

Understanding Nigeria's Political Economy and Culture of Underdevelopment

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Received 14 May 2022; accepted 4 June 2022

Published online 26 June 2022

Abstract

This paper examines the political economy of Nigeria with special focus on the structural and ideological foundation of its underdevelopment. The economy is a dependent capitalist entity; hence the level of its growth and expansion is externally determined and conditioned. This, in itself, is a defining factor of underdevelopment. Then, much of the revenue accruing from productive activities is appropriated and freely repatriated by foreign capital and technology which dominate the economy. This is a critical factor as the free repatriation of capital deprives the domestic economy of investment funds. The state has continued to depend on loans from the states and institutions of the global north for its critical needs, an option that has itself consolidated the dependent status of the state. The critical problem of the state and economy could have been mitigated if the state had been managed by patriotic and public-spirited political elite. The stark reality has been that the ruling political elite are self-serving; hence they appropriate much of the fiscal revenue of the state as emoluments and other rewards for public office-holders. Besides, the ruling elite and the dominant indigenous bourgeoisie in control of the state use it as an apparatus to divert and plunder fiscal revenue by corrupt means. Over the postcolonial period corruption has become so entrenched that it is today a way of public life. The end results have been the continuing underdevelopment of the productive forces and the abysmal inability of the state to address the basic economic and social needs problems of the people. The paper is rounded off with a call for political and radical political action by national patriotic, progressive, and

revolutionary forces as it is not in the interest of the corrupt and thieving comprador elite to relinquish their stranglehold on the state and economy.

Key words: Political economy; Nigeria; Dependent economy; Agriculture; Ruling elite; Corruption; Poverty

Nkem Onyekpe, J. G. (2022). Understanding Nigeria's Political Economy and Culture of Underdevelopment. *Canadian Social Science*, 18(3), 56-68. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/12548>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12548>

INTRODUCTION

The development or underdevelopment of any society is basically determined by its political economy. Therefore, there is an organic and dynamic relationship between a nation's political economy and its development or under development. Our aim in this paper is to explain the concept of political economy with a view to problematizing the issue of whether the nation is on the right path to development, or whether it has accepted underdevelopment as a way of life and therefore reconciled itself to it. Our subject will be examined *seriatim* under the following subheadings, viz: (1) The Meaning of Political Economy; (2) The Nature of Nigeria's Political Economy; (3) The Yoke of Dependent Status, and (4) Corruption and the Culture of Underdevelopment; and Conclusion

1. WHAT IS POLITICAL ECONOMY?

The concept means two things. First, it refers to the nature and organisation of an economy in terms of ownership or distribution of the means of production. The structure of ownership or the way the means of production are distributed among different groups is of first importance in defining political economy (Marx,

1954; Marx, 1970; Kozlov, 1977; Ryndina *et al.*, 1980; Barri, 1977). The structure of ownership of the means of production is termed property relations. Property relations depends on whether the society operates any of the 'isms, i.e. feudalism, capitalism, socialism, etc. (Kozlov, 1977; Ryndina *et al.*, 1980; Ebenstein, 1973). Property relations determine the distribution of wealth or surplus generated in the production process. The distribution of wealth or relations of distribution in turn determines the consumption pattern among different groups, what may be termed relations of consumption.

Material production is the basis of human existence. Thus, production basically distinguishes man from the lower animals as man cannot exist and reproduce himself without producing for his subsistence. Labour which is man's activity towards the creation of utilities and values is man's application of his physical and mental efforts to objects or things found in the natural environment. This means that land is the object of labour. To be able to work on land, man devises or fabricates means or instruments of labour. It is the objects and means of labour that constitute the means of production. The combination of the means of production and labour input constitutes the forces of production (Ryndina *et al.* 1980; Cornforth, 1976).

It is important to note that every economic system or mode of production has a corresponding political system or, more broadly speaking, civil society resting on it. The system of economic organisation in any society and the corresponding political structure resting on it constitute a socio-economic formation. Thus, society is made up of the economy or substructure and the political structure (broadly, civil society) or superstructure. The two form an organic whole. The development of the economy which is the foundation influences and determines the development of the civil society resting on it (i.e. the economy). Karl Marx explained long ago that, the superstructure of society and whatever happens and changes in it cannot be understood without first of all understanding the substructure. As he wrote in 1859, "... the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy" (Marx, 1970, p. 20).

At the same time, the forces and dynamics of the civil society, particularly the political class and the ruling ideology, provide the economy with a guiding compass. The issue of provision of a guiding compass or direction is very important indeed. It means that as far as the economy and its development and transformation are concerned, the orientation, system of value, and character of the political elite are fundamental.

There is another meaning of political economy. This is political economy as the study of the nature and organisation of the economy in the ramifications we have explained above. In this second sense, therefore, political economy is a field of study. In many universities and colleges around the world the field has long been

developed as an academic discipline, although in some others, political economy is domiciled in social science departments, especially political science, economics and sociology. Some scholars simply regard and use it as a method or tool of inquiry and analysis (Ake, 1983, Ch. 1; Ihonvbere, 1989; Onyekpe, 1997). But it is a non-issue whether it is an academic discipline of its own or domiciled in other disciplines, or simply employed as a method or tool of inquiry and analysis. What is important is its popularity among liberal and especially radical scholars in the social sciences and humanities.

Political Economy as a discipline or method of inquiry and analysis is indispensable in understanding society's organisational problems the way they are. First, it recognises the primacy of the economy and material production as the foundation of society. Second, it recognises the necessity for continuous expansion and transformation of productive forces. It is indeed an understatement to say that continuous expansion and transformation of productive forces are of great importance; for, the survival of man as a social being and the progressive advancement of his interests are impossible without the achievement of expansion and more and more expansion and development of productive forces (Onyekpe, 2013). Third, political economy, particularly the liberal and Marxist variants of it, recognises the inevitability of change and transformation which lead to successive emergence of new and better systems of economic and social organisation (Marx, 1964; 1970; Monijam, 1980). From the Marxist point of view, change and transformation occur when contradictions develop rapidly within an existing system and when such contradictions are resolved through the struggle of opposing forces: forces of the status quo or the establishment *versus* forces of change, and *only* when the status quo and its forces are defeated by the forces of change in a revolution (Marx, 1963; 1972; Marx and Engels, 1977; Lenin, 1977). In different parts of the world the slave-owning system, feudalism, capitalism, dependent accumulation, etc., were defeated at different times and epochs and replaced with new systems through revolutionary actions which Marx described as "the locomotives of history" (Marx, 1972, p. 109).

Fourth, political economy takes a comprehensive view of phenomena. All elements of every phenomenon inquired into are examined in their organic interconnectedness. The comprehensive method of studying society (and its problems) requires that the economic, political, social, and anthropological aspects of the society, as well as its philosophy, worldview, and system of value, are taken together. This means that the methods of inquiry in the different disciplines that focus on the different aspects of society's life that need to be covered are employed for a comprehensive and balanced view. Thus, political economy is necessarily conceptually

and methodologically multidisciplinary. Finally, as phenomena are inquired into in political economy, the inquiry goes beyond the present and beyond the surface. This enables the inquiry to establish the relationship between the present and the past rather than merely focusing on the present, *which is but* the accumulation and explosion of the problems inherited from the past. Going beyond the surface enables the inquiry to establish the relationship between the surface and the root rather than merely focusing on the surface, *which is but* the manifestation and accentuation of the problems in question? The relationship between the past and present, between the surface and the root of any problem was aptly expressed by Marx when he wrote:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by them, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never existed, precisely in periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service... (Marx, 1963, p. 96).

2. THE NATURE OF NIGERIA'S POLITICAL ECONOMY

Here, we are examining not the study of Nigeria's political economy, but the structure and organisation of production. Our emphasis is on the distribution of the means of production or property relations, relations of wealth distribution, and relations of consumption. Nigeria emerged as a state in 1914 in the aftermath of the amalgamation in that year of the different possessions and protectorates of Britain as recognised at the Berlin West African Conference in Germany from November, 1884 to February, 1885 where the continent of Africa was partitioned by the imperial powers of Europe and shared among them. The imperial powers represented at the Berlin Conference were Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Italy, and Belgium (Crowe, 1970).

Before the colonisation of Nigeria, the different peoples and empires organised their production to meet their basic subsistence needs of food, clothing and shelter. They also took care of their medical needs through the development of herbal medicines from plants and roots. The education of their youths was done through organised system of apprenticeship and training in the traditional occupations of farming, fishing, animal husbandry, the crafts, and trade. In the process each group devised enduring systems of organising productive activities. They also devised suitable technologies which were improved from time to time, and generation to generation.

The production engagements of the different areas and groups were dictated by their natural environments and geography (Oyemakinde and Flint, 1980; Njoku, 2001;

Mahadi and Inikori, 1986). Thus, while the northern parts were associated with annual production of cereals and livestock farming, much of the south was associated with annual root crops. In addition, the southern groups had tree crops such as oil palm, kolanut, and wild rubber. The swamps of the Niger Delta area were associated with fishing, salt-making, and thatch-making. The riverine areas of the country were all associated with fishing. In their activities the different groups practised communal system based on cooperation and reciprocity, with each group in control of its land which was the major object of production. Land was plentifully available in relation to population; hence production-which served mostly subsistence needs with some surplus for exchange-was limited only by labour and technology. Resources generated in the production processes were allocated to meet subsistence needs of the households which were the basic units of production.

The involvement of different areas and groups in different forms of production naturally led to the development of different levels of exchange and trade among the areas and groups. There was exchange among communities within each defined area, for example, Oyo, Ijebu, Benin, Etsako, Igbo, Igala, Kano, Katsina, Urhobo, Ijo, Efik; between each of these and their immediate neighbours; between geographically defined zones, for example, Hausaland and Yorubaland, Igboland and Upper Benue area, Niger Delta groups-Ijo, Itsekiri, Nembe, Opobo, etc.-and their hinterland neighbours-Urhobo, Isoko, Efik, Igbo, etc. Beyond these levels of trade, Nigerian peoples were involved in external trade with the peoples of North Africa through the Saharan trade routes (Njoku, 2001, Ch. 7; Bovil, 1970; Ogini, 1973, Ch. 2), and with Europe through the Atlantic Ocean (Njoku, 2001, Ch. 7; Ogini, 1973, Chs. 13 and 14; Onwubiko, 1982, Ch. 7; Ryder, 1980).

External or international trade played a crucial role as it provided a "vent" or outlet for surplus production and created the opportunity for concomitant economic change and transformation (Myint, 1958; 1973, Ch. 3; Onyekpe, 2008). This is especially true of the nineteenth century when European merchants began to penetrate from the coast into the hinterland in search of industrial raw materials such as palm oil and kernels, rubber, cocoa, groundnuts, cotton, timber, and hides and skin. Indigenous groups responded positively to external demand and began to expand production more and more.

As British merchants began to move into the hinterland beyond the coast, the traditional political elite and merchant princes such as King Kosoko of Lagos, Oba Ovonramwen of Benin, King Jaja of Opobo, Chief Nana Olomu of Itsekiri, and Ijebu and Aro merchants began to resist, not because they did not welcome the British merchants but because their lucrative middleman positions were threatened by British advocacy of free penetration and free trade (Ikime 1968, 1972, 1977, Chs

1-3, pp.93-101; Smith, 1971, 1978; Dike and Ekejiuba, 1990). In the ensuing conflict of commercial interests, British merchants appealed to their home government which responded with military support. The response of the home government was because of two considerations. First, the merchants were able to convince the government that without power trade and its free efflorescence would be obstructed by the assertive Nigerian elite at the coast. Besides, the government was not unmindful of the growing interest of other imperial rivals such as the Germans who were already “effectively” present in Cameroun and South-West Africa, and especially the French who had taken possession of Dahomey and Togo.

In the ensuing military encounters between indigenous Nigerian groups and the British, the former were defeated, largely because of the disunity within the groups, for example, the ruling aristocracy in Lagos where Kosoko and Akitoye were fighting over the throne, and Itsekiriland where Nana Olomu and Omodoghogbone (Dogho) were also fighting over the throne (Ikime, 1968; 1971, pp.205-232, 1977, pp.93-101; Smith, 1978). There was also the problem of intergroup wars as in Yorubaland especially between Ibadan and the Ekiti (Akintoye, 1971). But the final determinant of the outcome of the clash between Nigerian groups and the British was the superiority of the military technology of the imperial juggernauts (Crowder, 1971; Dike and Ekejiuba, 1990, pp.311-314; Webster and Boahen, 1972: Ch. 16; Ikime, 1977).

With the conquest of the indigenous peoples of southern Nigeria and then northern Nigeria, all the conquered peoples were coupled as one entity. Then, the imperial power turned its attention to the primary motive of conquest which was economic exploitation. In order to effectively organise exploitation an administrative machinery was created in the form of central colonial state apparatus. The colonial state took instructions from the Colonial Office in London and implemented policies and programmes as dictated by the Colonial Office.

The backbone of the colonial economy was agriculture (Helleiner, 1966; Oluwasanmi, 1966; Usoro, 1973; Onyekpe, 1996). The focus on agriculture was simply for the purpose of providing industrial raw materials for export to Britain for her factories and industrial plants. The Department of Agriculture was established and institutionalised in Nigeria between 1910 and 1912 to oversee agricultural development. Export agricultural production was promoted through the provision of new seedlings, the development of botanical gardens and experimentation farms, and the training of technical assistants. Schools of agriculture and research institutes and stations were established to promote production. The Moor Plantation was established and developed in Ibadan between 1912 and 1916. The plantation was an experimentation station for the dissemination of technical knowledge to local farmers. Other experimentation stations were opened in 1923 in Zaria, Umuahia and

Benin. An agricultural research station was established at Vom, near Jos in 1925, while a school of agriculture was established in Ibadan in 1927. In 1934 an agricultural station was opened at Samaru, near Zaria and in 1942 two veterinary schools were opened in Kano and at Vom (Ekundare, 1973, pp.156-162; Njoku, 2001).

To facilitate the transportation of agricultural produce the colonial administration embarked on railway development (Ekundare, 1973, pp.134-142; Omosini, 1980; Oyemakinde, 1974). There were two lines. The western line from Iddo, Lagos to Kaura Namoda near Sokoto was completed in 1929, while the eastern line from Port Harcourt to Nguru near Maiduguri was completed in 1930. The western and eastern lines ran from the coast to the northernmost end of the country, hence much of the country was not linked. However, the areas left out of the rail system were connected to it by the network of roads. The development of the north-south railway system and the extension to potentially rich agricultural belts like western Nigeria stimulated production. Road development achieved more or less the same result for the rest of the country. There were three categories of roads, namely, Trunk A, Trunk B, and Minor roads (Ekundare, 1973, p. 145). Trunk A roads were those constructed and maintained by the Public Works Department (PWD) of the government. The Trunk A roads were main produce routes. They were constructed and maintained by the central and regional governments. Trunk B roads were constructed and maintained by Native/Local Authorities with the help of local chiefs who were the main agents of local administration under the “indirect rule” system. The minor roads were earth roads maintained by local chiefs and their subjects.

To ensure that the agricultural produce evacuated from the hinterland to the coast were shipped to Britain, the colonial administration extended what has been termed “transport revolution” to ports development (Ogunndana, 1980). Between 1860 and 1914 there were 14 customs ports-in Lagos, Koko, Sapele, Warri, Burutu, Forcados, Akassa, Brass, Bonny, Degerma, Port Harcourt, Opobo, Calabar, and Ikang. However, colonial rationalisation of ports development reduced the number to seven, namely, Lagos, Port Harcourt, Sapele, Warri, Calabar, Burutu, and Degerma. Further rationalisation from the early 1920s led to the concentration of traffic in Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Sapele. The major shipping line or companies in colonial Nigeria were Elder Dempster Lines Ltd., American West African Line, Compagnie Fabre et Fressinet, Holland West Afrika Liju & Allied Companies, Woerman Line and Allied Companies, and Navigazione Liberia Triestina Line.

From the beginning of colonial rule to political independence in 1960, export-import trade of Nigeria was dominated by British firms floated by metropolitan mercantile bourgeoisie (Ekundare, 1973, pp.197-222, 328-346). The major firms were the United African Company,

John Holt and Company, and Messrs Cadbury Brothers Limited. The British firms bought up African produce and organised their export. They also were responsible for the importation and distribution of industrial goods and consumables in Nigeria. Indigenous trading interests operated in the commercial field only as commission agents and sub-agents who were dependent on the British firms and operated according to terms defined by their patrons, i.e. the expatriate firms.

It is important to note that the presence of the trading firms ensured that there was always a demand for agricultural produce. This encouraged expansion of production. Expansion was also stimulated by the desire by the local population to acquire imported goods and consumables distributed by the firms. These included cloths, spirits, beer, beverages, soaps, umbrellas, iron beds, bicycles, radios, gramophones, roofing sheets, paints, etc. Earnings from agricultural produce were the only means by which these goods were acquired; hence efforts were made by the people to expand their output. The crops cultivated were generally called "cash crops". The pressure for cash was also caused by the obligations imposed on the people, for example, taxation and licences for bicycles and liquor trade. Cash earnings were also expended on children's education.

Apart from agriculture, the colonial administration encouraged mining. Tin was exploited in Jos, while coal was mined at Udi in Enugu (Freund, 1981; Ekundare, 1973, pp.168-174). There was also the exploitation of gold in Zaria, Kano, Nupe, Kotangora, Sokoto, Ilesha, and Ile-Ife (Ekundare, 1973, pp.175-186). While tin was exported to Britain, the coal industry served the needs of the railway department and the rest of British West Africa as local coal was cheaper than coal imported from Britain. Unlike agricultural production which was left in the hands of indigenous peoples, mining was taken over by the colonial state. The state expropriated the mineral deposits and promulgated ordinances to that effect. This meant that the colonial masters made themselves landlords by right of conquest of the indigenous landowners. The state granted concessions to British tin mining interests. The concessionaires exploited the tin deposits and paid royalties to the colonial state (Freund, 1981). Coal exploitation was the business of the state. It was administered by the Railway Department up to 1937 when a separate Colliery Department was created for the industry (Ekundare, 1973, p. 182). As in the case of agriculture, tin and coal exploitation was stimulated by the development of transport infrastructure and the growing demand for the products.

With regard to industrialisation, the colonial administration did nothing towards its promotion. Indeed, the official attitude of the administration and its metropolitan principal, Her Majesty's Government, was outright hostility to industrialisation (Lawal, 1987; Onyekpe, 1996, pp.598-601). The hostility to

industrialisation was such that upto the Second World War (1939-45) much of the agricultural produce of Nigeria was exported without simple processing. British official attitude to domestic production of gin by indigenes is an exemplification of the hostility to industrialisation in the colony. Indigenous production of natural gin from palm-wine was prohibited with the product classified as illicit gin, while the market was flooded with imported spirits advertised not only as a cure but also a prophylactic for all known and unknown diseases.

It must be emphasised, however, that the British conquered and colonised Nigeria as a source of industrial raw materials and as an outlet for their surplus industrial products. Thus, industrialisation of the colony would have defeated the basic aims of conquest and colonisation. Raw materials produced by Nigerian farmers and the mineral products of the colony would not have been readily available for export as they would have been used mostly to feed the home industries. Besides, industries in the colony would have produced substitutes for imported industrial products and consumables.

3. THE YOKE OF DEPENDENT STATUS AND CULTURE OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

The concentration of the colonial administration on primary and extractive production and colonial hostility to industrial production had their implications. First, the colony depended on the external or metropolitan economy, i.e., Britain, for the purchase of its raw materials. The raw materials had no local value as there were no industries at home to utilise them. Therefore, the colony exported, willy nilly, all its raw materials. It did not matter at all whether the prices offered the producers were rising or falling. Not only did they not have local value, they were perishable, especially agricultural produce. Besides, the producers needed cash on a regular basis as cash had become the only means of survival in the monetised capitalist economy. Similarly, in the absence of an industrial sector, the colony depended on external sources for industrial goods and consumables. Here again, because of the absence of domestic production the colony continued, Willy Nilly, to import industrial goods whether the prices were rising or falling.

The absence of an industrial sector in colonial Nigeria was the major factor in the emergence of the economy as a dependent one. Dependency meant that the level of growth and expansion of the economy was externally determined and conditioned. The volume of production at all times responded to the behaviour of the metropolitan economy with which the colony had become vertically integrated. Thus, whether the colony generated quantity X^1 of output and moved on to X^2 and then X^3 , whether it receded from X^3 to X^2 and then to X^1 or even X^0 , was the function of the engine of growth located in Britain.

A dependent economy is a disarticulated one (Rodney, 1972, Chs 3 and 4; Ake, 1983, Chs 4 and 5). It lacks internal inter-sectoral interdependence and symbiosis. Therefore, it cannot achieve internal macroeconomic stability. Colonial agriculture in Nigeria was integrated with the industrial sector in Britain. It is important to note that as a capitalist system the British economy could not and still cannot, be planned in the strict sense of economic planning based on public ownership of the commanding heights of the means of production (Kozlov, 1977; Berri *et al.*, 1977; Shvyrkov, 1980). Without planning, the British economy, like other capitalist ones, was, still is, and cannot but continue to be associated with what Marx and Engels would call “anarchy of production” and “madness” which are expressed in “periodical convulsions” and crisis (Marx, 1963, p. 291, 1977, pp.42-47, 168-171; Engel, 1947, pp.323-347), euphemised by bourgeois writers as *business cycles* (Hansen, 1951; Hamberg, 1951; Bober, 1968). Whenever this convulsion or crisis was manifested in the colonial period, for example, during the First World War (1914-18), the Great Depression (1929-33) and the Second World War (1939-45), the colonies as dependent areas were very hard hit.

The absence of an industrial sector limited the expansion of the economy and therefore denied it the multiplier and accelerator effects associated with industrial growth and transformation. Without an industrial sector, it was impossible to increase the capacity to improve the technology of production even in the primary sector. Industrialisation involves the manufacturing of machine tools and work equipment. The absence of an industrial sector also meant the absence of opportunities for employment for the people. The consequent imprisonment of the creative energies of the people meant that they could not contribute to economic growth and earn a decent living in the process.

The political economy of colonialism was exploitative, through and through (Rodney, 1972; Ake, 1978, 1983; Babu, 1981; Onyekpe, 1996). The economy was structured and organised to feed Britain with raw materials and to serve as dumping ground for her industrial goods. British firms dominated import-export trade of the colony. With the protection of the colonial government and the metropolitan power, the firms fixed prices for both Nigerian produce and imported goods distributed in the colony. Because prices were fixed arbitrarily, resources generated within the colony were mobilised and repatriated by the firms to Britain through criminally low prices offered Nigerian producers and through scandalously high prices demanded for imported items. Exploitation was also achieved through outright expropriation of mineral deposits by the colonial state and through the various obligations forced on the people also by the state, for example, colonial head tax and income tax (Ikime, 1966; Onyekpe, 2003).

The resources mobilised by the colonial trading firms from the colony through “unequal exchange” (Emmanuel,

1972), and by the colonial state through the expropriation of the mineral deposits and the obligations imposed on the people, and repatriated to the Mother Country could not at the same time be available to meet the development needs of the country. Thus, physical infrastructure development was confined to produce areas and the port towns at the coast. Besides, social infrastructure provision remained tokenistic all through the colonial period. Schools and colleges, and health centres and hospitals were few in relation to the growing population. For example, at independence in 1960, the country had only one university at Ibadan, which was a college of the University of London.

It is important to note here that the colonial masters did not penetrate Nigeria or the rest of Africa because they wanted to develop conquered areas. Although metropolitan bourgeois and imperialist writers and troubadours had tried to fight the intellectual aspect of colonial conquest with the propaganda that colonisation was “civilising mission” of the Whiteman or the “Whiteman’s burden” (Clark, 1946; Gann and Duignan, 1967; Lugard, 1970), official records of the imperial powers themselves apropos overseas expansion from the 1870s to the partition of Africa in 1884-85, from then to the Brussels Conference in 1889, and upto the outbreak of World War One, clearly show that colonisation was primarily motivated by the economic and commercial interests of the European powers (Crowe, 1970). This is corroborated by the output of radical scholarship represented by intellectuals like C. Ake, V.I. Lenin, A.G. Frank, E. Woolf, P Baran, W. Rodney etc. (Ake, 1978, 1983; Lenin, 1983; Frank, 1978; Woolf, 1921; Baran, 1957; Rodney, 1972). Further, and more particularly instructive, colonialism from beginning to end was associated with policies and programmes consciously formulated and executed to achieve the primary motive of conquest, which was the exploitation of the colonies (Ake, 1978, 1983; Rodney, 1972; Onyekpe, 1996).

But if colonialism was exploitative in its policies and programmes because it was meant to be so, what has Nigeria done about exploitation and lack of development at independence since the achievement in 1960 of what Kwame Nkrumah called “the political kingdom”?¹ Has “life in abundance” promised the people by the nationalist

¹ In the age of nationalist politics and independence movement in Africa, 1950s-60s, the easily most outstanding nationalist leader and Pan-Africanist was Dr Kwame Nkrumah who founded the Convention People’s Party, CPP, in the Gold Coast (now Ghana). Dr Nkrumah’s thesis was that the economic and social and other problems of the African continent were the direct result of colonialism. He reasoned, therefore, that Africa needed political independence to enable the nationalist elite to wield power and authority and then be in a vantage position to address the problems of the continent. He epitomised his thesis in his famous slogan, “Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else will follow”. This was the adoption and adaptation of the message of Jesus Christ in Matthew 6: 33 “But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”. Thus, just as Jesus had preached that the salvation of the soul is required for the blessings of the kingdom of God, Nkrumah preached that political independence or salvation was a precondition for the all-round development of Africa.

political elite of the 1950s-60s been provided? This is the focus of our attention in the rest of this paper.

The most significant, if not the sole change, in the economy of post-colonial Nigeria has been the emergence and dominance of the petroleum sector. Crude oil was struck at Otuakeme village near Oloibiri in present-day Bayelsa State in 1956 while production began in earnest in 1958. Since the early 1970s petroleum export earnings have been the major source of fiscal revenue of the nation. The Petroleum industry currently contributes 74-76 percent of government revenue and 96-98 percent of national exports.

However, the sector's impact on the nation's development and transformation has been limited by its domination by the metropolitan states and their oil transnationals such as Shell, Gulf, Texaco, Mobil, Chevron, Agip, Slumberger, and former British Petroleum. The transnationals explore and exploit oil and pay taxes and royalties to the Federal Government of Nigeria which, by the Petroleum Decree (No. 51) (later Act) of 1969 and subsequent Decrees and Acts, had expropriated all oil wealth of the nation to itself.

It must be noted here that, crude production is extractive and, therefore, primary. Like the agricultural sector, the petroleum sector has remained vertically integrated with industrialised economies of the global north which depend on petroleum exporting countries for oil as energy for their economies and as raw materials for their petrochemical industries.

Nigeria began petroleum production with the bold initiative of establishing refineries at Port Harcourt, Warri, and Kaduna to meet domestic needs. Today, while the nation exports about 2.0-2.8 million barrels of crude oil per day, the refineries have been out of business for decades, in spite of the huge fiscal revenue appropriated for turnaround maintenance. Between 2015 and 2020, a total sum of \$26.5 billion was spent on maintenance of the nation's refineries located in Kaduna, Port Harcourt, and Warri (Jeremiah, 2021). The result of course has been that while the nation exports its crude oil to the metropolitan countries, it depends on them for refined petroleum products, i.e., premium motor spirit (petrol), diesel, and kerosene. Empirical evidence shows that although Nigeria is the world's sixth largest exporter of crude oil, the prices of refined petroleum products are highest in Nigeria.

An aspect of the petroleum industry that cannot be glossed over are the contradictions associated with oil exploitation in the oil-producing area, the Niger Delta area. Production has been associated with oil spillage, gas flaring, the destruction of the ecosystem, and environmental pollution. These have made it impossible for the people to continue gainfully with their traditional occupations of farming, fishing, craftworks, and trading. At the same time, the capital-intensive technology of oil production has made it technically impossible for the

sector to provide alternative employment for indigenous people thrown out of their traditional occupations. Indeed, only an insignificant percentage of the population is employed, and mostly as casual workers "hired and fired" at will. Thus the phenomenon of casualization of workers has been a major issue in the agitations of the labour union in the nation's oil and gas industry. The leading labour unions are the Petroleum and National Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria, PENGASSAN, and the Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers, NUPENG.

The transfer of ownership rights from the Niger Delta communities to the federal government has deprived the communities of the fiscal revenue accruing from oil production. This has been the major problem between the oil-producing communities and the federal government. The agitation of the Niger Delta people for some sovereignty over the oil wealth of their area and their frustration by the federal government has led to both peaceful and violent struggles for the actualisation of their dreams. This is what is today known as the struggle for resource control and fiscal federalism by the oil-producing peoples of the Niger Delta area (Onyekpe, 2009, 2010; Tamuno, 2011).

Expansion of oil production has not generated any linkage effect, for example on industrialisation. On the contrary, the emphasis on petroleum has diverted the attention of the ruling elite from the necessity of industrialisation. Consequently, the agricultural produce and crude oil of the nation have no local value. Consequently again, the nation has remained dependent on, externally vertically integrated with, and peripheralised by the industrialised and technologically advanced countries of the global north for the purchase of its agricultural produce and crude oil. These countries determine the exchange rate and terms of trade regimes under which the nation's agricultural produce and crude oil are bought up. It must be noted that, although the attainment of political independence in 1960 freed Nigeria from British monopoly imperialism, it paved the way for the free penetration of other imperialist states such as the United States, Germany, France, and Japan. Expectedly, the 'free' penetration by these other states has led to the intensification of exploitation of the Nigerian economy.

Another contradiction of the post-independence Nigeria is that between uncontrolled urbanisation and abysmal neglect of rural areas. Colonial administration had witnessed the growth of few towns and cities as centres of commerce such as Kano, Lagos, Asaba, Onitsha; as agricultural produce centres such as Ondo, Ife, Ijebu Ode, Zaria; as mining centres such as Jos and Enugu; as seaports such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, Sapele, Warri and Calabar; and as centres of administration such as Ibadan, Benin, Enugu, and Kaduna. Some of these and many other towns and cities performed some combination of the functions listed here.

The towns and cities were more or less “enclaves” of growth with very little impact on the surrounding districts. The colonial administration concentrated the few public utilities and social amenities in the towns and cities. Thus the towns and cities “pulled” migrants from the districts. This is very fundamental in understanding the phenomenon of rural-urban “push” or migration during the colonial period.

Not much has been done over the post-colonial period to address the asymmetry of urban growth and neglect of rural areas. On the contrary, there have been the heightening of urban growth and increasing, albeit unplanned, attention to the urban areas vis-à-vis the rural areas, and the concomitant increase in rural-urban “push”. The creation of more states—from three by 1960 to four in 1963, 12 in 1967, 19 in 1976, 21 in 1987, 30 in 1991, and 36 in 1996—was associated with efforts at the spread of development through the creation of new administrative capital towns and cities.

The opportunities for employment provided by the bureaucracy and civil service of the new states and infrastructure development generally promoted rapid urbanisation of the new administrative capitals. This heightened the phenomenon of “urban bias” in the provision of utilities and amenities (Lipton, 1977; Onyekpe, 2021). This has meant the continuing neglect of the rural areas. Thus, the urban areas have continued to attract more and more of the rural dwellers fleeing from poverty. Consequently, the urban areas and the utilities and amenities available in them are overstretched. The response of the ruling political elite to the problem of uncontrolled urban expansion has been to preach the sermon of “return to rural areas” or urban-rural migration². But the sermon has remained completely ineffective with the preachers winning no converts. For, the rural areas have remained condemned to hellish social existence as the same political elite only pay lip service to the issue of empowerment of the rural areas through the provision of basic infrastructure—roads, electricity, potable water, housing, etc.—and through the prioritisation of rural economic transformation (Onyekpe, 2021).

It remains to consider the tripartite and organically related issues of property ownership, distribution of the output of production, and consumption patterns in post-colonial Nigeria. As a dependent neo-colonial capitalist

economic system, the principal means of production (i.e. the objects and means of labour) are concentrated in the hands of metropolitan (and other external, for example, Chinese, Indian, Lebanese and Syrian) investors. These constitute over 70 percent of the total. About 20 percent is controlled by the indigenous capitalist or petty-bourgeois class and their bureaucratic state. Less than 10 percent is in the hands of the lower strata of the society, comprising rural peasant farmers, urban artisans, market women, etc.

The system of property or investment distribution determines the distribution of the products and proceeds generated in the economy. Thus, the wealth generated is mostly appropriated by foreign capital with the state depending mostly on fiscal revenue, royalties, and rents paid by foreign capital. The neo-colonial state is thus a rentier state. The mass of the people exist and operate peripherally in the fringes of the economy and are thus subordinated to foreign capital and the neo-colonial state and their whims and caprices. The dominance of foreign capital has meant that the bulk of resources generated are mobilised and repatriated to the home countries of the investors. Yet, for transformation and development to take place and for them to be sustained, the resources generated in the process of production must be largely retained where production and resource-generation are taking place. The net result of the continuous repatriation of resources of the country is that the state is permanently poor in terms of revenue and fiscal resource base. The implication of this for sustainable development is of course critical.

As the state cannot offer the society and people what it does not have, it transfers its poverty to the society and people through the formulation and execution of unprogressive and reactionary economic and social policies and programmes. Over the post-colonial period, the state has had to deal with the problem of inadequate capital by resorting to external loans from the same metropolitan countries with which it has maintained unprofitable relations from the beginning. The high interest rates charged by the creditor-metropolitan states and their multilateral finance institutions, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, have meant that significant percentages of annual budgets are spent on servicing such loans. To secure their credit and ensure that the loans are serviced, creditor states often ensure that the country spends less and less of its earnings on social services. During 2005-2007 the federal government spent US \$12bn in one fell swoop to liquidate its external debt owed member of the Paris Club of creditors (Onyekpe, 2004a).

4. CORRUPTION AND THE CULTURE OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

The problem of development, or lack of it, resulting from the continuous haemorrhage of resources from the country

² This sermon on the return by urban dwellers to the rural areas was preached by the ruling political class especially the military administrations of General Muhammadu Buhari, 1984-1985, and General Ibrahim Babangida, 1985-1993. But the message was inconsequential as it was mere escapism. Urban population explosion cannot be controlled by simply and cavalierly asking urban dwellers to return to the rural areas. It cannot be achieved by fiat, not even by the dictation or “command” of authoritarian military leaderships. It is achievable only on the concrete basis of appropriate policy instruments and economic measures for integrated rural development.

to metropolitan countries, has been compounded by the twin phenomena of corruption and parasitism of the ruling or governing class. After the metropolitan investors have taken their abnormal profit, enormous part of whatever they approve and leave for the comprador state is appropriated by the managers of the state for their maintenance. The cost of running government and maintenance of the large bureaucracy at all levels of government-federal, state, and local governments-is prohibitive. Nigerian legislators are today the highest paid legislators in the world, after Australia. In 2009, over 32 percent of the year's budget was expended as emolument for members of the executive and legislative arms of government at all levels. In 2010, while the federal government overhead budget was ₦536.2bn in a total budget of about ₦4tn, the share of the National Assembly alone was ₦136.2bn. This represented 25 percent of the overhead budget.³ In 2011, the governor of Central Bank of Nigeria at that time, Mallam Lamido Sanusi, revealed that 25 percent of recurrent expenditure of the federal government was spent as emoluments of national legislators. The skewed fiscal allocation of current expenditure of the state has remained ossified in favour of the parasitic ruling elite.

Apart from the depletion of state revenue and fiscal resources through the "authoritative" allocation of jumbo emoluments to the governing and legislative elite, the remainder of the national commonwealth is looted through corrupt enrichment by the same elite and their hangers-on (Madunagu, 1982; Joseph, 1991; Okonjo-Iweala, 2018). The governing and legislative elite and their hangers-on control the government and its agencies. Public treasury is looted through the award of contracts to non-existent companies, inflation of contracts, over-invoicing, under declaration of earnings by government agencies, and outright misappropriation and diversion of funds. The combination of these and other means of corrupt enrichment of the elite have robbed the state of inestimable resources over the post-colonial period. On the issue of contract alone, the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, President Goodluck Jonathan, 2010-2015, revealed in 2011 after comparing notes with his counterparts in many countries of the world that the cost of contracts in Nigeria is on the average 200 percent higher than in the rest of the world.

The three arms of government, i.e., the executive, legislature, and judiciary are today bedevilled by corruption, with unresolved allegations and counter-allegations of corruption and abuse of office within and among the organs. The agencies of government, public corporations/parastatals, and institutions are not immune to the endemic problem of corruption which has so freely festered and suppurated for so long that it is today, a

³ The calculation here is based on our analysis of the officially approved budgets of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the years 2009 and 2010.

full-blown, malignant systemic cancer. Why would the agencies of government and public corporations and institutions be immune to it? When the head is rotten and decomposing, what becomes of the body and its other organs and parts?

The number of agencies of government and public corporations and institutions swimming in the ocean of corruption is legion. We will name typical examples of agencies, etc., in contest for supremacy and championship. Agencies' examples include the Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Customs Service, Nigeria Immigration, and Pension Offices across the country, including the Pension Office in the Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation. Examples of corporations are the Nigeria Ports Authority (NPA), National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) (now Power Holdings Corporation of Nigeria (PHCN), Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), and the defunct Nigeria Telecommunications (NITEL) and Nigeria Airways. Examples of institutions include the universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), and the defunct Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC).

The Armed Forces, i.e., the army, airforce, and navy, are not left out. "Bloody civilians"⁴ may not be courageous enough to speak too loudly about the Armed Forces, but our memories are not so short that we forget so soon, the assessment in the 1990s of one of the three wings of the Forces, i.e. the army, by its Service Chief, as an institution where anything goes, or, as he put it, "an army of anything is possible". The huge amount of fiscal revenue appropriated for the security challenges of the state are misappropriated and unaccounted for while Islamic fundamentalist challengers of the state have superior weapons and equipment. To be sure, corruption in government and its agencies, corporations, and institutions has enabled the elite in power to horrendously amass gargantuan wealth. Members of the elite are many who are richer than their local governments, some their states.

⁴ The expression "Bloody civilians" was originally used by the Pakistani Armed Forces for the civilian population. The military in power used the expression to differentiate themselves as the privileged socio-political category from the civilian population. It was a derogatory characterisation of the civilian population who were regarded as ordinary and unimportant people. From independence in 1960 to 1999, a period of 39 years, the Armed Forces dominated and controlled political power, administration, and governance in Nigeria for 28 years, that is, 1966-1979 and 1984-1999. As rulers who emerged through the overthrow of elected civilian governments, they were dictators who ruled without parliament or constitution. As entrenched dictators, they were unaccountable and enjoyed boundless privileges. And so, like the Pakistani military elite, they disparaged the civilian population as "Bloody civilians", or inferior people not deserving of any rights, freedoms, and liberties. Whether in Pakistan, Nigeria, or elsewhere, "Bloody civilians" was an expression of arrogance and superiority complex by the military elite in power.

Over the post-colonial period, there have been efforts by government to deal with the problem of corruption and graft. For example, after the overthrow of the General Yakubu Gowon regime in 1975, the new Head of State, General Murtala Mohammed, 1975-1976, confiscated the ill-gotten properties of many military governors of the General Gowon administration. In addition, with the emergence of General Muhammadu Buhari as Head of State, 1983-1985, in the aftermath of the overthrow of the President Aliyu Shehu Shagari-led civilian government, 1979-1983, many state governors of the civilian administration were arrested and detained on charges of corrupt diversion of public funds and self-enrichment.

The fight against corruption suffered a major setback during the administration of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, 1985-1993. General Babangida toppled the Buhari administration in August 1985. To win the support of the political elite, General Babangida freed all detained civilian governors of the Alhaji Shagari administration. Besides, he reversed the confiscation of the ill-gotten properties of the military governors of the General Gowon administration. But it turned out that General Babangida was simply paving the way for the massive looting of public wealth by him and members of his administration. Apart from outright diversion and misappropriation of public revenue through abuse of due process and reckless extra-budgetary spending during his period, General Babangida squandered much of the commonwealth on his long but failed political transition programme, 1986-1993, and on his intervention in Liberian and Sierra Leonean crises through ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) from the early 1990s. Moreover, it is common knowledge among the enlightened public that General Babangida is yet to account for the US\$12bn "excess" crude oil earnings of the federal government during the First Gulf War, 1991, involving the United States and her Allies against the government of late President Saddam Hussain of Iraq.

General Sani Abacha took over as Head of State in November 1993 in circumstances generally perceived as a palace coup against the transient three-month interim government of Chief Ernest Shonekan. If General Babangida was corrupt as Head of State, his friend and "comrade", General Abacha stood on his shoulders! Huge savings in foreign currencies were later traced to General Abacha and his family. General Abacha died in 1998 and was succeeded by General Abdusalami Abubakar who ruled for ten months. The two most significant problems during his 10-month transition rule were (1) the mysterious death in Abacha detention of the acclaimed winner of the annulled June 12, 1993 Presidential election, Chief Moshood K. Abiola, and (2) the duality of General Abubakar's positions as Head of state who doubled as Minister of Petroleum Resources.

Chief Olusegun Obasango emerged in May 1999 as elected president. He made it clear at the inauguration

of his administration that he was going to deal with the endemic problem of corruption. As a demonstration of this, part of what the media termed the "Abacha loot" was recovered. However, corruption among public office-holders attained unprecedented heights during the Chief Obasanjo administration. The administration attempted to deal with the problem by establishing the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC). Many of the state governors and administrators of public agencies, corporations and institutions were exposed.

Nevertheless, not much was achieved. First, why he did not have a minister of petroleum resources, but chose, instead, as General Abubakar had done, to double as one, was not clear to many people. Second, those charged with the anti-corruption assignment did not have the courage and guts to deal with suspects most of who were sacred cows. Third, it was alleged that the People's Democratic Party (PDP) government used the anti-crime commissions to settle scores with not only members of the opposition parties but also with deviant members of the ruling party. Finally, it turned out in most cases that, looking at the accusers and prosecutors on the one hand, and the accused on the other, it was not easy to know which was which, as the difference between them was not more than that between the black kettle and the black pot, between tweedledum and tweedledee.

Chief Obasanjo's successor, Alhaji Umaru Musa, 2007-2010, could not do much. Apart from his health challenges, the militant struggles of the peoples of the oil-rich Niger Delta region diverted his attention. The administration of his successor, Dr Jonathan, 2010-2015, was so ferociously threatened by the challenges of Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism, banditry, etc., and the opposition of the political elite of the northern section of the country that not much could be done in the fight against corruption. Consequently corruption became more and more entrenched. In all his campaigns for the office of president of the federal republic from 1999 to 2015 when he was elected, the major focus of Alhaji Muhammadu Buhari was on the fight against corruption. He would be completing his second term in office in May, 2023. Corruption has become more entrenched as state response to it is feeble and selective with many high profile cases and allegations either overlooked or politically resolved. We return now to the implications of exploitation and corruption.

As pointed out earlier on, neo-colonial exploitation and corrupt enrichment by the political elite and their hangers-on in public agencies, corporations and institutions have meant poverty for the state. State poverty is manifested in its inability to transform the economy through improvement in existing sectors and especially through diversification. This has been the problem number one. Besides, neo-colonial economic exploitation and the parasitic activities of the elite and the resulting

poverty of the state have left the state without any option but to transfer its poverty to the people. Herein lies the explanation for the lack of basic needs approach to “development” issues and for lack of good governance.

Today, there is a deepening crisis in all areas—food supplies, water, housing, education, healthcare delivery, electricity, transportation, recreation, etc. In the urban towns and cities, the mass of the people are condemned to slums where families live in one bed-sitting room in barracks-like “face me-I-face you”⁵ apartment with a population of 50–100 sharing one or two kitchens, bathrooms and toilets. Some others live in prefabricated ghettos and shanties without access to basic utilities and amenities. These Nigerians who are in the majority have philosophically reconciled themselves to the reality of permanently living without electricity, transportation, healthcare, education, etc. Majority of the urban poor are without employment and survive mostly as petty thieves, robbers, touts, fraudsters, prostitutes, eleemosynary nomads and itinerants, and scavengers.

Their rural counterparts are not any better. Without state intervention, the rural people are left to their devices. Many are landless, while majority of the small holders lack access to basic tools and equipment. Many rural dwellers survive as hunters and gatherers. Many of them who are more than 50 years old have never seen electricity all their lives, while the roads, health centres, and boreholes said to have been provided by their state governments exist only on the pages of newspapers owned by the governments and the political elite themselves.

Abandoned as they have been and without education and enlightenment, rural dwellers are engaged more in reproductive activities than in productive ones. As the polygynous *agama* lizard, each male has his colony of wives. Thus, rural dwellers procreate like rodents and stop only when it becomes biologically impossible for them to continue. Yet, the adults, when they die, have nothing but poverty, squalor, superstition, and idiocy to bequeath to their offspring, offspring who have no portion or inheritance in ‘their’ state.

CONCLUSION

The dependent character of Nigeria’s capitalist political economy promotes the economic interest of the metropolitan powers and the narrow class interest of

the indigenous comprador class, especially those in control of the state and its institutions and agencies. This is *paid for* by (1) the economy which loses the capital resources required for its transformation, growth, and development, and (2) the people who are disadvantaged and squeezed in their everyday life as a reflection of the poverty of the state. Our emphasis has been that, because the economy is still largely dependent the expansion and development of its productive forces have remained tied to, and determined and conditioned by, the behaviour of the metropolitan economies. To be sure, the dependent nature of the economy ensures that underdevelopment and culture of a generalised life of mass poverty are self-reproducing and self-perpetuating.

The ruling class in control of the state are blind to the neo-colonial reality of the political economy. This blindness is promoted by the formulation by the metropolitan states and their institutions, of “development” policies and programmes for the exploited countries (Ake, 1978, 1983; Babu, 1981; Onyekpe, 2004b). The ruling elite have continued to embrace all policies and programmes foisted on them by the metropolitan states and their institutions. Besides, the ruling class use their control of the state and its institutions and agencies to plunder public resources for self-enrichment. The struggle for political power at all levels of government has been primarily motivated by the desire for self-enrichment rather than service. The people have thus been condemned and reconciled to living with poverty.

Since the political economy of imperialist exploitation and the plunder of public resources by the ruling class are dialectically responsible for underdevelopment of the economy and for poverty as a way of life for the people, particularly the lowest strata or the *hoi polloi*, the three problems, i.e., neo-colonial imperialism, the plunder of public funds by the thieving comprador elite, and mass poverty must be addressed as fundamental problems. However, it must be emphasised that those who promote and benefit from exploitation, underdevelopment, and mass poverty, cannot at the same time address the problems of exploitation, underdevelopment, and mass poverty. It would be utopian to expect that they would address these problems and thereby commit “class suicide”.⁶ Therefore, it is the responsibility of

⁵ “Face me-I face you” is used to describe a building with two lines of rooms and a long corridor or passible separating the two lines. The building is structured with the doors facing each other. Basic amenities are grossly inadequate. Many of the tenants have by their doorjams at the corridor toyish cooking stoves, some in addition have small generators. Altercations and fightings are regular features of living in the conditions of the buildings. It is not only the structure of the buildings that is described as “face me-I face you”, the interlocking altercations and fightings that are regular features can also be described as “face me-I face you” or “face me-I slap you”.

⁶ In Dialectical Materialism, a core part of Marxism, class suicide refers to the full identification of the rich exploiter class with the exploited poor. It is self-induced or voluntary poverty of the rich and privileged exploiter class which results from their radical empathy for the exploited class. It is the sacrifice of the exploiters’ power and privileges, their defining class interests, for the benefit of the exploited and oppressed. All Marxist analysis of class society is centred on the polarity of stupendous abundance at one end paid for by squeezing poverty and wretchedness at the other end. Class suicide, if or when and where possible, leads to some redistribution of property, wealth, privileges, etc. This demotes the exploiter class and promotes the exploited class.

the progressive and revolutionary forces and the people in chains to unyoke the society, free and empower the people, construct an entirely new political and social order, and thereby grapple with the political economy and culture of underdevelopment.

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