Man transporting bags of charcoal to the market in Katakwi, Uganda.
Development as Freedom?  
From Colonialism to Countering Climate Change

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In the new international security order, interventions are posed in the language of individual empowerment, freedom and capacity-building. This short article considers this discourse of empowerment and freedom in relation to the problematic of development. In today’s interventionist paradigm, individual autonomy or freedom is the central motif for understanding the problematic of development. Rather than a material view of development, human agency is placed at the centre and is seen as the measure of development in terms of individual capabilities. In the words of Amartya Sen, the winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize for Economic Science, freedom is increasingly seen to be both the primary end and principal means of development: ‘Development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency’ (Sen 1999: xiii). In this post-liberal discourse, of ‘human development’, freedom and autonomy are foregrounded but development lacks a transformative or modernising material content. In this discourse, development is taken out of an economic context of GNP growth or industrialisation or a social and political context in which development policies are shaped by social and political pressures or state-led policies. The individualised understanding of development takes a rational-choice view of the individual, or an ‘agent-orientated view’ (Sen 1999: 11), in which development is about enabling individuals to make effective choices by increasing their capabilities.

Change does not come from above but through the agency of individuals, who act and make choices according to their own values and objectives (Sen 1999: 19). The outcome of development cannot therefore be measured according to any universal framework, as different individuals have different development priorities and aspirations and live in differing social and economic contexts. Further, a critique of top-down state-led approaches to development, the post-liberal framing, should not be confused with advocacy of the free market (see further; Chandler
Markets are not of themselves seen as being capable of producing solutions or leading to development, as they depend on the formal institutional framework and the informal framework of social culture and ideas or ‘behavioural ethics’ (Sen 1999: 262). Although the individual in need of empowerment and capability- or capacity-building is at the centre, both the postcolonial state and the society are understood to have secondary and important supporting roles in developing the institutional and cultural frameworks to enable individuals to free or develop themselves (Sen 1999: 53).

The discursive framing of development in terms of empowerment and capacity-building centred on the individual responsibility of the postcolonial or post-conflict subject has been critiqued for its emphasis on ‘non-material development’, which has tended to reinforce global inequalities of wealth (Duffield 2007: 101-5) and as marking ‘the demise of the developing state’ (Pupavac 2007) as the poor are increasingly seen as the agents of change and poverty reduction rather than external actors. Vanessa Pupavac highlights that as development has come to the forefront of international agendas for state-building and conflict prevention, there has been a distancing of Western powers and international institutions from taking responsibility for development, with a consensus that the poor need ‘to find their own solutions to the problems they face’ (Pupavac 2007: 96; see also Pupavac’s and Reid’s contributions in this volume). This article draws out the changing nature of Western discourses of development and the understanding of policy practices as promoting the empowerment of the post-conflict Other.

**Background**

The problem of development has been one of the most sensitive questions raised in the external intervention in and regulation of the colonial or postcolonial state. The framing of development has been a sensitive question as it has arisen defensively, in the context of apologia: in the negotiation of the ending of formal colonial rule and, subsequently, as a way of rationalising support for one-party rule in postcolonial Africa and for the limited aspirations of external powers in the post-Cold War era. In the days when colonial hierarchies were unquestioned, development was not a question of concern, regardless of the nature of economic crisis. For example, in response to the Irish potato famines of the 1840s, British administrators did not blame colonial economic policy but saw Irish habits and lifestyles as the cause of poverty and famine. Questions of poverty and development were not discussed in economic terms but as racial or cultural problems connected to diet, overpopulation or laziness and indifference. In this context, ‘Britain’s
mission’ in Ireland ‘was seen not as one to ‘alleviate Irish distress but to civilize her people’ (Sen 1999: 174).

The discourse of development only arose defensively, in the context of external avoidance of responsibility for the inequalities that critics alleged were being reproduced and reinforced through the hierarchies of international power or the pressures of the world market. It is for this reason that the problematic of development has always tended to be linked with the question of local ownership and empowerment and has sought to shift the understanding of development away from a universalising perspective of modernisation to exaggerate the differences between the West and the postcolonial world, where the attenuation of development aspirations has been held to be a way of empowering or capacity-building postcolonial societies themselves.

The post-liberal paradigm of international state-building builds on earlier discursive framings of development, stressing the need for ownership, but is distinct from earlier framings in that it ruptures the traditional liberal framing which understood economic development and political autonomy as mutually supportive aspects of liberal modernity. Earlier discourses of apologia sought to problematise liberal approaches to the colonial or postcolonial world through the emphasis on the problems of material development. The state-building paradigm inverses the problematic - the framing of the relationship between development and autonomy: posing the autonomy of the postcolonial or post-conflict subject as a problem for development rather than the lack of development as a problem for political autonomy. This means that development in relation to state failure or state fragility becomes a process of external relationship management and an explanation for inequality and intermittent crisis but without an end goal in which this situation is seen to be alleviated. In this article, the paradigm of development as freedom, central to discourses of development within the international state-building paradigm, will be traced out in relation to two earlier framings of the problematic of development and autonomy. These three framings of the problem of development can be seen from the viewpoint of Western policy-makers or international interveners and in their differing relationships to the object of intervention – the colonial or postcolonial state – and the different rationales in which development fitted into the paradigms within which this relationship of domination or influence was conceived.

The historically defensive and limiting nature of discourses of development is drawn out here through an initial focus upon the rise of the development problematic in the colonial era. In fact, it first arose with
the problematisation of colonialism in the wake of the First World War. Development as a set of policy practices was used both defensively, to legitimise colonial rule, and to help further secure it. The classic example of discussion of development under the period of late colonialism was that most clearly articulated by Lord Lugard under the rubric of the ‘dual mandate’, where development discourse operated to reveal the different and distinct development needs of colonial societies and therefore to indicate the need for a different set of political relations and rights than those of liberal democracies. The dual nature of the development discourse helped to shift the focus of policy-making away from the export of Western norms, such as representative democracy, and towards support for traditional elites, empowering more conservative sections of society in the attempt to negotiate imperial decline through preventing the political dominance of pro-independence elites.

The second period where development discourse comes to the fore in international debates is that of negotiating relations with the postcolonial world. Here, too, the discourse was a defensive one, with an awareness of the lack of direct interventionist capacity and a need to respond to the perceived threat of the Soviet Union gaining influence in many states that were no longer formally dependent on Western power. From the late 1950s to the early 1970s development was presented as necessitating a centralising state role as Western governments sought to bargain with postcolonial elites, facilitating a strong state to prevent rebellion led by movements sympathetic to the Soviet cause. The division of the world geopolitically, and the competitive balance of power, made the postcolonial state an important subject in its own right, with the possibility of choosing (and playing off) competing external patrons. The Western approach to development was one that argued that Western standards of democracy and governance were not applicable to the management of postcolonial development needs.

From the late 1970s until the end of the 1990s, development was largely off the agenda as models of state-led development failed and the Soviet model became discredited. In this period, the international financial institutions were much less defensive and, under the ‘Washington Consensus’ framework of structural adjustment, sought increasingly to assert regulatory control over the postcolonial state, gradually extending the reach and focus of economic policy conditionality, focusing on financial and monetary controls and attempts to ‘roll back the state’. The lack of defensiveness meant that there was little focus on development as a precondition for political equality, either in terms of independence or liberal-democratic frameworks of domestic rule; in this period, therefore, there was also little concern with the ownership of develop-
ment. Rather than focusing on the empowerment of the postcolonial state and society, the international financial institutions openly claimed the mantle of development expertise and had little concern regarding the social impact of their financial stringency or about advocating the market as the framework that would provide solutions. The lowering of the priority of development meant that from the late 1970s to the 1990s the development sphere became the sphere of non-governmental activity as voluntary bodies stepped in to fill the humanitarian gap left by the decline of official institutional concern (Duffield 2007).

Today the development of the postcolonial state and society has made a comeback as a central concern of international institutions and leading Western states. The precondition for development becoming more central to Western concerns has been a new defensiveness in relation to the postcolonial world as Western powers have sought to withdraw from policy responsibility. This discourse of withdrawal has taken place within the rubric of anti-modernisation frameworks, shaped by concerns over the environment and global warming. This defensiveness is reflected in the shift in focus, away from the open dominance of international financial institutions and away from the market as a means of resolving the problems of development. Instead, development discourse focuses on empowering and building the capacity of postcolonial states and societies in ways similar to those of the earlier discourses of the colonial and postcolonial periods. Once again postcolonial states and societies are held to be the owners of their own development, but in the very different context of Western regulation and intervention in the 21st century.

Today’s development discourse of the importance of empowering the postcolonial subject was well described by Gordon Brown, in 2006, while still the UK’s chancellor of the exchequer: ‘A century ago people talked of “What can we do to Africa?” Last century, it was “What can we do for Africa?” Now in 2006, we must ask what the developing world, empowered, can do for itself’ (Brown 2006). In today’s discourse of development, it is often asserted that what is novel about current approaches is empowerment of the postcolonial world in relation to the needs of development. Many critiques of this approach have suggested that the discourse of empowerment and ownership is a misleading one; considering the influence of Western powers and international financial institutions (for example, Harrison 2001, 2004; Rowden and Irama 2004; Gould and Ojanaen 2003; Craig and Porter 2002; Fraser 2005; Cammack 2002; Chandler 2006), this is no doubt the case. The focus of this article, however, is how the discourse of ownership and development is historically linked and how this discourse transforms and inverts the earlier attempts to explain differential policy frameworks,
which understood development to be a precondition for autonomy, and instead asserts a post-liberal claim that it is autonomy which is the problem for development. It is this distinctive framing, emphasising the autonomy of the postcolonial subject, which facilitates development interventions aimed at indirectly influencing the autonomous choices of the poorest and most marginal sections of postcolonial societies.

**Indirect rule in Africa**

In the British case, the African protectorates were already, in effect, a postscript to the glory of Empire. The African states were ‘protectorates’, not colonies, which already highlighted a defensive, contradictory and problematic approach to the assumption of colonial power over them. The distinction lay, not so much in the power that the British government could exercise but in the responsibilities it accepted. In 1900 the British courts (the King’s Bench) definitively ruled that: ‘East Africa, being a protectorate in which the Crown has jurisdiction, is in relation to the Crown a foreign country under its protection, and its native inhabitants are not subjects owing allegiance to the Crown, but protected foreigners, who, in return for that protection, owe obedience’ (cited in Lugard 1923: 36). Colonial administrators were conscious of the fragility of their rule and nowhere more so than in sub-Saharan Africa. It was in order to address this problem that the discourse of development and the policy-making frameworks associated with it, particularly in the administrative conception of indirect rule, developed in an attempt to shore up external administrative authority through talking up the autonomy and independence of native chiefs, whom they sought to rule through and whose capacities they sought to build and develop.

The insight that Lugard had was to make a virtue out of development differentials as an argument for recasting British policy requirements in ostensibly neutral terms. Rather than an overt act of political reaction, Lugard’s attempt to stave off the end of colonial rule through the empowerment of native institutions was portrayed to be in the development interests of the poor and marginal in colonial society. Through the rubric of interventionist administrative ‘good governance’ native institutions were to be built and simultaneously external control was to be enhanced. As Lugard describes:

> The Resident [colonial official] acts as sympathetic adviser and counsellor to the native chief, being careful not to interfere so as to lower his prestige, or cause him to lose interest in his work. His advice on matters of general policy must be followed, but the native ruler issues his own instructions to subordinate chiefs and district heads – not as the orders of the Resident but as his own – and he
is encouraged to work through them, instead of centralising ev erything in himself… (Lugard 1923: 201).

For Lugard, ‘the native authority is thus de facto and de jure ruler over his own people’, and there are not ‘two sets of rulers – British and native – working either separately or in co-operation, but a single Government’ (1923: 203). Lugard states: ‘It is the consistent aim of the British staff to maintain and increase the prestige of the native ruler, to encourage his initiative, and to support his authority’ (1923: 204). Development was key to legitimating Lugard’s strategy of indirect rule, with the reinvention of native authorities with modern administrative techniques, which could assist in developing trade through introducing a wider use of money, rather than barter, and could expand the scope of political identification beyond personal social connections.

The discussion of development and its link with the mechanisms of indirect rule was the first attempt made to extend the policy framework of intervention with the goal of empowering and building the capacities of the colonial Other. This framing of empowerment developed in response to the negotiation of colonial withdrawal and the desire to use development as a discourse to undermine the legitimacy of the nationalist elites through posing as the representative of the poor and marginal, in whose interest development had to be managed through the maintenance of traditional institutions. In order to counterbalance the elites, British colonisers sought to become the advocates of development centred on the needs and interests of the poorest. The voices of the poor became the subject of British advocacy to suggest that development should focus on their needs rather than on the aspirations of the elites.

The question of development and its relationship to empowerment and local ownership was revived in terms of content, but in a very different form, in the postcolonial era. Here, as considered in the next section, similar arguments to those put by Lugard, about the need for separate and distinct political forms to address the problem of development, were forwarded, while arguments that insisted on measuring the postcolonial state according to the standards of Western liberal democracy were seen as problematic in relation to development needs. Again the defensiveness of the discourse of critiques of liberalism can be seen in relation, not to the threat of anti-colonialism, but to the much broader problematic of support for the Soviet block and resistance to Western influence per se rather than just to Western rule in its most direct colonial form.
Postcolonial development

In the 1960s there was general awareness of the weakness and fragility of the postcolonial state, and development discourse focused defensively on distancing the problems of the postcolonial state from the history of colonial rule. This defensive concern deepened with the perception that development might lead to the growth of influence of social forces that would be more sympathetic to Soviet rule. Whereas the discourse of development and local ownership focused on the poor in an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of ruling elites, in the 1960s, development discourse focused on ownership at the level of state elites in order to prevent the masses from becoming a destabilising force capable of aligning the regimes to the Soviet sphere of influence.

In terms of policy responses, the problem of development was seen to be a unique dilemma, which had arisen only in the postcolonial period. It was clear that while democracy was a central motif of the Cold War divide, the West was in no position to withdraw support from postcolonial states on this basis if it wished to keep them outside the Soviet sphere of influence. In postcolonial 'transition' societies, Western Cold War norms of judgment needed to be rethought. This sense of defensiveness is well expressed by Pye:

Is the emergence of army rule a sign of anti-democratic tendencies? Or is it a process that can be readily expected at particular stages of national development? Must the central government try to obliterate all traditional communal differences, or can the unfettered organisation and representation of conflicting interests produce ultimately a stronger sense of national unity? Should the new governments strive to maintain the same levels of administrative efficiency as the former colonial authorities did, or is it possible that...because the new governments have other claims of legitimacy, this is no longer as crucial a problem? The questions mount, and we are not sure what trends are dangerous and what are only temporary phases with little significance (Pye 1962: 7).

Samuel Huntington's 1968 book, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, concretised the postcolonial perception of the problem of development and stands as the classic text for this period. Whereas previous analysts had suggested that instability and authoritarian rule could be inevitable, Huntington proposed a much more state-led interventionist approach to prevent instability and maintain order. He also inverted the late-colonial understanding of the problem as being that the state institutions were in advance of society, suggesting that the issue should be seen from a new angle. Rather than seeing the lack of economic
development as causing the state-society gap, he argued that it was the development process itself that was destabilising: ‘It is not the absence of modernity but the efforts to achieve it which produce political disorder. If poor countries appear to be unstable, it is not because they are poor, but because they are trying to become rich. A purely traditional society would be ignorant, poor, and stable’ (Huntington 1968: 41).

Rather than being the potential solution, rapid economic progress was held to be the problem facing non-Western states, creating an increasingly destabilised world, wracked by social and political conflict: ‘What was responsible for this violence and instability? The primary thesis of this book is that it was in large part the product of rapid social change and the rapid mobilization of new groups into politics coupled with the slow development of political institutions’ (Huntington 1968: 4).

It was not the case that the political institutions of the postcolonial state were ahead of their societies (in terms of representing a national collectivity which was yet to become fully socially and economically integrated). The problem lay with the institutions of the state rather than with society. Huntington’s state-building thesis consciously sought to privilege order over economic progress, as both a policy means and a political end.

Huntington was clear in his critique of the export of universal Western norms, asserting that the promotion of democracy was not the best way to bring development or to withstand the threat of communist takeover. The barrier to communism was a strong state, capable of galvanising society, possibly through the undemocratic framework of one-party or authoritarian rule: ‘the non-Western countries of today can have political modernization or they can have democratic pluralism, but they cannot normally have both’ (Huntington 1968: 137). He suggested, as did the colonial advocates of indirect rule, that focusing purely on organic solutions to development, waiting for economic growth to develop a middle-class basis for liberal democracy, would result in ‘political decay’ and weak states falling to communist revolution.

The institutional focus for Huntington, as for Lord Lugard, was not a bureaucratic one, but a political one. This much more ‘political’ approach to development reflected the Cold War framework of US foreign policy which sought to support ‘friendly’ authoritarian regimes in order to maintain international stability and order, rather than concern itself with questions of narrow economic policy or with representative democracy. It was not until the late 1970s and 1980s that the international financial institutions and the former colonial powers concerned themselves with the domestic politics of African states once the threat
of Soviet competition and the resistance movements they sponsored became increasingly lifted. In this period the discourse of development and local ownership went into abeyance, to return in the late 1990s.

**Climate change**

From the 1990s onwards development and local ownership have returned to the top of the international agenda and local ownership has been key to reinterpreting the development problematic. In many ways, the discourse draws upon the past: on the late-colonial discourse of emphasising the poor as the central subjects of development but also on the postcolonial discourse problematising the dangers of development and its destabilising effects. Sub-Saharan Africa is particularly vulnerable to climate fluctuations. The lack of development means that 70 per cent of the working population (90 per cent of Africa’s poor) relies on agriculture for a living, the vast majority of them by subsistence farming (NEF 2006: 12). It is no coincidence that the continent with the lowest per capita greenhouse gas emissions is also the most vulnerable to climate change. Rather than the problems of Africa being seen as a lack of development resulting in dependency on climate uncertainties, the problem of development has increasingly been reinterpreted in terms of the problem of individual life-style choices and the survival strategies of the poor.

The framework of intervention in the new security order views African development in terms of external assistance to an ‘adaptation agenda’ essential to prevent the impact of climate change from undermining African development (see, for example, UNFCCC 1994). According to the UK government’s white paper on development, *Making Governance Work for the Poor*, ‘climate change poses the most serious long term threat to development and the Millennium Development Goals’ (DFID 2006). The poverty agenda and the climate change agenda have come together in their shared focus on Africa. In the wake of international support for poverty reduction and debt relief, many international NGOs, international institutions and Western states have called for climate change to be seen as the central challenge facing African development. African poverty and poor governance are held to combine to increase Africa’s vulnerability, while the solution is held to lie with international programmes of assistance, funded and led by Western states, held to be chiefly responsible for global warming.

The ‘adaptation agenda’ brings together the concerns of poverty reduction and responses to climate change by understanding poverty not in terms of income or in relation to social to economic development but in terms of ‘vulnerability to climate change’. This position has been widely articulated by the international NGOs most actively concerned with the
climate change agenda. Tony Jupiter, executive director of Friends of the Earth, argues that: ‘Policies to end poverty in Africa are conceived as if the threat of climatic disruption did not exist’ (McCarthy and Brown 2005). Nicola Saltman, from the World Wide Fund for Nature, similarly feels that ‘All the aid we pour into Africa will be inconsequential if we don’t tackle climate change’ (McCarthy and Brown 2005). This position is shared by the UK Department for International Development, whose chief scientific adviser, Professor Sir Gordon Conway, states that African poverty reduction strategies have not factored in the burdens of climate change on African capacities. He argues that ‘there are three principles for adaptation: 1. Adopt a gradual process of adaptation. 2. Build on disaster preparedness. 3. Develop resilience’ (Conway 2006). The focus of the adaptation agenda puts the emphasis on the lives and survival strategies of Africa’s poor. Professor Conway argues that, with this emphasis: ‘Africa is well prepared to deal with many of the impacts of climate change. Many poor Africans experience severe disasters on an annual or even more frequent basis. This has been true for decades. The challenge is whether we can build on this experience’ (Conway 2006).

The focus on the survival strategies of Africa’s poor is central to notions of strengthening African ‘resilience’ to climate change. This approach has been counterposed to development approaches that focus on questions of socio-economic development dependent on the application of higher levels of science and technology and the modernisation of agriculture. As the NGO Working Group on Climate Change report states: ‘Recently the role of developing new technology has been strongly emphasized… There is a consensus among development groups, however,
that a greater and more urgent challenge is strengthening communities from the bottom-up, and building on their own coping strategies to live with global warming’ (Simms 2005: 2). Despite the claims that ‘good adaptation also makes good development’, it would appear that the adaptation to climate change agenda is more like sustained disaster-relief management than a strategy for African development (Simms 2005:4).

In re-describing poverty as ‘vulnerability to climate change’, there is a rejection of aspirations to modernise agriculture; instead there is an emphasis on reinforcing traditional modes of subsistence economy. Rather than development being safeguarded by the modernisation and transformation of African society, underdevelopment is subsidised through the provision of social support for subsistence farming and nomadic pastoralism. Once poverty is redefined as ‘vulnerability’ then the emphasis is on the survival strategies of the poorest and most marginalised, rather than the broader social and economic relations that force them into a marginalised existence.

The Working Group argues that community and individual empowerment has to be at the centre of the adaptation agenda:

[I]t has to be about strengthening communities from the bottom up, building on their own coping strategies to live with climate change and empowering them to participate in the development of climate change policies. Identifying what communities are already doing to adapt is an important step towards discovering what people’s priorities are and sharing their experiences, obstacles and positive initiatives with other communities and development policy-makers. Giving a voice to people in this way can help to grow confidence, as can valuing their knowledge and placing it alongside science-based knowledge (NEF 2006: 3).

African ‘voices’ are central to climate change advocacy as the science of climate change leaves many questions unanswered, particularly with regard to the impact of climate change in Africa (the problems of climate monitoring capabilities, particularly in Africa, are highlighted in UNFCC 2006: 4–5). Information, to support the urgency of action in this area, is often obtained from those in Africa, held to have a ‘deeper’ understanding than that which can be provided by ‘Western’ science. For example, the views of Sesophio, a Maasai pastoralist from Tanzania are given prominence in the *Africa – Up in Smoke* report:

It is this development, like cars, that is bringing stress to the land, and plastics are being burnt and are filling in the air. We think there is a
lot of connection between that and what is happening now with the
droughts. If you bring oil and petrol and throw it onto the grass it
doesn’t grow, so what are all these cars and new innovations doing to
a bigger area? Every day diseases are increasing, diseases we haven’t
seen before (NEF 2006: 10).

Climate change advocates patronisingly argue that they are empower-
ing people like Sesophio by ‘valuing’ his knowledge and giving him a
‘voice’ rather than exploiting Sesophio’s lack of knowledge about climate
change and the fears and concerns generated by his marginal existence.
The focus on the ‘real lives’ of the poorest and most marginalised African
communities has gone along with the problematisation of autonomy and
the individual choices made by the African poor. The NGO Working
Group suggests that the problems of African development lie with the
survival strategies of the most marginalised in African society:

To survive the droughts, people have had to resort to practices that
damage their dignity and security, their long-term livelihoods, and
their environment, including large-scale charcoal production that
intensifies deforestation, fighting over water and pastures, selling
livestock and dropping out of school (NEF 2006: 10).
The view that climate change, rather than underdevelopment, is responsible for poverty, results in an outlook that tends to blame local survival strategies, such as cutting down trees to make some money from selling charcoal. When these views are reflected back to Western advocates, the African poor reflect Western views that they are part of the problem:

In nearby Goobato, a village with no cars, no motorcycles, no bicycles, no generators, no televisions, no mobile phones, and dozens of $5 radios, Nour, the village elder, said increased temperatures bake the soil… Nour also said villagers share the blame: ‘We cut trees just to survive, but we are part of the problem’ (Donnelly 2006).

The strategy of adaptation tends to problematise African survival strategies because, by talking up isolated positive examples of adaptation under international aid, it inevitably problematises the real life choices and decisions that the African poor have to make. The ‘adaptation agenda’ allows Western governments, international institutions and international NGOs to claim they are doing something positive to address the impact of global warming but the result is that the African poor are problematised as being responsible for their own problems. ‘Learning from the poor’, ‘empowering the poor’ and strategies to increase their ‘resilience’, end up patronising Africa’s poor and supporting an anti-development agenda that would consign Africa to a future of poverty and climate dependency.

**Conclusion**

The discursive framing of development and autonomy within the international state-building paradigm is that of understanding social and economic problems, most sharply posed by the problems of subsistence agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa, as those of individual lifestyle choices. The framework of engagement understands the problem not as a lack of material societal development but rather as an ideational and cognitive problem rooted in the institutional framework influencing these lifestyle choices. ‘Development as freedom’ understands the problems of lack of development, most clearly highlighted in the dependence on climate stability in sub-Saharan Africa, in terms of the lack of freedom of the individual to make the right choices in response to the external environment. Rather than push for material development, the state-building paradigm of ‘development as freedom’ suggests that the solution lies with the empowerment of individuals and communities and therefore that their lack of agency or their inability to make the right autonomous choices is the problem that external state-building intervention needs to address. In this respect, the current framing of development solutions seems little different from that of the colonial period, discussed at the start of this chapter, where Britain’s mission was not ‘to alleviate Irish distress but to civilize her people’ (Sen 1999: 174).
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