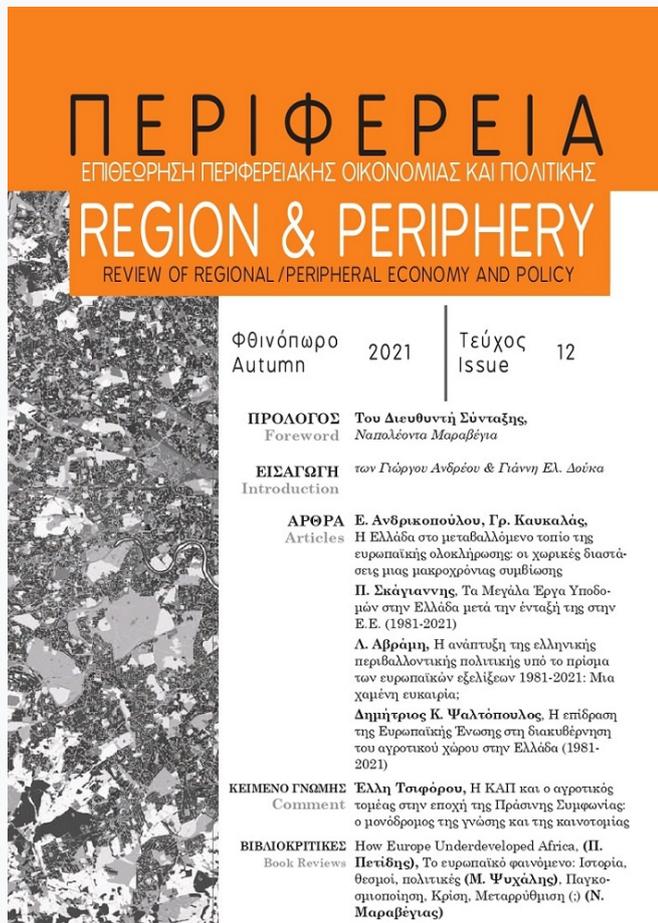


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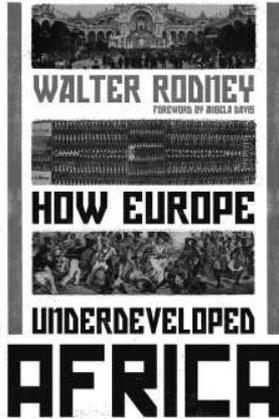
How Europe Underdeveloped Africa

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Walter Rodney

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What does it mean to be developed, and what does it mean to be underdeveloped? Rodney feels forced to address this issue before proceeding with his aggressive analysis of Africa's ills. He emphasizes that progress should not be viewed solely as an economic phenomena but rather as an overarching social process that shapes and is shaped by the ideological structures of societies. The author emphasizes that «underdevelopment is not the lack of development.» If anything, it is a by-product, an (in)direct result of it. Without underdevelopment or the amassing of wealth and skill acquired from exploiting natural resources and human labor, there can be no development. In the context of colonialism, the latter signifies a relationship of exploitation, in which another exploits one country or another exploits one class in any event.

The two phenomena are not natural nor dependent on one people's or race's better ingenuity. Development and underdevelopment are politically determined, and exploitation is inextricably linked to both. Otherwise, it would be impossible to explain why some of the world's poorest countries in terms of natural resources are among the richest; their money comes from the violent seizure of other countries' wealth. Rodney can appreciate and evaluate the continuance of the colonial paradigm and its racist superstructure by replacing economic exploitation at the center of his research. «Under colonialism, complete control was reinforced by military dominance. Foreign ownership is still prevalent in many African countries today, even when foreign forces and flags have been removed.» In colonial thievery's ever-evolving and innovative business, foreign aid and loans were already replacing armed forces.

The structural dependency that came to characterize Africa's political and economic relationship with Europe can be traced back to a pivotal period in the African continent's modern history: enslavement. During the terrible days of the

slave trade, all of the foundations that still influence the contemporary situation of most African countries were laid out. The cultural and social traditions of almost a whole continent were extinguished at that time, and the populace was exposed to a mass displacement, the likes of which humanity had never seen before or since. Slavery was the engine of industrialization, and as a result, the very foundation of Western progress and global dominance. Without the stolen gold from Africa, Amsterdam would never have become Europe's financial metropolis at the time; therefore, it was no coincidence that the English christened their new coin «Guinea» in 1663. Liverpool, for example, «depended first and foremost on the prosperity of its port through slave trading,» according to the book.

The slave trade built an acrimonious split that came to define Europe's and Africa's historical prospects. The social and cultural gains that European civilizations have achieved are inextricably linked to the barbarism inflicted on African societies via slavery; it's an unsolvable contradiction that Europe continues to ignore. It is a fiction to credit to colonial powers a civilizing outcome, notwithstanding their ostensible faults. «The most striking evidence of the superficiality of the rhetoric about colonialism having 'modernized' Africa is the reality that the vast majority of Africans went into colonialism with a hoe and came out with a hoe.» While the consequences of the slave trade and colonialism cannot be quantified, Rodney argues that they have essentially denied Africa of any developmental potential, demoting it to a second-class status. On the altar of European expansionism and expensive economic prosperity, the continent and its resources had to be sacrificed. Political, cultural, and, most importantly, educational disparities arose as a result of material discrepancy.

Furthermore, although Western economists hypothesized the free market and its mythical benefits, capitalism in Africa bypassed democracy and proceeded directly to its monopolistic stage with no institutional barriers. While Europe developed its freedoms, human rights, and civilizations, its colonies suffered violence, exploitation, and misery. The unregulated brutality of colonial capitalism gave rise to massive monopolies: Unilever, Crédit Lyonnais, Cadbury, Barclays, Procter & Gamble, Lloyds, Société Générale, De Beers, and many others all had a piece of the African pie. The continent that barely escaped European conquest was devoid of cultural and political consciousness. «Colonialism established that Africans were no more inure history builders than insects — objects to be scrutinized under a microscope for peculiar characteristics.» Africans are not responsible for the «characteristics» that are still connected with them. For example, tribalism, which is generally thought to be an atavistic element of «primitive» civilizations, is a modern phenomenon, the strategic result of Europe's systematic application of divide and rule in all of its colonies.

«Colonial powers sometimes perceived the value of stoking internal tribal jealousies [...] in order to halt and reverse the march toward larger African national and class solidarity,» Rodney notes. Moreover, as Angela Davis points out in the volume's prologue, colonialism caused a shift in gender relations. As a result, the destroyed picture of Africa and its people, infants with a translucent rib cage, swollen stomach, and supplicant eyes, became the preferred emblem for the lucrative charity industry. Rodney presents an Oxfam billboard to illustrate how humanitarian business hid the roots of poverty to blackmail its backers emotionally. Charity signified its perpetuation through many means rather than providing a remedy to the poverty inflicted on Africa by colonialism.

Unsurprisingly, Africans, not kindly, guilt-stricken Europeans, provided the solution to Africa's dilemma. Sedition and subversion crept into the cracks of this brutal system, challenging colonial administrations and armies. «The educated played a far greater role in African liberation fights than their numbers imply because they took it upon themselves and were called upon to articulate the aspirations of all Africans.» Despite the West's continual denunciation of African barbarism, Amílcar Cabral's «weapon of theory» emerged as a vital asset in the anti-colonial battle. Despite being militarily victorious on most fronts, anti-colonialism could not break the more insidious economic bonds on which neocolonialism continues to thrive. Frantz Fanon warned that the dangers of national consciousness may have contributed to the many problems that newly independent countries faced, but it is worth noting that «in the 1940s and 1950s, it was prevalent to have strikes that were specifically linked with the struggle for independence.» Anti-colonialism was never purely a nationalist endeavor, to put it differently.

While postcolonial powers found it easier to avoid national independence, the class struggle remained a nightmare for them, and every African leader who brought it up on his agenda was promptly deposed – from Patrice Lumumba to Thomas Sankara. Even apartheid's demise in South Africa was predicated on a terrible agreement that did not nationalize gold and diamond mines as a compromise to the white governing class that controlled them. Failure to achieve social justice led to a deeply divided country with profound class and racial differences, except for a small black bourgeoisie. Rodney's critique is as relevant today as when it was first written, serving as a rallying cry for the class battle for racial equality.

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