



Colonised minds? Post-development theory and the desirability of development in Africa

Sally Matthews

Department of Political and International Studies, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa

ABSTRACT

While post-development theory is very concerned with the ways in which development has impacted upon the countries of the Global South, there has been relatively little written on post-development theory from an African perspective. This paper identifies some of the ways in which post-development theory fails to adequately understand the African experience of development. In particular, I explore the difficulty that post-development theory confronts when faced with the continued desire on the part of many people in Africa for development. In his introduction to the new edition of *The Development Dictionary*, Wolfgang Sachs discusses the desire, noting that despite development's many failures, many still associate the concept with self-affirmation and redress. He explains this continued desire for development as being indicative of the need for the decolonisation of the imagination. In this paper, I show some of the problems with this explanation and present alternative ways of understanding the persistence of the desire for development in Africa.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 October 2016
Accepted 20 January 2017

KEYWORDS

development theory
popular protests
colonisation of the mind

In his preface to the new edition of *The Development Dictionary*, Wolfgang Sachs acknowledges that the contributors to this volume did not fully appreciate the desirability of development for those in the South.¹ He says that while development 'was an invention of the West', it was 'not just an imposition on the rest.'² Indeed, it is the South that has emerged as 'the staunchest defender of development.'³ In this paper, I reflect on the continuing appeal of development, with a particular focus on Africa. In so doing, I explore my own gradual disillusionment with post-development theory, using this exploration to identify some of the ways in which post-development theory fails to fully grapple with the continuing desire for development. As my own experiences have been rooted in the African context, my disillusionment reveals some of the ways in which this context raises particular challenges for post-development theory. It is hoped that the exploration of my growing disillusionment with some aspects of post-development theory will bring out clearly some of the ways in which the African context, which has received relatively little attention in post-development theory, prevents us from too easily embracing some of the positions associated with post-development theory.

CONTACT Sally Matthews s.matthews@ru.ac.za

This article was originally published with errors. This version has been amended. Please see Erratum (<https://doi.org/10.1080/01418017.2017.1375278>).