



Developing Africa: Development Discourse(s) in Late Colonialism. Vienna: Gerald Hödl, Martina Kopf, Department of African Studies, University of Vienna, 13.01.2011-15.01.2011.

Reviewed by Sara Elmer

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (March, 2011)

Developing Africa: Development Discourse(s) in Late Colonialism

The history of development and foreign aid is a burgeoning field of research, not least because it offers a fruitful frame to investigate the relations between Africa and Europe. In agreement with many other authors, the workshop organizers Martina Kopf (Vienna) and Gerald Hödl (Vienna) date the beginning of 'development' as a central concept in North-South relations back to the interwar and decolonization period and not to Truman's famous Point-Four speech. In order to shed light on the changing meanings of development over the course of time, they invited scholars from various disciplines to discuss and compare discursive and non-discursive practices of development from ca. 1918-1960 at the workshop 'Developing Africa: Development Discourse(s) in Late Colonialism'. The workshop is part of the interdisciplinary research project 'Colonial Concepts of Development in Africa' conducted by Gerald Hödl, Martin Kopf and Walter Schicho (Department of African Studies, University of Vienna).

The workshop opened with two keynote lectures on discourse analysis as a tool to study the global development endeavour. The political scientist ARAM ZIAI (Hamburg) and the linguist FRANCOISE DUFOUR (Montpellier) both agreed with the workshop's presumption of the colonial roots of development discourse but looked at development as a rather flexible concept and raised the question of discontinuities in the post World War II period. Referring to Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Ziai tracked the archaeology of the notion of development from its colonial use in the interwar

period to its mainstream understandings in the heights of the Cold War. He argued that against the background of the historical context (Great Depression, World Wars) and changing strategic intentions (anti-imperialism, Cold War), the discourse clearly shifted its focus from people to regions and from biological to economic differences. Backwardness was no more a question of race but of culture and technology. Dufour agreed with the shift in the after-war period but saw the postcolonial understanding of development still in the same underlying rules of formation as the colonial discourse. She made her point clear with the figure of the savage who was no more a mere object but became a subject who 'wants' and 'intends'. Nevertheless, the savage has not become a full subject yet as he is still not 'doing'. Further, Dufour pointed out the shift from a predominantly intransitive to a transitive meaning of development in the postcolonial period, an argument which was asserted in several other presentations throughout the workshop. In her conclusion, Dufour stressed the dilemma of the notion of 'development' that went through the whole course of the workshop: development was and is a very vague and therefore confusing concept that was not only used in many different ways by practitioners and policy makers but also by contemporary researchers including the ones attending this workshop. Yet, as ANDREAS ECKERT (Berlin) made clear in the concluding roundtable session, the term development cannot be avoided, simply because there is no alternative word with an adequate meaning. Furthermore he pointed out that there is no

value in looking for a sharp definition of development nor does one solve the dilemma by hyphenating it or using plural forms. But there is a need for constant reflection on its use when one wants to apply it as an analytical category in academia.

The manifold perspectives on and understandings of development that occurred during the workshop shall be illustrated by some of the papers presented.

In view of the mainly economic meaning of development in the early decades of the 20th century, the *mise en valeur* of the colonized territories gained special attention. Be it through infrastructure projects (EWALD BLOCHER, Munich), agriculture (JUHANI KOPONEN, Helsinki / SVEN SPEEK, Bochum), labour market regulations (CYRUS VEESER, Waltham / SUSAN ZIMMERMANN, Budapest) or health care (WALTER BRUCHHAUSEN, Bonn), the discussed initiatives for colonial development claimed to be beneficial for both the colonisers and the colonized. The cultural and social implications of such economic measures were, for example, pointed out by Veeseer in his presentation on the debates about the African *homo economicus*, the discursive construction of the *lazy African* and its correlation with the universal policy of forced labour. This entanglement of economic, humanitarian and racist discourses was confirmed by Bruchhausen. He presented on the *medicalisation* of the development discourse in the early 20th century, when health care schemes were first introduced in Tanganyika in order to provide more efficient labourers. From the colonizer's perspective, the introduction of western medicine required a radical break with previous local practices of health care. Later on, health became a major topic in development, not only as a precondition and result, but also as an explicit goal of development. Bruchhausen also showed the clear racist implications of the medicalisation of development with the example of the then fashionable explanations of African *backwardness* by brain deficiencies or other medical problems.

In reference to Veeseer, MAMADOU FALL (Dakar) called in his keynote the Mouride brotherhood a kind of African *homo economicus*. The Mourides, followers of an Islamic Sufi order, are very influential in Senegalese trade and politics since French colonialism. Apart from the Mourides, Fall presented some more insights on development in West Africa from non-colonizer's perspectives and also asked for the impact of French colonialism on postcolonial development. In regard to this question, the discussant HENNING MELBERT (Uppsala) provoca-

tively pointed on the similarities in the language of postcolonial emancipation and male colonial chauvinism. In order to better understand such postcolonial continuities not only race but also class divides are important to consider, argued Melbert.

Only a few other papers dealt with a non-European perspective on colonial development. SUZANNE HANSON (Leeds) looked at indigenous responses to colonial development initiatives in British East Africa, especially at the rise of anti-development voices among African elites. EMMA HUNTER (Cambridge) also analyzed how the concept of development was used by both sides, by the supporters and the opponents of colonial rule. In an enlightening study of the term *maendeleo*, which is the most common word in Swahili for development, she illustrated how the political function of *maendeleo* remained basically the same in the Tanzanian public discourse even though the word's meaning had changed over time.

ROBERT SHENTON (Kingston/Ontario) highlighted in his keynote the important factor of surplus population in the British Empire. While the surplus population and social unrests led to the invention of social welfare schemes in the metropole, the response in the colonial peripheries was *development*. Although colonial development showed clear links to social welfare policies in Britain in its origins, it got more and more depoliticized and divorced from struggles for social welfare. With a different focus, REGINA FINSTERHÄLZL (Berlin) underlined the entanglements between the internal civilizing mission towards the British working class and the colonial development policy in late colonialism in her presentation on the socialist Fabian Colonial Bureau.

Against the background of these imperial policies, several papers focused on early development experts. JOSEPH M. HODGE (Morgantown) identified two competing schools within the British tradition of tropical agricultural research, the *human* and the *technical*. While the first believed in the necessity to build upon local practices and knowledge of agriculture, the latter promoted modern technologies to accelerate the agricultural revolution. By tracing the expert's careers and networks, Hodge showed how many of them continued their work in postcolonial development agencies and how the same conflicting schools became visible again in the debates on the green revolution. GERALD HÄDL (Vienna) demonstrated that not only technical experts, but also the social scientist development studies, had their colonial roots. HUBERTUS BÄSCHEL (Gießen) raised another aspect of colonial development which had been absent in

the workshop, the gender question. With the examples of three female colonial development experts – Audrey Richards, Lucy Mair and Margery Perham – Büschel stressed on the engendered language in the female development discourse and worked out some recurring themes such as the ‘white motherhood’ for Africa.

Although the workshop hosted a broad range of research projects, the overall focus was still very much a Eurocentric one. In the final roundtable discussion ODILE GOERG (Paris) addressed the need for in-depth studies of local development discourses despite the methodological difficulties. DAVID SIMON (London) agreed with Goerg’s consideration and suggested to look also on South-South transfer processes and on moving people and ideas between different places of the empire. Gerald Härdl not only noticed the Eurocentric scope of the conference but even a very strong focus on British colonial policies and actors. Few papers made references to French or German colonialism but only one explicitly dealt with another colonial power, namely CAIO SIMOES DE ARAËJO (Budapest) and IOLANDA VASILE’s (Coimbra) presentation on the Portuguese Empire. Andreas Eckert detected some more blind spots of the workshop such as the issue of violence, the agency of the various people working ‘on the ground’ or the ‘visual turn’ and power of images in development.

In reference to the roundtable title *The Past in the Present*, the workshop was concluded with a short discussion on the relevance of history in today’s development endeavour. Although there is a general agreement about the importance of history, serious historical research is rarely considered by decision makers as it obstructs the aims of practitioners. But instead of lamenting this deficiency of development policy, the workshop’s participants thought their own risk of too narrowly grounding their research in a secluded past and of neglecting the present context of development practices. This awareness also led to the observation of the gap between the more nomothetic approach of social scientists and the ideographic narratives of historians.

Workshop Overview:

Workshop Opening: Martina Kopf (University of Vienna) and Gerald Härdl (University of Vienna)

Keynote Session 1: Perspectives on Development Discourse

Discussant: Walter Schicho (University of Vienna)

Aram Ziai (University of Hamburg): From Colonial

to Post-colonial Discourse on Development: Questions of Method

Françoise Dufour (CNRS, University of Montpellier 3): The Paradigm of ‘Development’: Social Implications of a Change in Discursive Practice

Panel 1: Labour, Capital, and Development

Chair: Margarete Grandner (University of Vienna)

Regina FinsterhÄlzl (Humboldt University, Berlin): Development Discourse in Socialist Debates: The Fabian Colonial Bureau, 1940-1960

Billy Frank (University of Central Lancashire): Conflicting Ideologies: The ‘Public’ and ‘Private’ Faces of African Development in the Trans-colonial Period, 1930-1970

Cyrus Veaser (Bentley University, Waltham/Massachusetts): Homo Economicus in the Tropics

Susan Zimmermann (CEU, Budapest): Forced, Free or Protected Labor? Competing Vision and Interest in Developmentalist Labour Policy for Africa within the ILO around 1930

Panel 2: Strategies of/against Control

Chair: Marie Rodet (University of Vienna)

Caio Simões de AraËjo (CEU, Budapest) and Iolanda Vasile (University of Coimbra): Colonize is Needed. What About Develop? The Portuguese Empire from Scientific Colonialism to Luso-tropicalism

Eric Kushinga Makombe (University of Witwatersrand): Urbanism/Ruralism and the Pedagogy of Development during Colonialism: The Case of Zimbabwe 1946-1979

Julian Reid (University of Lapland, Rovaniemi): The Biopolitics of Development Discourse in Late Colonial Africa

Keynote Session 2

Discussant: Henning Melber (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala)

Mamadou Fall (University of Dakar): Fog of Empire and the Development Dilemma in French Colonialism

Robert Shenton (Queen’s University, Kingston/Ontario): Development, Welfare, and ‘Surplus People’

Panel 3: Focus on Tanganyika

Chair: Birgit Englert (University of Vienna)

Walter Bruchhausen (University of Bonn): From Pre-condition to Goal of Development. Health and Medicine in the Planning and Political Conflicts of British Tanganyika Territory

Juhani Koponen (University of Helsinki): Faces of colonial development in South-eastern Tanganyika

Karlheinz Spitzl (University of Vienna): Educational Development in the Occupied (Trusteeship) Territory of Tanganyika: From the Asymmetries of Power to the Asymmetries of Discourse

Panel 4: (Social) Science and Technology

Chair: Berthold Unfried (University of Vienna)

Joseph Hodge (West Virginia University): Knowledge and Networks of Science and the Late Colonial and Early Postcolonial Epoch: The Case of British Tropical Agriculture, 1925-1980

Gerald Härdl (University of Vienna): Colonial Development Studies? The British Social Sciences and Africa, 1940-1960

Sven Speek (University of Bochum): Visions of Crisis and Development: Ecology & Agriculture in British Central Africa ca. 1929-1951

Panel 5: Cultural Constructions

Chair: Hanna Hacker (University of Vienna)

Hubertus Bäschel (University of Gießen): White Mothers & The Power of Gender in British Colonial Development in Africa

Suzanne Hanson (University of Leeds): Developing Africa: The Dream of a Great White State

Martina Kopf (University of Vienna): Developing East Africa in the British Colonial Imagination

Panel 6: Perspectives from within

Chair: Heike Schmidt (University of Vienna)

Ewald Blocher (University of Munich): Constructing Modern Egypt: Modernization and Development Discourses in the Context of British and Egyptian Water Engineering

Emma Hunter (University of Cambridge): Development Discourse in Tanzania's Swahili Public

Concluding Round Table: The Past in the Present

Andreas Eckert (Humboldt University, Berlin)
Odile Goerg (University Paris Diderot - Paris 7)
David Simon (University of London)

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Sara Elmer. Review of , *Developing Africa: Development Discourse(s) in Late Colonialism*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. March, 2011.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=32673>

Copyright © 2011 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.