful elites and the aristocratic class indulged in exploitations of the lower classes including domestic and chattel slaves. He points out in several ways that prior to the break of the transatlantic slave trade, Africa and Europe were at parr with each other in many ways – with African kings having honorary positions in European courts or became knights in European feudal society – and that parity was stalled by the transatlantic slave trade. Thanks to vicious weaponry like guns and shipping technology, and ideologies that allowed for the dehumanisation of people to attain profit, the slave enterprise became a catalyst that determined what would be developed and underdeveloped. This complex of a triangle meant eliminating millions of indigenous peoples in the Americas through varied forms of genocidal activities including diseases, acquiring indentured labourers and eventually enslaving African men, women and children.

“They engaged in buying cotton cloth in India to exchange for slaves in Africa to mine gold in Central and South America. Part of the gold in the Americas would then be used to purchase spices and silks from the Far East. The concept of metropole and dependency automatically came into existence when parts of Africa were caught up in the web of international commerce,” writes Rodney.<sup>7</sup> The consequences were vital, and had an impact not only in the diminution of brains and labour force, but also in the stagnation of technology due to the imposed trades: “When European cloth became dominant on the African market, it meant that African producers were cut off from the increasing demand. The craft producers either abandoned their tasks or they continued on the same small hand-worked instruments to create styles and pieces for localized markets. Therefore there was what can be called “technological arrest” or stagnation or even regression. The abandonment of traditional iron smelting in most parts of Africa is probably the most important instance of technological repression.”<sup>8</sup>

Rodney's well researched and trenchant historical, sociological and socio-economic report also takes us through the institutionalisation of colonialism, the partitioning of peoples, the imposition of languages and destruction of knowledges and cultures, and how all these still have repercussions in the present moment of 1971/72, as much as the present moment of 2021/22. Rodney also takes us through the decolonial movements and era, and does not fail to call out the generation of African leaders who became accomplices with their former colonial rulers in the continuous exploitation of their citizens. Which is to say that the big promises of the “missions civilisatrice” that served as the “excuses” to colonise, as well as the hope or say the claim of colonisation as a means of bringing better education, modernity, technology, and eventually

<sup>3</sup> Overview on *Timber Trade Portal*: <https://www.timbertradeportal.com/countries/cameroon> (Accessed 22.02.2021)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Jeff Tollefson. “Why Deforestation and Extinctions Make Pandemics More Likely”, *Nature*, 07.08.2020: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02341-1> (Accessed 22.02.2021)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Cape Town, Dakar, Nairobi, Oxford: Pambazuka Press 2012 (orig: 1972)), 76.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

development never really materialised, except infrastructures like roads and railways that actually were built in the first place to facilitate the exportation of resources from the inlands to the coasts to be shipped to Europe and beyond, as we saw in Anecdote II. As Rodney puts it “in other words, capitalism in the form of colonialism failed to perform in Africa the tasks which it had performed in Europe in changing social relations and liberating the forces of production.”<sup>9</sup>

All the while, in the midst of exploiting and making shameless profits at the costs of people’s lives, the colonised societies were promised this was for their own good, for their freedom and that “free trade” was the solution to all the world’s problems. One is tempted to think of Mr Burnham’s answer to Raja Neel Rattan in Amitav Ghosh’s novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008): “The war, when it comes, will not be for opium. It will be for a principle: for freedom – for freedom of trade and for the freedom of the Chinese people. Free trade is a right conferred on man by God, and its principles apply as much to opium as to any other article of trade. More so, perhaps, since in its absence, many millions of natives would be denied the lasting advantages of British influence.”<sup>10</sup> Mr Burnham went on to claim, quoting a friend, that “‘Jesus Christ is Free Trade and Free Trade is Jesus Christ.’ Truer words, I believe, were never spoken. If it is God’s will that opium be used as an instrument to open China to his teachings, then so be it.”<sup>11</sup>

Which takes us literally and metaphorically to the notion of dependence in the complex of “development” and “underdevelopment”. Be it dependence on drugs, on currencies, on health facility support in times of crisis, dependence on market economy/trade and banking, political support or otherwise. It is this dependence that frames and guides the myths and constructs of “development” and “underdevelopment”.

As the dependency theorists around Raul Prebisch and others had already pointed out in the 1950s and beyond, to understand economic underdevelopment one needs to comprehend the dependencies on and constraints imposed by global economic and political structures. According to dependency theory, the world is divided into core countries, periphery of the core countries, core of the periphery countries, and periphery of the periphery countries. This division means also an international division of labour whereby the core countries are those fit to do the brain work, do research etc, while the periphery of the periphery countries are fit to do just cheap manual labour and provide the world market with raw materials — often enough produced by child labour under the most unacceptable conditions. These raw materials from the periphery countries are then treated and transformed in the core countries to finished goods, which are then resented to the periphery countries and sold for exorbitantly high prices, depleting the already low capital in these countries that was intended for their industries, health and social

systems and general infrastructures. This four step class distinction has the ultimate goal of exploiting the masses of the so-called “underdeveloped world” in a process of effectuating global capitalism. To put it bluntly, this international/global economic system is meant to keep certain countries developed and prevents other countries from developing.

## DEBUNKING THE MYTH – IN HIS OWN WORDS

In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney attempts to give meaning to concepts. In so doing, he could unveil the myths that surrounded certain political and economic concepts. Unveil. Or maybe he placed a thorn in the balloon. Fundamental in this effort was his definition of what underdevelopment really is: “Obviously, underdevelopment is not absence of development, because every people have developed in one way or another and to a greater or lesser extent.”<sup>12</sup>

“A second and even more indispensable component of modern underdevelopment is that it expresses a particular relationship of exploitation: namely, the exploitation of one country by another. All of the countries named as ‘underdeveloped’ in the world are exploited by others; and the underdevelopment with which the world is now pre-occupied is a product of capitalist, imperialist and colonialist exploitation. African and Asian societies were developing independently until they were taken over directly or indirectly by the capitalist powers. When that happened, exploitation increased and the export of surplus ensued, depriving the societies of the benefit of their natural resources and labour. That is an integral part of underdevelopment in the contemporary sense.”<sup>13</sup> “In a way, underdevelopment is a paradox. Many parts of the world that are naturally rich are actually poor and parts that are not so well off in wealth of soil and sub-soil are enjoying the highest standards of living. When the capitalists from the developed parts of the world try to explain this paradox, they often make it sound as though there is something ‘God given’ about the situation.”<sup>14</sup>

And in reflecting about development Rodney writes: “Development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Some of these are virtually moral categories and are difficult to evaluate – depending as they do on the age in which one lives, one’s class origins, and one’s personal code of what is right and what is wrong. (...)

<sup>10</sup> Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2008), 115.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>12</sup> Rodney, 13.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

The relations which develop within any given social group are crucial to an understanding of the society as a whole: Freedom, responsibility, skill, etc. have real meaning only in terms of the relations of men in society.”<sup>15</sup>

“At the level of social groups, therefore, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. Much of human history has been a fight for survival against natural hazards and against real and imagined human enemies. Development in the past has always meant the increase in the ability to guard the independence of the social group and indeed to infringe upon the freedom of others – something that often came about irrespective of the will of the persons within the societies involved.”<sup>16</sup>

“More often than not, the term ‘development’ is used in an exclusive economic sense – the justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of other social features. What then is economic development? A society develops economically as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment. This capacity for dealing with the environment is dependent on the extent to which they understand the laws of nature (science), on the extent to which they put that understanding into practice by devising tools (technology), and on the manner in which work is organised. Taking a long-term view, it can be said that there has been constant economic development within human society since the origins of man, because man has multiplied enormously his capacity to win a living from nature.”<sup>17</sup>

Assassins of conversation they bury the voice they assassinate, in the beloved grave of the voice, never to be silent. I sit in the presence of rain in the sky’s wild noise of the feet of some who not only, but also, kill the origin of rain, the ankle of the whore, as fastidious as the great fight, the wife of water. Risker, risk. I intend to turn a sky of tears, for you.

"For Walter Rodney" by Martin Carter

## IMAGINING A POST- (UNDER) DEVELOPMENT WORLD

In our lifetime, like in the lifetime of those before, we have been told that some are “underdeveloped” because of the desolate P O L I T I C A L , democratic and governmental situations. Imagine the hundreds of coup d’etats that have been carried out in “underdeveloped countries” supported by the US, French, British or other Western administrations. Notable ones include the U.S. government supporting the 1971 coup in Bolivia to topple President Juan José

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Torres just because he convened the "Asamblea del Pueblo" (People's Assembly or Popular Assembly), or the 1973 CIA orchestrated overthrow of democratically elected president of Chile Salvador Allende, or the 1960 elimination of Congolese prime minister Patrice Lumumba with the support of the USA and Belgium, or the 1987 French orchestrated coup and murder of Burkina Faso's president Thomas Sankara. To name but just a few. In all these examples, the presidents put then in place in these countries were never meant to pursue democracy, but facilitate and lubricate the processes of exploitation of their countries.

Imagine a country like Cameroon ruled by a single president since 1982, and not only backed by all French governments since then, but also permitted to massacre its own citizens under the watchful eyes of all international political bodies. All the while, “developmental aid” and huge loans are given to these same corrupt leaders to build football stadiums, hospitals, schools and roads that are never really built. Although these are facts known to many or all, the loans are still given out making the countries indebted for generations, as a means of prolonging relations of dependence.

In our lifetime, like in the lifetime of those before, we have been told that some are “underdeveloped” because of the poor A G R I C U L T U R A L infrastructure and dependence on producing food products to be exported to far off countries or importing food products that they could actually produce themselves.

Imagine the poultry farmers in Cameroon who breed free land, natural and ecological chickens. A few years back, these Cameroonian poultry farmers would sell a healthy chicken for 5.000 FCFA. But today few would buy that same chicken for 4.000 FCFA. But why? Decades of over-subsvention of the agricultural sector in Europe has led to massive overproduction. The surpluses of sugar, wheat and even chicken bred under terrible hygiene conditions in tight cages and have never seen the light of day are now shipped for dumping prices to Africa and Asia. Before the chicken arrives in Bamenda, Cameroon, it is frozen and thawed severally such that the chicken parts are sometimes germ-ridden. But because they are shipped en masse and offered at dumping prices (ca 2.000 FCFA) way below the local costs of healthy ecological chicken, customers opt for the cheap. Having been brainwashed that everything that comes from the “developed world” is better than what is locally produced, the customers choose an option that implicitly crumbles the local economy.

In our lifetime, like in the lifetime of those before, we have been told that some are “underdeveloped” because they can’t do M O D E R N A R C H I T E C T U R E . From Bogota, Columbia, to Yojakarta, Indonesia, to Douala, Cameroon, all tropical

cities, one finds cement and glass buildings. Houses built as mimics of a Western architectural modernity. In such tropical spaces in which the temperatures outside could go up as far as 40°C in the day, cement and glass buildings allow for 40°C inside. Therefore enormous amounts of energy is invested in the cooling of poorly constructed buildings without a sensitivity to materiality – in such places where people have historically built with adobe, sand, wood or raffia – only to attain a skewed notion of modernity and “development”.

In our lifetime, like in the lifetime of those before, we have been told that some are “underdeveloped” because they have no KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION. To be “developed” means to be assimilated within Western technology, arts, philosophies and sciences. In postcolonial Nigeria, like in Brazil, it is more likely to learn about European and American histories than to learn about Nigerian or Brazilian histories. While William Shakespeare, Charlotte Brontë, James Joyce or George Orwell are regulars on the curriculum in schools in Cameroon or Zimbabwe, it is rather unlikely to find Bessie Head, Ama Ata Aidoo, Chinua Achebe, Mongo Beti, or Dambudzo Marechera on any school curriculum in Europe. A strive for “development” in education has come to mean teaching pupils in tropical areas of the world an alphabet that says A is for apple, and S is for snow, while neither do apples grow nor does snow fall in their areas. A strive for “development” has also come to mean teaching the fundamentals of neoliberal capitalist economics à la Chicago Boys — the group of notorious Chilean economists of the 1970s and 80s, most of whom were students of under some of the torchbearers of neoliberal economy, Milton Friedman and Arnold Harberger at the Department of Economics of the University of Chicago and the economics department at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile.

In our lifetime, like in the lifetime of those before, we have been told that some are “underdeveloped” because they have no LANGUAGE S but just dialects, and to have a language one must speak Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, German or some other Western colonial language. One has no RELIGION, for to have a religion one must be a follower of one of the Abrahamic religions, and better still Christianity in particular. Essentially to be “developed” would mean being assimilated into the CULTURE of those considered purported to be “developed”.

These give one no other room than to understand the notions of “development” and “underdevelopment” as racialized, classicist and imperial concepts that are in place to act as the continuum of the colonial exploitative enterprises.

“These systems of classification became the

crux of the projects for bringing “civilization,” “modernity,” and, later on, “development” to much of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In short, there is no modernity anywhere without this coloniality; coloniality also implies a pervasive Eurocentrism—a hegemonic representation and mode of knowing that claims universality for itself, derived from Europe’s claimed position as the center.”<sup>18</sup>

Arturo Escobar

The project THE MYTH OF DEVELOPMENT — THE UNDERDEVELOPMENT COMPLEX takes its cue from and celebrates Walter Rodney’s *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, while asking the question: HOW CAN WE IMAGINE A POST-(UNDER) DEVELOPMENT WORLD? By relating Rodney’s seminal work to the dependency theorists, as much as to the post-development advocates like Ivan Illich, Gustavo Esteva, Wolfgang Sachs, Arturo Escobar or Majid Rahnema, to the struggles of ecofeminists of degrowth like Maria Mies, Amaia Pérez Orozco, Chandra Talpade Mohanty among many others, this project is a daring effort to analyse the status quo and imagine a world that doesn’t exist in the binary of “development” and “underdevelopment”.

The project will be choreographed to manifest itself as a two-fold series of research, exhibitions, performances, lectures, workshops around the myths of “development” and “underdevelopment” as well as imagining and crafting a Post-(under)development world.

“If Walter Rodney’s scholarly and activist contributions exemplified what was most demanded at that particular historical moment – he was assassinated because he believed in the real possibility of radical political change, including in Guyana, his natal land – his ideas are even more valuable today at a time when capitalism has so forcibly asserted its permanency, and when once existing organized opposing forces (not only the socialist community of nations, but also the non-aligned nations) have been virtually eliminated. Those of us who refuse to concede that global capitalism represents the planet’s best future and that Africa and the former third world are destined to remain forever ensconced in the poverty of ‘underdevelopment’ are confronted with this crucial question: how can we encourage radical critiques of capitalism as integral to struggles against racism as we also advance the recognition that we cannot envision the dismantling of capitalism as long as the

structures of racism remain intact?”<sup>19</sup>

## PART I: TOOLS OF MASS SUBVERSION

This first part of the project embraces our reality. We who have been relegated to the trenches of “underdevelopment” have created technologies, sciences, arts that do not only reflect our quotidian, but also are fundamental for the subversions of the terrors of “development”. We have misappropriated technologies and sciences that were imposed on us as means of becoming “developed”, only for us to pervert these sciences and technologies for our own purposes. We, the Chinese, and Nigerians, have adopted the tools of counterfeit and forgery as our weapons of mass subversion. Such that, if Apple creates the newest iPhone technology smartphone with one SIM card, we will counterfeit that same technology and produce a similar smartphone with two or three SIM cards and call it xPhone.

## PART II: THE POST-(UNDER) DEVELOPMENT TURN

This second part will bring together artists, activists, scholars and producers like the Senegalese permaculturalists around Goran N’diaye, the Cameroonian green house movement around Roland Fomundam, cooperatives like Somankidi Coura around Bouba Touré, Proceso de Comunidades Negras in Colombia, Zapatistas in Mexico and many others to deliberate on the shortcomings of the principles of “development” and “underdevelopment”. The larger aim of the project is to bring together stakeholders physically, digitally, on radio, as well as other platforms to draw a charter or manifesto to break out of the bondage of “development” and “underdevelopment”. What is at stake is obviously an aesthetic, a philosophical, a scientific, an economic manifestation of Post-(under)development that is translatable from ideas to practice.

The post in Post-(under)development is not meant as a negation of development in the sense of “an event constituting a new stage in a changing situation,” but a breaking free from an ideology of development that is framed around a gradient of colonial power and ingrained in colonial capitalist structures of dependency. Post-(under)development is the negation of the subordination and denigration that is connoted in and with “under”, as no peoples are or should ever be “under” anything or anyone. Post-(under)development is the emancipation from

the imperialist logic of extortion and profit of one at the detriment of the other. Post-(under)development embraces inter- and intra-dependencies as modes of being together in a world in which our well-being, our breath is contingent on the well-being and breath of the other. Post-(under)development is an advocacy of collaborations and cohabitations of different kinds and species rather than the competition and antagonisms between kinds and species. Post-(under) development is an acknowledgement that with each tree that is destroyed in the Amazonas or the tropical rainforest, the reverberations are palpable as far as the North and South poles. Post-(under)development is a radical refusal of the industrialised capitalist economic model as the only way and a fervent repudiation of a universalised Eurocentrism as the sole way of being in the world. And finally, Post-(under)development is the embracing of the plethora of knowledges, arts, sciences, technologies, philosophies that facilitate our situated being in the world with and in relation to others.

## PART III: RADIO AS A POST-UNDERDEVELOPMENT PLATFORM

Radio can represent an effective and heuristic Post-(under)development platform. From its very onset radio has made and has erased the difference between “developed” and “underdeveloped” spaces. In one nodge, one can listen to BBC radio as much as African Nr. 1 radio on short waves. The proximity of the so-called “developed” and “underdeveloped” has never been closer. Radio has revealed itself to be a perfect medium to create coalitions between activists, as a mode of resistance and a physical as much as an immaterial space to develop tactics of listening and networks of solidarity. A place of counterinsurgency and of experimentation, an infrathin territory and a threshold, navigating possibilities between the digital and the non digital technologies.

With this project we aim at shaping an on-air-network of activists, sonic agitators, scholars, artists and designers, political economists and practitioners, to share knowledge across languages and sonority and imagine and shape together a post developmental age. A pluriverse of interdependent imaginations, visions and strategies, away from capitalist and industrial productivity and toward transformative conviviality.

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung

<sup>18</sup> Escobar, Arturo. 2018. *Designs for the Pluriverse. Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

<sup>19</sup> Angela Davis, “Walter Rodney’s Legacy”, Foreword to the 2018 edition of Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London, New York: Verso Books, 2018), xi-xii.14 Ibid, 20.

## MORE INFORMATION

savvy-contemporary.com

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S A V V Y Contemporary—The laboratory of form-ideas is an art space, discursive platform, place for good talks, foods and drinks—a space for conviviality. S A V V Y Contemporary situates itself at the threshold of notions of the West and non-West, to understand and deconstruct them. S A V V Y Contemporary has realized a kaleidoscope of art exhibitions, performances, film screenings, lectures, concerts, readings, talks, dances. S A V V Y Contemporary has established a participatory archive on German colonial history, a performance arts documentation centre, a library, a residency program, as well as educational projects with schools. The art space engages in its neighborhood's history and socio-political realities which are entangled with the reflections and discourses of the project.

S A V V Y Contemporary is Elena Agudio Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock Bona Bell Cecilia Bien Onur Çimen Bilge Emir Sagal Farah Billy Fowo Raisa Galofre Juan Pablo García Sossa Hubert Gromny Hajra Haider Karrar Anna Jäger Kimani Joseph Aditi Kapur Laura Klöckner Kelly Krugman Mokia Laisin Rafal Lazar António Mendes Kamila Metwaly Daniellis Hernandez Nancy Naser Al Deen Arlette-Louise Ndakoze Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung Abhishek Nilamber Matthias Rademacher Lema Sikod Meghna Singh Lili Somogyi Ola Zielnińska

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