

Negotiated Development - A New Paradigm For Social Dynamics in Rural Africa

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It seems to me that a new perspective is unfolding within which the history of rural Africa is being rewritten. In this article, I trace this emerging perspective. I try to show its internal coherence and characteristic features. I also comment on its arch-enemies, narrative tropes and to its limitations. I call this perspective a paradigm although, significantly enough, it has not been portrayed as such in the literature.

This article also serves another purpose. It is a select literature review of recent works of social history which adopt a critical, culturally informed analysis of African rural development. Thus the article is also a review of a specific interpretation of African social history. As far as theory is concerned, the article draws on three key texts: Sara Berry's *No Condition is Permanent*, Allen Isaacman's *Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa* and David Booth's *Social Development Research: An Agenda for the 1990s*.

1. THE PARADIGM OF NEGOTIATED DEVELOPMENT

In the perspective of 'negotiated development' the concept of negotiation refers to a situation where different social groups come into contact with each other and try to make claims about a specific issue. A typical analysed case is a historical situation where land, manpower or an administrative position was suddenly perceived as a valuable resource by competing claimant groups. When these groups made claims several things started to change. First, the negotiation process tended to recompose old social groups or create new ones. Second, the process of negotiation sharpened people's views and perceptions of the object of negotiation. Thirdly, the social relationship between the negotiating parties changed.

Negotiation is analysed in these constructionist terms. What is essential to this perspective is that the object of negotiation can be placed on the periphery of the analysis and, instead, the social groups and their perceptions assume the central position. Since different groups have different perceptions, their negotiations imply contradictions and conflicts - the fuel of the dialectical machine. This kind of recentered (or occasionally decentered) analysis presents a very interesting sociological project.

Unravelling a social situation is sometimes compared to peeling an onion. When we peel away one level, we encounter the same shape at the next level. In social analysis, each change in perspective just gives a new version of the old story. The negotiation perspective differs from this static structural perspective. It is an historical perspective *par excellence* but some structuralist traces remain. When one feature changes, changes occur to the whole system. Thus what we have is more like ripples after stones are thrown into the water. When the stones disappear from sight, the ripples are there to be seen, but you have to be quick to observe them properly as they merge into new combinations and then disappear altogether.

'Negotiation' is a metaphor which emphasizes openness of interaction as far as outcome is concerned. Negotiation does not require face-to-face contact. It does not even require the identification of a person with a definite interest group. However, the mere existence of aggregates of people with similar dispositions creates a situation where those dispositions surface as claims to challenge other claims.

The second element in the paradigm is development. Development is a highly politicised concept and has very different, even opposing connotations. I give it a specific meaning. Development means social change with structural implications for both the 'infrastructure' and 'superstructures' of a society. I use the concept of development without making moral claims ("how things should be") or predictive claims ("how things are likely to change in the future"). The negotiation process results in certain changes, which have unexpected and expected effects, and which simply needs to be analysed. I use the term development (and not social change) to stress that the analysis aims to discern certain historically important changes. This does not necessarily imply, that the changes are taking place at a national level. However, if they take place in a limited local or regional context, they are either central historical turning points or they are indices of a cumulative pattern and thus have general comparative value for national-level analysis.¹ A local development creates, if nothing else, a discrepancy between different regions. Thus the national level is not necessarily the level at which significant processes of development occur. But equally, analysis of a spatially limited process does not culminate in the writing of an episode in a history. That history needs to be interpreted.

2. REINTERPRETATIONS

The scholarly community writing on African social history is large - at least in relation to the volume of written archival sources. Because of limited, biased and often downright unreliable records, researchers need to stretch available sources and their own their interpretative capacities. Many key documents have been turned

¹ This historical reflection is particularly pertinent to the current debate on the role of nation-states in Africa. While claims that the era of nation-state is ending are exaggerated, they are, nevertheless, useful in analysing exactly how coherent the colonial and post-colonial state structures have been and how they did really penetrate vast rural areas.

over again and again. All too often, social historians need to interpret what might lie behind the terse, defensive or sarcastic remarks of administrative officers in their official reports. Oral history can be gathered as supplementary information but older oral testimonies tends to be scant and have unreliable comparative value. The poor quality of both written and oral sources has engendered an approach that requires concurrent, critical reading of both types of sources.

The question of stretching or not stretching material is crucial. Much valid material is presented in the anthropological and administrative sources which have a strictly limited local focus. Since these village or ethnic studies tend to concentrate on parochial concerns it is difficult to define whether the studied local processes transcend local/regional level and whether they can be generalized to a national level. Central to the methodology of the negotiated development paradigm is acknowledgement of local variation and the effect of that variation on state-citizen relationships. This means that the national level is not given predominance in the analysis but neither is the generalization from one locale expected to be representative for a whole nation. Nevertheless, one needs a large amount of local level material from various settings to be able to present the geographical variation and its implications in a balanced way.

Given the problem of sources, the writing of social history has resulted in the slow accumulation of scholarly works. Below, I present some works which have adopted the new paradigm and developed it by critical use of the sources. The order in which the books are presented does not reflect any kind of ranking.

A valuable overview of African rural development from this perspective is *No Condition is Permanent*, by Sara Berry (1993). She uses negotiation as a central metaphor in her analysis. The book covers the changes during the 20th century in the fields of the state-peasant encounter, agricultural production, labour arrangements, access to land and economic relationships and networks. The major part of her material derives from four case-studies (central Kenya, northeastern Zambia, southern Ghana and southwestern Nigeria).

Of state-peasant encounter, Berry concludes that "during second colonial occupation (when the level of interventions increased from the 1930s onwards) and since independence, the presence of the state in rural economies has been intrusive rather than hegemonic" (Berry 1993: 48). The peasantry has entered the negotiations with its own agenda and has had the power either to manipulate the outcome or partially withdraw from social processes which they perceive unfavourable. This view challenges the old view that colonialism and subsequent nation-building uprooted Africans and thereby favoured the ambitions of authoritarian leaders. Berry argues:

... the fact that government objectives are themselves often contradictory or inconsistent leads farmers to expect that government policies will be transitory and hence to use them as channels of access to state resources in the short run, rather than as aids to long-term development. In the process, rural dwellers often 'straddle' formal and informal institutions in an effort to diversify their options and maintain flexibility in the face of uncertain opportunities and constraints.

The result is neither effective state control of the countryside nor an uncaptured peasantry, but rather multiple linkages between farmers and states which affect patterns of resource allocation and agricultural performance partly by encouraging mobility and diversification of networks and income sources (Berry 1993: 66).

This means that the power used in a structurally unequal relationship (e.g. ruler-subject) can always be contested.² In older studies this was not noticed. The harshness of the power relationships and the concealed strategies of the oppressed made it difficult to discern the full scope of the contestation. This oversight also arose from the limitations of the euro-centric conceptual apparatus which had overvalued western-style national institutions.

2.1 ADMINISTRATION AND LAW

In his book *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya* (1990), Bruce Berman has analysed how the colonial administration worked. He gives a realistic account of the indeterminacies and variations in the colonial project. The book concentrates on colonial administration and shows the limitations on administrators in imposing any kind of social order when using the mighty resources at their disposal during their brief tenures in any one administrative position. Certainly the administration tried new things all the time. If the officer did not attempt something different, the Colonial Office invented new policies instead.³

Martin Chanock in his *Law, Custom and Social Order* (1985) gives a similar account of legal and extra-legal institutions in Zambia and Malawi. He concentrates on the encounters between rulers and their subjects. His analysis shows brilliantly how Africans reacted to the visible and hidden agendas of administrators who tried to construct 'customary laws'. Nevertheless, the African input on the writing of customary laws gave primacy to one ideological view on African society - that of the elders - and created an artificial construct which was then continually challenged, directly and indirectly, by the youths, the rich accumulators, etc. The legal arena is an excellent one for the historical analysis of negotiated development, because legal cases always include a concrete negotiation process which is often systematically documented in court proceedings. The richness of Chanock's analysis comes from its openness to extra-judicial forms of control. Thus issues like

² Actually, the relational nature of power should be evident to anyone familiar with theories of power (e.g. Foucault 1982; Giddens 1979).

³ Gus Liebenow (1971) described the continually changing policies as the "white man's madness". He depicted his case (i.e. southeast Tanzania) as an exceptional one of colonial experimentation but it may be that the same level of local experimentation and policy modification existed in other regions and other colonies.

witchcraft and marriage payments are given full treatment as focal points in the encounters which generated the historical interpretations of morality and law.

2.2 LAND AND LABOUR

Sally Falk Moore (1986) has written a systematic analysis of the evolution of land rights in northern Tanzania in her *Social Facts and Fabrications*. She shows how both land claims and lineage organisation were shaped in the process of land litigation. The relationship between the land and a social group is not taken as given, but emerges as a result of public negotiation. A theoretical review article on disputes and negotiations over rural land in Africa south of the Sahara has been written by Parker Shipton and Mitzi Goheen (1992). They emphasize the symbolic meanings of belonging that continue to be imputed to the land.

Henrietta Moore and Megan Vaughan in their *Cutting Down Trees* (1994) have written an agricultural history of northeastern Zambia. Their analysis shows the contradiction between development planned from above and adaptation to the local situation from below. When the state imposed agricultural rules to control population and protect the environment, it worked on premises in which its political agenda was fully enmeshed with ecological analysis. The result is unsuitable policies, which the peasants, based on their own rationality, partly use and partly dismiss. Whatever its initial purpose, the intervention created new social constellations with unintended consequences which then provoked further action.

Moore and Vaughan, among others, show how differentiated responses have increased differentiation in rural Africa. Differentiation has in turn enhanced reliance on social networks and patron-client relationships. This is due to the unpredictability of and high risks in the economic system that is created. Robert Chambers (e.g. 1989; 1993) has aptly described African rural production systems as "complex, diverse and risk-prone". Although his social analysis is rather schematic (and ahistorical), Chambers has demonstrated well the complexity of production systems in peripheral areas and at very low levels of output.

Many works illuminate differentiation as an unpredictable result of different encounters. A good example is Sara Berry's *Fathers work for their Sons* which deals with cocoa cultivators in Nigeria (1985). This book shows the spatial and economic mobility that the colonial and post-colonial situation has fuelled. The pattern of accumulation is not based solely on agriculture, but on the combination of agriculture with wage labour and with entrepreneurship. Berry shows how social change and accumulation also have a dynamic inter-generational dimension.⁴

⁴ A similar observation is made by Stephen Orvis in his unpublished study *The Political Economy of Agriculture in Kisii, Kenya* (1989). He shows how most households "straddle" employment and agriculture. The difference between successful and less successful cases is that the successful households started earlier (during the 1920s and 1930s) than others and transferred the comparative advantage to the following generations by investing in education.

One important theme in African social history is the diversification of income sources. Diversification is the tendency to engage in small-scale production for local markets. It provides a vast array of services and goods with a competitive price. The non-agricultural activities have become increasingly significant in terms of employment and gross economic value. These activities, together with continued access to land, mean that rural households have all their basic needs somehow provided for locally and, when risks are grave, are resilient in the face of externally imposed change.

The definitive social history of diversification remains to be written. There are some texts that touch on the issue. Janet MacGuffey's study, *Entrepreneurs and Parasites: Struggles for Indigenous Capitalism in Zaire* (1987) is an analysis of an urban environment, but it demonstrates well the path of 'informalization' that non-state non-agricultural production has taken. Although independent African countries have devoted large amounts of money to industrialization and thus to 'derived urbanization' (Bryceson 1993: 10), the economic results have been negligible. The so-called informal sector which is seen by mainstream economists as a marginal economic trend, has been understood in critical studies as integral to negotiated development.

Scholarly discussion shows that the political dimension is always present in the negotiated development perspective. Recent years have also witnessed a proliferation of studies where subaltern forces and protest movements are given a central role. Allen Isaacman's review article *Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa* (1990) shows that the rural population has been able to use several indirect methods of leverage when overt rebellion has been impossible. Rural protest has not always been successful and it has often generated a harsh reaction. The political situation does not allow for romanticizing the rural power relationship.⁵

2.3 IDEOLOGY AND COSMOLOGY

Perhaps the cosmological level is still uncertainly integrated into the grand project of negotiated development. Some works have been produced where cosmology and ideology are seen as the battlefields of negotiation. Stephen Feierman's *Peasant Intellectuals* (1990) is an example. Feierman studies the responses of local ethnic leaders and peasant women to colonial agricultural policies in northeastern Tanzania. A central part of these confrontations was the interpretations of the relationship between political authority and cosmology. Even more compelling

⁵ I would like to acknowledge Göran Hyden's *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania* (1980) as an important forerunner of the paradigm of negotiated development because it has a persuasive account on the rural exit option in its understanding of the state-peasantry relationship. The more popularly known work *No shortcuts to Progress* (1983) has a slightly more romantic notion of the rural population. It states that the rural population has a self-sufficient 'economy of affection' and can decide to withdraw from its relationship with the state.

examples of this theme are presented in *Modernity and Its Malcontents*, edited by Jean and John Comaroff (1993). In this book, ritual practices and modernity are studied dialectically. The Comaroffs argue (p. xxx) that "ritual, as an experimental technology intended to affect the flow of power in the universe, is an especially likely response to contradictions created and (literally) engendered by processes of social, material, and cultural transformation, processes re-presented, rationalized, and authorized in the name of modernity and its various alibis".

The unfolding cumulative pattern that emerges from these studies is that rural populations have been able to influence their relationship with their official superiors. In many cases, the strategies have proved to be sensible, at least in the short-term perspective. The long-term effect of this rather unorganised pattern of reaction is perhaps more negative, for it leaves the state relatively undisturbed to usurpate resources, it allows for differentiation and uneven development. One result is the current high level of poverty.

3. THE ARCH-ENEMY

The paradigm of negotiated development is convincing simply because it is so refined. Nevertheless, this perspective is gaining ground only slowly because it faces a formidable opponent, the stubborn neo-liberal economic perspective. I call it an arch-enemy for the simple reason that it has managed to convince many observers tilted towards development studies that neo-liberal theory, as opposed to much other research, is a paradigm with a coherent methodology.

It is not necessary to repeat here in detail the critique of neo-liberal economics. Suffice it to say that neo-liberal economic theory is an abstract and general theory that emerges, when applied at the more detailed level, as a politically motivated ahistorical theory. Nevertheless, neo-liberal economics has remained a highly visible tradition because it is internally coherent and internationally acknowledged. It is based on universal categories. By contrast, the negotiated development paradigm provides only historical episodes which are not generally applicable in other contexts. Whereas neo-liberal economics can allegedly be used anywhere, the negotiated development provides situated knowledge which cannot be readily applied in other contexts.

Thus it is impossible to disregard neo-liberal economic theory. Even if one categorically denies that it is a serious theoretical competitor (and this would be an underestimation), it still needs to be confronted as part of the studied reality. Neo-liberal economic theory is worth reckoning because it has guided economic adjustment programmes and thus become a definite ideological force in Africa. In some cases, structural adjustment programmes have increased differentiation which in turn has fuelled social conflicts of all kinds. Neo-liberal economic theory is not to be noted only when market liberalisation has been successful but also in the

situations of failure because, in all cases, the application of the theory has caused a major shift in power relations.

4. THE TROPES IN THE NARRATIVE

The paradigm of negotiated development has developed a definite style of presentation. It has generated its own vocabulary which is usually straightforward (with visually descriptive verbs and dynamic substantives) but which occasionally tends to shun clarity, especially when the style is given the upper hand. Below I give a list of often used expressions and a mischievous reading of them:

embedded	somehow related, causality unclear
entangled	as above
interwoven	as above
socially constructed	it is not self-evident, it has a history
contested	not accepted by everybody
negotiated	the end result is unexpected
multiplicity	complicated, unclear, more than three
complex	complicated, unclear

The discussion of 'entangled' social and cultural forms tends to result in descriptive analysis where causalities are both formulated and negated. The sentences are constructed so that both the structural setting and the momentary dynamism are involved. When this is done skilfully, it succeeds in overcoming hypostasis and linearity in the textual presentation. When it is done less skilfully, the result is reduced clarity.

Descriptive and inclusive analysis tends to simplify in certain instances. The analysis often pays lip-service to 'diversity' which, when closely scrutinized, amounts to little more than vague formulations such as 'multiplicity of factors' or 'the contradiction of social forces' because the prose form does not really allow for confronting diversity. Why is this? Because analysing diversity sounds like an empiricist project and we have been warned to always avoid such. Leach warns us against 'collecting butterflies'; Marx warns against 'surface appearances' (although he acknowledged that 'abstract' (i.e. decontextualised) is not the final level of analysis); and Bourdieu tells an anecdote about an anthropologist counting the hundreds of different acts a woman can do in a kitchen. Usually the researchers avoid the full scale analysis of variation and prefer to reduce variation into two or three alternatives. If there is greater variation, the analysis tends to slip into vague 'multiplicity'.

The style of the new genre is entertaining, once you get used to the code words. The texts are lively, the tropes are well formulated (although often extended as far as possible), and you will find both ironic comment and cases of human contradiction and deficiency (common sources of joy and superior feeling among

impoverished researchers). The use of tropes, metaphors and symbols as keys to social change is sometimes alarming. Although a trope can be illuminating, there is always the danger that it will take over as has happened in neo-classical economics, with its 'demand', 'market' and 'equilibrium'.⁶

There is one more danger in the style of constructivist analysis. The analysis often show how a cultural pattern was 'invented' in the colonial encounter. The danger is that invention is perceived as a morally bad change which undermines 'true' African culture. Terence Ranger, who is the father of the 'invention' school, has elaborated his own position in this respect. He refers to his critics while acknowledging that "no matter how open and dynamic I seek to make African 'custom', my emphasis upon colonial 'invention' could be read to imply that 'once their alien representations had been stripped away ... the authentic and other (Africa) would emerge'" (Ranger 1993: 6-7).

5. A PARADIGM, A METHOD OR A STYLE?

I have drawn a line around a number of texts which, to my mind, are paradigmatically linked. The common factor in these texts is the specific kind of understanding of social dynamics. This common factor holds that the political process of interaction can take the form of 'negotiation' even when the groups are not organised into pressure groups. Moreover, the cumulative effect of the ripostes and created constellations modifies the outcome of the historical process. The pattern of claims and counterclaims is called negotiation.

In this final section I pose the question whether what I have described actually amounts to a paradigm shift, whether we are witnessing a new method for generating qualitatively different information, or whether the shift is just a stylistic change in 'writing culture'.⁷

I would like to argue that there is indeed a new paradigm even when it rests on methodological and stylistic attributes. What is curious in this paradigm is that it is very academic and it simply aims to put the record straight. The paradigm has generated very limited concepts of its own. It struggles still with the concepts of the

⁶ Mark Hobart has criticised the metaphorical idioms in modernization theory, which is the backbone of the neo-classical economics. He says: "What is striking for an epistemology that claims to represent the world accurately and neutrally is the frequency with which abstract and contested notions not only make use of metaphor, but the extent to which metaphor is constitutive" (Hobart 1993: 6).

⁷ There have been very limited claims for a systematic paradigm for critical development studies on rural Africa after the rise and fall of the neo-Marxist paradigm. Some tentative claims are naturally there. Robert Chambers (1993) has been a central figure in paradigm building for the concepts of local knowledge and indigenous knowledge. David Niemeijer (1996) has also recently written on an emerging paradigm in studies on African agricultural history. However, both writers concentrate more on the nature-society relationship than on social dynamics.

last century (e.g. class, ethnic group, social order) and tries to open them to permissive and culturally shaped analysis.⁸ Thus it is not a pretentious project emanating from an old university (or a new think-tank) which tries to impose new all-encapsulating key concepts for all research.

Allen Isaacman argues (based on his own reading list) that the new studies are characterized by the absence of a dominant paradigm. He states: "This is not to imply that the new literature is shapeless, but, rather, that it confronts the heavy structuralism of both underdevelopment theory and modes of production analysis, and offers an alternative approach examining the relationship between social action and social structure over time" (Isaacman 1990: 12). Sara Berry also avoids speaking directly of a paradigm when she lumps together her reading of historical and anthropological studies and argues that there is a certain degree of coherence. "Recent historical and anthropological literature has been especially critical of the structuralist and jural paradigms which informed both the classic British ethnographies of the late colonial period and much of the Marxist literature of the 1960s and early 1970s" (Berry 1993: 4). She continues that, in contrast to this critical line of thought, the economic development studies provide a different strand of ideas which rest on universal models and quantitative analysis.

Compared with Isaacman and Berry, David Booth provides a drop more masculine/authoritarian stamina by stating that there is a new 'research agenda'. Booth's reading list is slightly different and consists of serious non-economic development studies. He argues: "Today, the state of the social development field by no means justifies complacency; yet the heavy atmosphere of intellectual stagnation and self-imposed insulation from practical issues that was so prevalent in the early 1980s, does seem to have cleared. Not only is fresh and exciting work being carried out at a variety of levels and on a host of different topics, but the convergences of style and perspective are sufficiently striking to justify the notion of a new research agenda" (Booth 1992: 2). His analysis is very rich in opinions. He places much emphasis on diversity and incoherence. Yet he argues that the new studies avoid the trap of empiricism and yield "productive levels of abstraction". He takes the concept of regime (e.g. regimes of accumulation) as a case of such a "useful pointer" (Booth 1992: 18).

What should be clear by now is this: these authors would almost contradict themselves if they postulated a 'paradigm' at the level of theory when they locate 'negotiation' in the field. To use the word paradigm in research is to assert homogeneity rather than debate among researchers. This is naturally unacceptable. However, when this corpus is studied from the broad perspective of the history of science, we gain a different view. On that level, I argue that there is enough evidence to assert - at a suitable level of abstraction - that there is definite coherence in a certain set of the textual production on African history and that this

⁸ Perhaps one new social category has been circulated widely in the literature. This is the concept of network. Networking is seen as a form of lateral cooperation without definite institutional backing.

coherence is producing sufficient institutional criteria within the research community that we can speak of an emerging paradigm.

What I have outlined is a paradigm of the historical analysis of unfolding challenges and ripostes where agricultural practices, political systems and religious ideas are analysed in one context. The new paradigm has effectively questioned causality in societal processes. It has provided good examples of situations where ideological factors are as important as ecological changes. Does this mean that there is still hope for the old dream to come true: a scientific community without artificial borders between disciplines?

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