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New Trends in African Art: The Liberation of Symbolic Images

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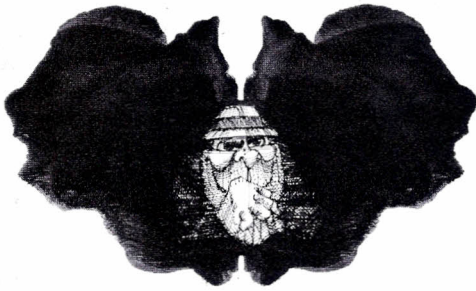
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THE PSYCH OLOGY OF UNDER DEVELOP MENT

By Linus A. Hoskins

Since World War II, the label of underdevelopment has been stamped on countries that have not been able to take on those characteristics which fall under the broad description of modernization or industrialization. Many reasons have been put forth as the root cause for economic underdevelopment in these countries—now called “Third World,” “underdeveloped,” or “developing countries.”

It is the contention of this writer that the derivation of the terms “underdevelopment/underdeveloped” has been a psychological move on the part of the Western world to secure and maintain superiority over the non-white world. Further, this same type of psychology is used to compartmentalize and categorize certain peoples and societies under the guise of levels of development. The outcome of this genre of psychology has been that these terms are synonymous with inferior/backward peoples.

In analyzing the psychology of underdevelopment, Dr. Walter Rodney, in his magnum opus, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, suggests that an “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 preoccupied is a product of capitalist, imperialist, and colonialist exploitation.”

According to Dr. Rodney, the interpretation that underdevelopment is somehow ordained by God is emphasized because of the racial trend in European scholarship. In other words, the West has a very distorted perception of Black, non-white peoples of the world.

The late Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, in his book, *Class Struggle in Africa*, attributed underdevelopment “not to exploitation but to inferiority, and racial undertones remain to be removed with the cause of the people.”

tion of development and underdevelopment.

Western economic experts view the problem of underdevelopment in terms of the economic backwardness (inferiority) of the people. In the book, *Economic Theory and the Underdeveloped Countries*, Hla Myint stretched the point further to emphasize that: “although the ‘underdevelopment’ of natural resources may cause the ‘backwardness’ of the people, it does not necessarily follow that any efficient development of natural resources resulting in an increase in total output will . . . reduce the backwardness of the people. . . .”

What the above statement suggests is: Although the so-called underdeveloped countries are able to achieve a level of development comparable with that of the developed countries, the peoples of the former countries will still remain, and be considered, backward, inferior. One senses the subtle implication that equal economic development of resources does not mean that the peoples of those countries are equal—even if the peoples of the underdeveloped countries were to develop their resources to the same level of the developed countries, they still will not be able to reduce or eradicate their inherent inferiority.

Contrary to what economic textbooks may suggest, the primary criterion for designating countries as being developed or underdeveloped has strong racial overtones. It is not a mere coincidence, therefore, that in countries where the Black, non-white population constitutes the majority, these countries are called Third World or underdeveloped. These countries comprise Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Caribbean—that is two-thirds of the world’s population—countries that suffered colonial underdevelopment.

When professor James Tobin of Yale University visited China in 1972 (along with other American academicians and experts), he was surprised at the tremendous ignorance in the West concerning a country with which the United States and

the West had so little contact for a quarter of a century. Despite this, he attempted (in a magazine article) to apply Western capitalist concepts, definitions and values to the Chinese situation. In the article, “The Economy of China: A Tourist’s View,” *Change* magazine, March/April 1973, Professor Tobin stated that he thought it a worthwhile exercise of imagination to try to construct some plausible, consistent, primitive national accounts from the hints and scraps of data he was able to pick up while in China.

Again, the adjectives in Professor Tobin’s report are not dissimilar to those previously used to describe African art and culture and the Black family structure. [In Fred J. Parrot’s *Wind in the Sieve*, one learns that the Western world labeled African art as primitive and uncivilized. The white man used his own values and standards to judge natural African art—something he knew absolutely nothing about. Not only was African art primitive, but as the centuries elapsed, one came to realize exactly what the white man did. He plainly outpsyched the African, stole his art and cultural forms, brought them back to the West, modified them and then exalted them as products of the West].

Professor Tobin, in other words, injected the Western (best) way of doing things in China, without recognizing the fact that the Chinese also have the right to adopt their own economic methodology and system. Again, it is simply the same rationale whereby it is conceived that the West is right and that all other cardinal points are wrong or inferior.

Professor Tobin failed to take into consideration the truism that the people of China turned inward more than 20 years ago and adopted a different style of life, sought a consumption pattern more consistent with their own condition and station of life. China has redefined her economic and social objectives to staggering proportions, liquidated privileged groups and vested interests, and redistributed political and economic power which she hopes would be successful—not through

28 revolution but rather through an evolutionary process.

Dichotomy of the World

Professor Tobin's analysis of China's economy is one example of the superior/inferior psychology (mentality) Western experts have used to categorize peoples and countries throughout history. Indeed, the components of economic hydraulics suggest that the world has been systematically dichotomized to reflect this trend. For example:

West	East
Jews	Gentiles
Christians	Pagans
Feudal lords	Serfs
Capitalists (relations of production)	Proletariat (forces of production)
Rich, developed, advanced, industrialized	Poor, developing, underdeveloped, backward
Central, price-makers, haves	Peripheral, price-takers, have-nots
Secondary and tertiary producers	Primary producers
First and Second World	Third World
White	Black, non-white

(In terms of conventional geo-politics, the First World consists of Europe, Japan, North America; the Second comprises China and the Russian Orbit; while the Third World includes Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Caribbean.)

As can be seen, those on the West plank are considered advanced, developed, and superior; those on the East, underdeveloped, backward, and inferior. This is the scheme that has been operative throughout history (even today). Although economic textbooks and even the United Nations have put out criteria for designating countries as developed or underdeveloped, the pattern in which the world has been molded suggests otherwise. All Black, non-white, "backward" peoples are partitioned as Third World—developing or underdeveloped—while the First and Second World membership is exclusively Caucasian or quasi-Caucasian.

For decades, Western experts have been telling Black, non-white peoples that they are underdeveloped, and Black people have accepted this fact. The experts acted on the Black man's mind into believing and accepting the fact that he is underdeveloped. Beyond that point the

Black man was not quick enough to realize that when the Western experts say that Blacks are underdeveloped what they really mean is that Black, non-white peoples are inferior; and that their state of underdevelopment stems from genetic inferiority.

Africa, the richest Continent in the world [in natural resources], is exemplary of the racial determinant in the syndrome of underdevelopment. The African Continent and its peoples are still regarded as underdeveloped; and that fact has been accepted as a given. Indeed it cannot be denied or rejected that the only reason Africans are considered underdeveloped or backward peoples is because they are Black—their natural economic resources and potential are unimportant. As shown earlier, underdevelopment is synonymous with backward peoples and even though these peoples were to develop economically, they would still be considered backward and inferior. They are also considered to be "incapable" of developing the resources of their own countries and are taught to labor and appreciate European manufactured goods, so as to become "good" customers of the West, the industrialized world. (This point was emphasized by Nkrumah in *Towards Colonial Freedom*).

Let us look at the morphology of development. The Congo produces about 60 percent of the world's output of cobalt, 8 percent of copper and 4 percent of zinc; Africa's iron reserves are put at twice that of America's and two-thirds of the Soviet Union's. Africa's calculated coal reserves are considered to be enough to last for 300 years; Africa has more than 40 percent of the world's potential water power; and among the most valuable commodities mined in the Congo are iron ore, uranium, radium, germanium, manganese, silver, tin, and cadmium. There is hardly a country in Asia, Latin America, or the Caribbean which has such rich and varied mineral resources. Agricultural resources are no less great, and there are tremendous reserves of water that can be used

for the production of power and electricity. Yet despite all the natural resources, Africa is still considered underdeveloped by Western standards.

Is Africa underdeveloped or do we just accept that datum and fall victims of the psychology of underdevelopment? Are we underdeveloped because so-called experts say we are? Are we going to define ourselves and our conditions?

The point is that the so-called Third World, underdeveloped countries are not *underdeveloped*, but *undeveloped*. They are undeveloped because of their non-development under colonialism, to the extent that colonialism did not generate economic development and industrialization in the colonies, rather, in the "mother countries" of the colonizers. Therefore, the resources of the colonies were not underdeveloped, they were just not developed. Hence, the reason why the Industrial Revolution took place in the United Kingdom and no development took place in the colonies. This is the paradox of underdevelopment. The United Kingdom and Europe became developed, while the colonies remained undeveloped. Therefore, the use of the universally accepted term "underdevelopment" is but a deceptive facade to camouflage the generally accepted truism of economic retardation cum exploitation and undevelopment that has been the plight of the now so-called Third World countries for centuries. Dr. Rodney, in his book, explains the process this way:

"Colonialism was not merely a system of exploitation, but one whose essential purpose was to repatriate the profits to the . . . 'mother country.' From the point of view of the colonies that amounted to consistent expatriation of surplus produced by colonized labor out of the resource of the colonies. It meant the development of Europe as part of the same dialectical process in which (the colonies were) underdeveloped."

The primary problem facing so-called Third World countries today is not underdevelopment, but the problem of trying to

develop their economies after centuries of non-development or undevelopment of their resources under colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, and other isms. Another corollary, of course, is the problem of political, psychological, cultural, and economic dependency, the solution to which is total liberation. (For a more explicit analysis of the structure of dependence, see Michael McCormack's *Liberation or Development*, Study Paper No. 5, Barbados, West Indies: CADEC Publishers, 1971).

Liberation of the Mind

The crucial question now is: What should Black, non-white peoples do to overcome and extricate themselves from the psychological web the Western world has swung around them?

The solution is in the liberation or decolonization of the mind. The achievement of mental liberation does not merely involve plugging in new information; it involves getting rid of old information. It is time that Black, non-white peoples see, evaluate, and categorize themselves according to their own values and conditions and not to be evaluated according to extraneous, Western and incompatible values.

The process of decolonization takes in mental as well as cultural and economic liberation. Black people must instill in their minds the truism that the West's rule of thumb in designating countries and peoples as being developed, underdeveloped—and so on—stems from a racial view of the world, a racial dichotomization of the world, a racial view of history and a racial conceptualization of the Black, non-white man. The Black man must consider himself as being developed—developed according to the Black man's perception of himself and not according to the West's perception of the Black man. And when the Black man has set his mind in motion along these lines, only then will true liberation begin. □

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