Spring 4-2015

Cocoa and Chocolate: Deconstructing the Development Paradigm in Cameroon

Chelsea VanHook
University of Dayton

Cocoa and Chocolate: Deconstructing the Development Paradigm in Cameroon

Honors Thesis

Chelsea VanHook

Department: International Studies, Human Rights Studies

Advisor: Simanti Dasgupta, Ph.D.

April 2015

Cocoa and Chocolate: Deconstructing the Development Paradigm in Cameroon

Honors Thesis

Chelsea VanHook

Department: International Studies, Human Rights Studies

Advisor: Simanti Dasgupta, Ph.D.

April 2015

Abstract

This project focuses specifically on the neo-liberal economic iteration of international development. Neo-liberalism is the idea that the deregulation of the private sector and expansion of free trade will lead to growth in undeveloped countries, which will effectively end poverty and increase the standard of living. My ethnography in Southwest Cameroon, however, shows that the experience and embodiment of development takes on a new understanding at the local, daily level. Exploring the paradox of cocoa and chocolate in Cameroon, I find that while the average Cameroonian is able to grow cocoa, he/she is unable to afford chocolate. This context calls for a critiquing of the assumptions which undergird the development paradigm in order to understand how and why it so often fails, as well to reconcile development with the local understandings and needs in the Global South, generally, and Southwest Cameroon, specifically.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The first week of my work placement with the Community Development office in Kumba, Cameroon we travelled outside the city limits to visit a small village called Banga. This would be my first interview. I had come to Cameroon on a cultural immersion through my university's Center for Social Concern in order to understand how international development is conceptualized at the local level. As someone who has only been educated in the United States, my experience of development has primarily taken place in the classroom: through macroeconomic and development economics classes, as well political science classes emphasizing the challenges of conducting development. Aside from these formal, pro-development classes, I had also begun reading ethnographic critiques of development. James Ferguson's seminal book, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, opened my eyes to the seedy underbelly of the development machine and its ability to lift political issues by its logic of assistance. In his book, Ferguson argues that the discourse and practice of development has the effect of depoliticizing questions of unintended consequences and state power.[1] Nevertheless, my experience of development was an academic one. I, an American university student, have always been "developed" and "modern" on the basis of where I was born and raised. I was visiting Cameroon for a month to immerse myself in the culture and conduct research for a senior thesis.

[1] James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Through this project, the central question I hoped to answer was how international development is conceptualized at the local level. Furthermore, I wanted to understand how the local conceptions compared to the formal conception of international development at the global level. The ethnographic critiques alerted me these understandings would most likely diverge in many ways; however, I was unsure how they would diverge in the context of Cameroon. In order to understand where and how these divergences occur, it would be necessary to then understand what the underlying assumptions of international development at the global level are, and, perhaps most importantly, how these assumptions impact the people at the local level.

When referring to international development, I am specifically speaking of neo-liberal economic development. This type of development is contingent upon neo-liberal economic principles, which argue that economic growth will naturally lift people out of poverty by creating an environment in which businesses flourish, jobs are created, and, therefore, the standard of living is raised. According to neo-liberal ideology, free trade, reduced government interventions in the regulation of markets, and market competition create the conditions in which economic growth can be achieved most efficiently.[2] The institutions responsible for the expansion of neo-liberal policy globally are International Financial Institutions (IFI), specifically the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In order to answer the research questions, I decided to interview farmers and Common Initiative Groups (CIGs) I came in contact with through my Community Development office placement. Prior to leaving for Cameroon, I created a survey

[2] Thomas I. Palley, "From Keynesianism to Neoliberalism: Shifting Paradigms in Economics" (2004).

containing questions regarding themes within the development paradigm, such as "needs", "goals", and "progress". Some of the questions were multiple choice, asking how strongly the interviewee agreed or disagreed with the statement, while other questions asked for a short answer. The survey was created in a format so that it could be completed with written responses or in an oral interview. While I had intended to collect more written responses, the language barrier required I conduct mostly interviews based on the surveys. Agricultural technicians employed through the Meme Division Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development translated my questions and the interviewees' responses.

Additionally, field observations were recorded as I visited farms and villages with my boss, an agricultural technician, and her colleagues responsible for assisting the farmers and CIGs we visited. Field observations were also recorded at the Cocoa Coffee Seedling Project (CCSP) where I was taught agricultural techniques used to grow cocoa, coffee, and citrus plants more efficiently. While I only spent two weeks in the Community Development office, I also lived with a host family during those two weeks, and travelled to different parts of Cameroon with a group of students from my university during an additional two weeks. All observations were recorded in a journal kept during the duration of the trip.

My first interview was not only a confrontation between how I had learned development and what it meant as a lived experience, but it also embodied one specific material contrast in those experiences: chocolate and cocoa. As someone who lives outside a tropical zone, my only experience of cocoa was in its processed form as chocolate. I had consumed chocolate without ever having experienced the production of its fundamental ingredient.

The trip to conduct my first interview required my boss, the chief of Kumba's Community Development office, her colleague assigned to Banga as the agricultural technician, a fellow student, and I to travel by taxi to a checkpoint just outside Kumba and then take a van along a narrow highway to the village. Vans pass between the locations often, however not often enough to meet demand. As a result, we piled in the van with other locals, sharing two to a seat where necessary. The road to Banga from Kumba is relatively smooth, with the exception of the occasional pothole, passing between hilly, tropical forests and terrain that drops low into valleys. The loaded van was stopped at a second checkpoint by a military personnel carrying what looked like an assault rifle. After some time checking our passports and identities, we were finally able to continue on our trip. A second hiccup along the way, our van breaking down, meant that we would have to finish our journey walking along the side of the dusty, paved road on foot.

When we finally arrived at Banga, we walked up to a gathering of concrete and wood structures with tin roofs among patches of gardens with assorted trees and other plants. On the dirt ground we walked on among the houses were laid sheets and tarps with small brown beans and cobs of orange corn, drying in the sun on the hot, sunny day. My boss directed us towards a rectangular enclosure made of tan straw, held together and upright by long tree limbs. This was the small cocoa nursery for the village. In rows of small black bags with dirt and green leaves pushing to the surface stood buds of what would later become cocoa trees. These farmers grew both cash and food crops. They, by virtue of their agricultural products, are engaged in both local and international markets. These farmers sell their beans to cocoa buying agents who later export the beans to European markets.

Sitting down for the interview, we talked to an older man and woman while my boss and her colleague translated from pidgin for me. Taking a look at the questionnaire I had written, my boss' colleague remarked that my questions were "rather technical", a mark of the dichotomy between my Western experience of development and the daily, lived experiences of development to Cameroonians. For my interviewees, their farm is very important to them. It enables them to have food to feed their families and to send their children to school. The land and what can be reaped from it is the means towards acquiring necessities. They grow corn, cocoa, cassava, and cocoyam. They rely on natural methods to dry their products, the way we saw as we walked in, because they do not have the machines to do so mechanically. They admitted that the natural way is better, but during the rainy season, when torrential downpours can begin at any moment and for any duration, a cocoa oven would allow them to process their cocoa beans faster. Their idea of "progress" is defined as "while you are working and you've increased your production . . . you will have more than before." They are intimately connected to their land and their labor and see their work as advancing their own needs. "We are progressing, but we need help from you people to develop more technical help." Specifically, she meant financial help to purchase equipment and seeds, or those materials themselves.

This interview, and subsequent experiences, was eye-opening in a number of ways. The international development regime is often defined in terms of economic growth, the idea that by increasing a country's growth and the number of firms investing there, jobs will be created that will lift people out of poverty. According to neo-liberalism, ideal economic growth persists in a climate free from constraints, such as government regulation. Internationally, the primary institutions responsible for proscribing the "proper" economic and governance reforms are the World Bank and the IMF. These institutions are typically lauded for their expertise and experience while fitting comfortably in a development paradigm that situates the Western experience as the norm. Universal, technical knowledge is assumed to address the local concerns of people living in a variety of climates and facing a variety of conditions. As assistance is passed down from the international, formalistic level to the local, the size of the gaps between experiences and forms of expertise becomes more glaring. Programs fail to meet their expectations, as well as take on other unintended consequences; the people who are the subject of development continue living their lives without their self-defined needs being met.

The fault lies not only in the programs themselves, but also the ideologies that bring them into existence. The Western experience becomes the discursive model by which all societies are meant to progress while entire groups of people become defined by what they are not.[3] Policies, past and present, formulate a means by which others can "catch up," never mind the colonial extractive processes which detrimentally impacted entire societies in the past and which continue today in both

[3] Gustavo Esteva, "Development", in *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*. Wolfgang Sachs (ed.) (London and New York: Zed Books, 1991).

outright and subtle forms. Deconstructing and understanding the disconnects in experiences can help us locate how and why development fails the people it is supposed to help and how it harms them in a neocolonial reality. Specifically in Cameroon, the extractive process of development is manifested in a material way: the average Cameroonian can afford to grow cocoa, but not to buy chocolate. Furthermore, understanding the disconnects can help us address the persistent desire of communities to receive help from development agents, but on their own terms.

Disconnects in the Process

Before travelling to Cameroon, I had never seen a cocoa pod. In the West, we consume chocolate and cocoa products, but we do not grow any of it because it must be grown in a tropical climate. We are familiar with corporations like Hershey's and Nestle, but most of us are unaware of what the natural products look like before they are transformed into the products we so readily consume. Furthermore, most of us are unaware of the chain of inequalities that exist along the supply chain as packaged chocolate reaches our shelves.

Production of cocoa in Cameroon largely consists of farmers, Common Initiative Groups (CIG), and assistance from the government. In order to receive funds for projects from the government, one first must be in a CIG. After identifying a community need, the CIG then presents a project proposal to its local government's Community Development office or agricultural technician. Most projects are proposed during planting season in March, with the expectation that it will take about a year for the plan and need to be verified. Ultimately, it is the Ministry of

Agriculture and Rural Development in the capital at Yaoundé who decides if a project will take place. In the office where I spent two weeks, initiatives' progress was being kept track of by hanging large handwritten charts on the wall. The charts defined the zones, CIGs, villages, projects, amount of money given to the projects, and observations. The plans and outcomes of past village workshops were also kept in manuals in a file cabinet in the office. Past projects included increasing cassava production by utilizing one cutting method, management of community water schemes, maize storage, and snail farming. In these official reports, the projects were categorized as "capacity building" or "participatory development" by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, presumably to satisfy requirements from the donor, the African Development Bank (AfDB).

The African Development Bank's objective is to contribute to the economic and social development of its member countries, which includes Cameroon. To do so, AfDB provides capital to its members. This capital is raised from funds received from the repayment of loans, funds raised through AfDB borrowings on international capital markets, and funds raised from income on other AfDB investments.[4] The AfDB provided a loan to the Cameroonian government for the Rumpi Project.[5] Rumpi is short for the Rumpi Area Participatory Development project, which concentrates on rural development in the southwest province of Cameroon. The goal of this project is to "contribute to poverty reduction among rural households of the

---

[4] African Development Bank Group, "African Development Bank", Retrieved from http://www.afdb.org/en/about-us/african-development-bank-afdb/.

[5] Devex, "Rumpi Area Participatory Development Project in Cameroon," (2009), Retrieved from https://www.devex.com/projects/tenders/rumpi-area-participatory-development-project-in-cameroon--5/54668

Rumpi area. The specific objective is to increase the income of the smallholders in the project area [in] a sustainable way."[6]

The Rumpi Project straddles the divide between formal, legalistic language and local understandings of development. On the one hand, the Rumpi Project employs the language of neo-liberal development:

> "The increase in income will contribute to improved standard of living and contributing thus to poverty reduction. . . The project was justified as economically feasible by the Bank since the economic internal rate of returns estimated at 21 percent is much higher than the opportunity cost of capital estimated at 12 percent."[7]

The Rumpi Project is justified by its market and social values, mixing investment return with increased well-being. Additionally, farmer practices are labeled "improved inputs," "access to credit," and "clientele consultation workshops".[8] In speaking with farmers and agricultural technicians, these phrases never came up in our conversation. On the other hand, the implementation of the Rumpi Project does not necessarily apply this language, with the exception of within formal reports. Agricultural technicians' interactions with farmers and CIGs, is based more in the daily farming practices and experiences.

One way of providing assistance to farmers and CIGs comes in the form of providing crops, some for free but most for a price. For example, the unit cost of maize is 300 CFA/kg but cocoa pods are free. Cocoa seedlings in Kumba are distributed from the Cocoa-Coffee Seedling Project (CCSP), an office that has been operating for about eight years in a facility that was once owned by the Belgians. At

[6] The Rumpi Project, "About Rumpi," Retrieved from http://rumpi-project.tripod.com/id2.html
[7] *ibid*
[8] *ibid*

CCSP, agricultural techniques, like grafting, budding, and pollinating, are used to decrease the amount of time it takes to grow a viable plant. CCSP does not harvest products from the plants they grow, but raise them to point where they are small, yet grown enough to give the plants to CIGs, who then set up nurseries to raise the plants until they can be permanently planted and grown into trees. At this point, products can be harvested. All three processes require practice to master the tiny motions and coordination of fingers.

Budding is a process primarily used for citrus plants. Using lemon stems, the bud is cut from the primary twig and a short horizontal incision is made at the base of the bud, about half a centimeter, with a razor. A second vertical incision is made intersecting the horizontal one, up the stem about an inch. One must be careful when making the incision to cut the depth just right: too shallow a cut will not permit the attached twig, but too deep a cut will most likely kill the plant and any stability it has. The outside covering of the stem is then peeled back only slightly, in order to prepare for the insertion of the bud. Next, a detached bud connected to a stem, shortened to about an inch is prepared for insertion. The shortened stem is shaped to a point so that it is able to fit into the incision on the first stem. A piece of plastic twine is then wrapped around and tied at the point of intersection, holding the pieces together so that they can grow together and produce the fruit in half the time. Grafting is a similar procedure, the only differences being that cocoa stems are used throughout the process and a small tube is placed around the cuts and inserted pieces as it germinates. About 70 to 80 percent of the time, cocoa grafting succeeds.

The last process central to the CCSP's work is cocoa pollination. In a small grove on the property sits full grown cocoa trees, some with green pods and some with reddish-brown pods, one female and the other male. The subject of the pollination process, however, is actually the flowers on the trees. The flowers from both trees we used were about the size of one fingernail. Small yellow leaves surround the three inner pollinating parts: white pieces that curl around towards the short, thin, purple strands, encasing the center, white bulb. Prior to the process of manual pollination, the flower from the female tree has to be protected with a small net before it blooms in order to prevent any unwanted cross-pollination. Using tweezers, the curling white piece from the male flower is plucked and transplanted onto the central bulb on the female flower. The female flower is covered again by the small net, so it can germinate without interference.

The point in describing these technical processes is to highlight the variety of expertise. Most people I met in Kumba and its surrounding divisions are intimately connected to the land. They harvest their food from it, sell their extra food at the local market, and/or have employment with offices and organizations that hire them to perform the processes described above. Most Cameroonians who have attended school must take courses in agricultural techniques as part of their core curriculum. Suffice it to say, most Cameroonians are experts in agriculture. Yet, for the ones who produce cocoa, as well as other commodities like rubber, they are at one extreme end of the global supply chain of an international commodity. Cocoa buying agents purchase the cocoa from farmers and export it to Europe, where it is processed into chocolate and sold at a markup. The exception to this rule is Chococam, the only cocoa production facility in Cameroon. According to the Cameroonian professor who led my trip, Chococam is a brand of chocolate that operates in Cameroon for a Swiss company and is restricted in its production capabilities by agreements with France. Very little of the cocoa in Cameroon is processed at the Chococam facility. Otherwise, the highest level of production of cocoa in Cameroon is the drying process before it is sold and then exported.

The delicate precision of workers and farmers who grow and harvest the cocoa fades away as the commodity ships abroad and transforms into another product, one which is readily consumed internationally without the recognition of the labor and skill involved in its central ingredient. As the chocolate is made and consumed, the cocoa transforms from a grown commodity into a manufactured ingredient, and through this process the gap between agricultural expertise and international expertise grows.

Cocoa as an Extractive Process

These gaps do not occur solely at the international level as the cocoa is transformed into chocolate, but in fact are prevalent throughout the entire buying relationship. As was explained to me by my boss's colleague at CCSP, cocoa has to primarily be exported because Cameroon does not possess the technology to transform the cocoa. Corporations, however, are unwilling to invest in production in Cameroon due to taxes, which the government is working to subsidize to attract the companies. Therefore, cocoa farmers and CIGs have to sell their cocoa to cocoa buying agents, who then export the cocoa to Europe be processed. When a cocoa buying agent purchases cocoa, he/she determines the price of the cocoa. He/she tells the farmer how much will be bought and at what price, with little to no negotiation because both parties know the buyer can go somewhere else. Faced with the decision between not selling the cocoa at all or selling it and receiving very little of its value, the farmer usually goes with the latter option.

Farmers, of course, are trying to fight the systemic inequality. The Integrated Farmer's Union of Bai Bikom was created in 2010 by the unification of twelve CIGs. The union's objectives are to fight poverty and improve the standard of living, but their function is also to attempt to leverage some power when they sell their cocoa. Cocoa is the main cash crop of the group, who sell together to a buyer. According to the president of this union, while they attempt to arrange prices with the buyer, "the prices are not steady, they changes all the time." He explained that buyers have no competition and are therefore free to set the price however they decide:

> "They don't allow the buyers from Douala to come here, because they know that they will come and disturb the market. So really, they are exploiting us. They do their business in a monopoly type of way so that there will be no competition. . . You cannot sell well."

This situation is not unique to Kumba. Throughout Cameroon, buyers have monopolies in cities from which they buy.

This economic dynamic is not only problematic because farmers are taken advantage of, but also because it acts as an extractive experience of neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism is a process by which states' past colonial relationships continue to play out after independence.[9] Exploitation of resources is but one marking. According to Diana Haag, there are four areas in which state influence constitutes direct forms of neo-colonialism: economic, political, financial, and military. Economic influences include trade agreements that operate in ways that maintain colonial trade patterns, such as import and export prices and quantities determined primarily by the neo-colonial power, as well as monopolistic access for companies. Therefore, the economic influences take form not only in formal agreements set between two countries, but also in the way that business is conducted. Political interference can take the form of direct support of a political leader through payments and manipulations of votes or by active personnel decisions regarding public administrative positions. Financial dependence is expressed through monetary and exchange rate controls by the former colonial power and abuse of international aid to benefit corporations of the former colonizer. Lastly, a military presence that secures the current leadership in exchange for favorable economic conditions or protects corporations before the local population is seen as another direct iteration of the neo-colonial relationship.[10] Therefore, in Haag's definition of neo-colonialism, the relationship is not only formally between governments, but also between governments and corporations in order to secure a favorable economic environment without accountability to citizens. Furthermore, the above described mechanisms only include "direct" patterns, not more ideological and subtle ones, such as the way a country is told it is supposed to progress.

---

[9] Diana Haag, "Mechanisms of Neo-Colonialism: Current French and British Influence in Cameroon and Ghana", (Barcelona: *Institut Catala Internacional per la Pau*, 2011).
[10] *ibid*

Haag goes on to describe instances between 2004 and 2011 where she sees a current presence of neo-colonialism. First, France is Cameroon's primary trading partner. This means that Cameroon imports far more from France than it exports, resulting in a negative balance of payments, something economists do not recommend for achieving growth. Furthermore, Cameroon and France signed the multilateral European Economic Community (EEC) agreements, which reinforces Cameroon's role as a raw goods supplier. French corporations are also treated favorably. Boloré has almost monopolized the Cameroonian transport system; logging areas are controlled by Thanry, Bolloré, Coron, and Rougier; and Somdiaa has illegally dispossessed local populations from their sugar cane plantations. Politically, President Paul Biya, who has been in office for thirty years, has been sponsored by the French oil company Elf Aquitaine through offshore accounts. Financially, Cameroon's currency is tied to France's. Historically, the Central African CFA franc (CFA) was tied to the French franc, before switching to the Euro. Regardless, the CFA was tied to the Euro and France maintains a large amount of monetary and financial decision-making power. Furthermore, development aid and projects have been used in ways that benefit French economic interests over those of the local populations. Aid has been used in infrastructure projects that primarily serve French corporations and in 2004 the Chad-Cameroon pipeline was completed despite objections from local civil society. The pipeline was a joint venture of several foreign oil companies and supported by the World Bank. Many objections to the project concerned its inability to deliver benefits to Cameroonians. Lastly, the military presence takes the shape of financing mercenaries and a part of the Cameroonian military through French corporations and the French military.[11]

While Haag assesses the four areas in order to make a judgment on whether or not France maintains a neo-colonial relationship with Cameroon, I would like to focus on one area primarily: economic dependence. Within the cocoa trade, clear monopolies are present. Farmers attest to the inequalities when they enter the market with their cocoa: "[buyers] do their business in a monopoly type of way." The role most Cameroonians hold as primarily raw materials suppliers translates to the daily experience where the average Cameroonian is unable to afford chocolate yet able to produce cocoa. While the farmers did not specify to what countries the cocoa buying agents export their cocoa, the Cameroon-France trade relationship leads to a conclusion that France is most likely at least one of the recipients of Cameroonian cocoa.

Cocoa is not the only product with this type of relationship. During my month-long trip, the group I was travelling with visited a rubber factory to see how raw rubber is processed to a form where it can be transformed into other products. The technology to transform rubber from its raw state into a malleable secondary state exists in Cameroon, but in this secondary state the rubber cannot be used for anything. It must be transformed further into a tertiary state to create a product. The tertiary state technology does not exist in Cameroon, so it is exported. Similar to the cocoa-chocolate relationship, the average Cameroonian cannot afford new tires because the markup after transformation and re-importation is too high.

[11] *ibid*

These are consequences of the direct iteration of neo-colonialism described by Haag. Other, more subtle, iterations of neo-colonialism need to be examined in order to understand how the international development system is complicit in the relationship of extraction that Cameroonians face in the international market. This is not to say that practitioners of international development or policy prescribers are scheming officials, bent on maintaining a submissive Global South. While some may operate on an ideology of a political zero-sum game, many do not. In fact, international development regimes are often argued on the basis of their virtues: that they will reduce poverty and global suffering while creating a more inclusive world. That is not to say that reducing suffering in the world is without its merits, but when the foundations of such goals are steeped in normative understandings of societal development based in a singularly located experience, universalizing progress on dominating conceptions, regardless if it is justified as the "right" and "moral" way, is still dominating and oppressive.

Neo-Liberal Market Development

Understanding the economics involved in international development and neo-colonial relationships can help connect the ideas of economics and exploitation in the Cameroonian context. Two international financial institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, are deeply engrossed in development economics and advancing the idea of the neo-liberal market.

Neo-liberalism is a conservative economic philosophy closely associated with *laissez-faire* economics that dominated England in the nineteenth century.

Contemporary neo-liberal theory is usually connected to the Chicago School of Economics, which "emphasizes the efficiency of market competition, the role of individuals in determining economic outcomes, and distortions associated with government intervention and regulation of markets."[12] Central themes of this theory attribute virtue to individuals and organizations acting in the market while according vice to government interventions in those market interactions. In its strictest form, neo-liberal theory understands that by way of supply and demand, everyone is paid what they are worth and will be used by the market accordingly. Supply and demand regulate the amount produced within the market, eradicating the need for institutions to intervene because the market itself is self-correcting. Those who produce what is needed will be paid according to those production levels, while those capitalists who invest the resources will reap the rewards or consequences of their risk-taking. Similarly, those who are needed for production will be utilized by the market efficiently. In fact, neo-liberalism says that intervention in the market can disrupt the self-regulating market processes that guide society towards equilibrium.[13]

What neo-liberalism assumes is an economic vacuum. Absent from the theory is the factor of power exercised by those with wealth over those without it. Pragmatic neo-liberal policy calls for the deregulation of markets and labor so that the true value of labor may prevail. As a result, inequality in wages and incomes is steadily increasing, particularly in the United States where pro-capitalist and neo-liberal tendencies are strongest.[14] The way neo-liberalism accounts for this theory, however,

[12] Palley, "From Keynesianism to Neoliberalism" (see footnote 2), pp. 1
[13] *ibid*, pp. 7
[14] *ibid*, pp. 5

is that it is supposed to happen this way: the market is paying what people are worth. These patterns are being repeated in Cameroon, sometimes as explicitly as monopolies cocoa buyers have over cocoa producers in Cameroon, sometimes implicitly by the expertise passed down from international institutions to state officials.

Two international financial institutions, The World Bank and IMF are primarily responsible for economic and financial policy intervention in the Global South. These two institutions were created in the aftermath of World War II, when at the Bretton Woods Conference the means for ensuring a liberal world economy through multilateral institutions was finalized. The IMF's purpose was to ease obstacles to world commerce by reducing foreign exchange restrictions and creating a reserve of funds to give to countries in order to ensure they could trade easily. Meanwhile, the World Bank's purpose, then founded as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, was to provide loans for infrastructural rebuilding and promote private foreign investment through partnerships in loans with private investors.[15]

At the same time that the IMF and World Bank were established, global capitalism was being challenged by communism and state-managed economies. While the Bretton Woods agreements principally stated their objectives were to rebuild war-torn areas and simultaneously promote trade, these objectives were advanced in an environment in which the capitalist world economy was under threat. Therefore, an objective of these two institutions has from the beginning always been

---

[15] Kevin Danaher, "introduction", in *50 Years is Enough: The Case Against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund,* Kevin Danaher (ed.) (South End Press, 1994).

to ensure a capitalist world economy by encouraging other countries to participate in the system.

Through the provision of loans, states became indebted to the World Bank and the IMF. As funds flowed out of countries in order to pay back loans, and the interest rates that came with them, money that could have been invested in public services instead flowed into the institutions supposedly in the business of developing countries and helping citizens. For many, the outflows from countries in the Global South to elites in the North represent neo-colonialism. Furthermore, in order to pay off loans given to countries, the IMF and World Bank suggested structural adjustment reforms. These reforms include selling state enterprises to the private sector, devaluing local currencies to make exports more competitive, reducing government spending on social services, reducing regulation of the private sector, and creating incentives to attract foreign investment.[16] Essentially, these institutions have encouraged and continue to encourage neo-liberal economic reforms that reinforce global capitalist markets while reducing state interventions in social programs.

In Cameroon, the World Bank's and IMF's strategies are to provide technical assistance that creates an environment in which foreign capital will be persuaded to invest in Cameroon. According to the World Bank's "World Bank Group Engagement in Cameroon," increasing economic growth and investments, as well as ensuring the shared benefits of growth and investments, will reduce poverty and increase prosperity. The sectors which the World Bank sees as offering the greatest

[16] *ibid*

potential are energy, agriculture, telecommunications, mining, and transport.[17] These recommendations are geared towards the creation of a neo-liberal market environment in Cameroon, in which growth is theorized to naturally lead to poverty reduction. While the World Bank's strategy mentions the need for investments in human development as well as infrastructure and telecommunications, the human benefits are seen as a mere side effect of the enhanced business opportunities.

Similarly, the Cameroonian government's proposal in 2009 for funds from the IMF included steps to reduce economic instability by:

> "(i) [increasing] nonoil revenues; (ii) [diversifying] the sources of public financing; (iii) [strengthening] public expenditure management; (iv) [improving] the business environment; and (v) [preserving] the stability of the financial sector. In addition, the government will avoid introducing or intensifying trade restriction."[18]

The IMF's "Cameroon: Staff Report for the Article IV Consultation" in 2012 reiterated this view on the necessity of these policies by arguing that:

> "Competitiveness in Cameroon remains challenged mainly by structural factors. Improving the business climate will require that the authorities tackle governance issues, deepen dialogue with private sector interests, take measures to increase the level of financial intermediation, and improve access to credit."[19]

Like the World Bank's technical assistance advice, the IMF's advice strongly encourages the neo-liberal market, engaging directly with development oriented towards the creation of a market environment rather than engaging directly with the needs of the people. The phrases used emphasize legalistic language rather than the language a farmer, the subject

---

[17] The World Bank, (30 September 2014). "Cameroon Overview: Strategy". Retrieved from http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cameroon/overview#2.

[18] Government of Cameroon, (18 June 2009), "Cameroon: Letter of Intent", pp. 2-3, Retrieved from https://www.imf.org/external/np/loi/2009/cmr/061809.pdf.

[19] International Monetary Fund, (13 August 2012), "Cameroon: Staff Report for the 2012 Article IV Consultation", pp. 27, Retrieved from https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2012/cr12237.pdf

of development, would use to describe his/her practices. Not only does this demonstrate the disconnect between the international financial institutions and the people, but it also reinforces the appearance that despite promises to address the concerns of the people, these institutions do not intend to address their needs directly.

The "technical assistance" of these international financial institutions is based on formal understandings of the political economy, detached from context. While the World Bank and IMF espouse technical assistance based on macroeconomic principles, at the local level technical assistance is defined by the relationship between the agricultural technician and the farmers and CIGs. Their ability to provide resources and training to their clients depends on the there being funds and resources to disperse. The World Bank's and IMF's interferences can hamper the ability of these relationships to prosper by threatening the provision of funds for such programs. As one agricultural technician lamented: "It's quite some time now, the government stop giving subsidies. . . In the past they used to empower the Community Development Office."

Specifically, at the same time these agricultural technicians are requesting funds to sustain their programs and relationships with their clients, the IFIs are advising the Cameroonian government to cut such spending or it will not be given funds. Again, the agricultural technician provided insight:

> "Those were the recommendations, some of the recommendations from some foreign bodies. . . If you need that which should give you funds, you have to maybe reduce the size of your government, you have to reduce government expenditures, and subsidies, and those type of stuff."

This represents another very clear instance where neo-liberal market development perpetuates inequalities rather than reducing them.

Development's Assumptions

In order to understand how inequalities can be perpetuated while being justified by their purported virtues, the underlying assumptions within the development paradigm must be challenged. The construction of development itself, the weight the word itself holds, must be reevaluated outside of its universal understandings in order to evaluate its point of reference. Furthermore, by understanding what development references for the development of societies, the market emphasis can be understood as being attached to a particular experience of society and community, rather than a neutral and natural phenomenon.

First, "development" cannot exist without its antithesis. By stating what is developed, one is irrevocably comparing it with what is undeveloped. Therefore, development becomes a process by which the undeveloped are made aware of the burden of what they are not, compared to those living in another society with another experience. The point of reference for this other society is the Western experience, rooted in liberal thinking of the community and the individual. So, while development imagines itself as a universal and benevolent process, rather, its power comes from Western hegemony.[20]

Through such an analysis of development, the neutral and virtuous posturing of the paradigm is confronted by relationships of inequitable power. Rather than being simply a process of poverty alleviation and service to the Global South, a simultaneous process occurs in which the subjects of development must adopt the

[20] Esteva, "Development" (see footnote 3).

burden of their condition and reorient their experiences and expectations towards the West. On the other side of this relationship, those who are developed see themselves as rational individuals, citizens of the Enlightenment whose experience of community exists on the same track as other global citizens. In this view, the difference between these "rational citizens" and others is how far along on the track one is in relation to the other. In such a paradigm, the Western experience is clearly privileged over any other experience and development becomes synonymous with homogenization.

Similarly, market capitalism is generally assumed in the West as being linked with the democratic experience. Individuals free to make exchanges in the marketplace come to symbolize democracy regulated by the market. By extension, transplanting such ideas about the market into development delivers the belief that the market can solve the world's problems.[21] This lies at the core of neo-liberal economic development, that so long as the market is free to self-regulate and individuals are free to participate, jobs will alleviate poverty and market interactions will cycle the process back to create more growth.

Absent from the neo-liberal economic development ideology is an acknowledgement of the structural concerns negatively impacting participation in the market. First, development grounded through the market is a selective process. Areas where economic growth can be cultivated will see market intervention, while those that are not profitable will be left alone.[22] This selective process does not promise the resolution of problems the way a neo-liberal market is theorized to. Rather, the

[21] Gerald Berthoud, "Market", in *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power.* Wolfgang Sachs (ed.) (London and New York: Zed Books, 1991).
[22] *ibid*

market intervenes not as some enigma, but as an economic decision made by those in businesses, corporations, and institutions seeking to extract a profit. In this way, not only will the sparse benefits of the market only reach those areas which promise to be profitable, but also the intervention does not necessarily promise to be beneficial for the people involved. For the cocoa farmers in Cameroon, market intervention has not been mutually beneficial, but instead exploitative; rather than solving all their problems, the market has exacerbated them.

Lastly, an idealized market is not immune to political, social, cultural, and moral values, but is in fact defined by them. Furthermore, the market depends on institutions entrenched in these particular values to expand and reinforce itself.[23] A belief in the virtues of the capitalist market is rooted in the history of the development of Western societies. This does not mean that a capitalist market is a universal concept, but that it arose out of a particular cultural and institutional history. Furthermore, the morals assigned to a free market do not translate to a universal concept. The differences between socialism and capitalism, for example, are found in the variations of political, social, cultural, and moral values. Yet, it is neo-liberalism that is assigned the moral value of resolving all of the world's problems despite its contested presence.

[23] *ibid*

Avoiding "Banalization"

While development has been demonstrated to be a destructive force in communities, there still exists a desire for development in Cameroon. Walking through my host family's neighborhood one evening, I came upon a house with a sign in front of the porch with a map of Cameroon. Across the map it read "Let's develop Cameroon!" How is critique of development reconciled with its desire in the spaces where development can act destructively?

First, this sign was posted in a middle class neighborhood. By using the term "neighborhood," I mean to distinguish the houses differently from those that reside along the main road leading into Kumba. Those houses are lined parallel with the road, often taking the same shape and design. In the neighborhood of which I am referring, rather, a dirt road diverges from the main paved one and leads to a series of houses and other roads splitting off in ways which we might describe in the United States as a neighborhood. Here, the houses often look different from one another and vary in color. In this neighborhood some people are employed as doctors, pharmacists, and accountants; some of the homes are protected by tall fences, guards, and/or dogs. The appearance, careers, and ability to afford such protections distinguish this neighborhood as middle class.

The middle class distinction is an important one to make because often the development experience differs along class lines. An understanding of development is very much predicated upon one's daily experiences, specifically with the market. For example, if one is a cocoa farmer, as described above, one's experience with the market may resemble a parasitic relationship in which cocoa is extracted in a way beneficial to the market but not to the farmer. In that same relationship, if one is the buyer, a positive experience is to be had in an environment where more power is allocated to the buyer. In one instance, the daily experience of the farmer is connected to the experience of growing the cocoa, whereas in the case of the buyer, the daily experience is connected to the act of purchasing and reselling the cocoa.

Furthermore, as Simanti Dasgupta argues, “privileging the market as a tool of social organization privileges a specific section of the population that is financially competent to compete in it.”[24] In Dasgupta’s ethnography of a water project in Bangalore, India, a middle class non-governmental organization was encouraged by the World Bank to include the urban poor in their project. For the middle class, the participatory project introduced a private-public partnership which would bring taps directly into homes so long as individuals contributed to the project. For the urban poor, the market-oriented project created anxiety due to the disturbance it could cause to the existing relationship between the state and the free public water supply. Therefore, those in the middle class who could more readily contribute to the market, specifically a market-oriented water project, were privileged by the market as a form of social organization and readily participated. Meanwhile, those living in the slums and dependent upon the unmetered public fountains were not financially in a position to benefit from a retooling of public services.[25]

[24] Simanti Dasgupta, “Rethinking Participation: Water, Development, and Democracy in Neo-Liberal Bangalore”, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies,* (2012), pp. 6.
[25] *Ibid*, pp. 7

While Dasgupta specifically refers to the participation initiatives of a water project in Bangalore, India, her observations are very much connected to neo-liberal development discussed in this paper. Under neo-liberal development, those who are in positions to benefit from the market are likely to take advantage of development and to desire it. Similarly, while walking through a middle class area close to the center of the city, it should not be surprising to see a sign that welcomes the development of Cameroon because those in the middle class are more likely to be “financially competent to compete in [the market].”

Outside of these class divides, however, development is still desired as a means towards improving communities and meeting needs. Unpacking the desire for development can help us reconcile critique with need. Here, I find Pieter De Vries’ work helpful for unpacking the desire for development, despite its repeated failures. De Vries argues that development acts as a desiring machine that dually generates desire by promising the fulfillment of needs and then banalizes those same needs by failing to fulfill them. By promising a utopian future in which all needs are fulfilled, development promises a future to citizens it cannot and will not secure. Just as any promise, the failure to follow through with action signals a devaluing of what was promised, a banalization, in De Vries words. The failure signals that the need was so trivial that it need not come to fruition. Furthermore, this is precisely how development operates: it creates voids it must fill in a cyclical fashion. Without the virtual creation of desires, and the subsequent failure to fulfill those desires, development cannot be consistently recreated to fill the voids it previously created.[26]

Yet, the reality is that the development system is entrenched. Despite the failures and inequalities associated with development language and practice, and despite the disconnect between development themes and the farmers I interviewed, the development language is deployed in order to attain the funds necessary for agricultural technicians to assist farmers and CIGs. The Community Development office, agricultural technicians, and CCSP I worked with throughout this project work within the Divisional Delegation of Agricultural and Rural Development Meme. While this delegation was created in order "[work] very closely with the rural population and [witness] their day to day activities, problems and constraints," outlined in its mission and organization and functioning are phrases, such as "improve productivity and competitiveness in the agricultural sector;" "modernization of rural infrastructure and production;" "capacity building and institutional development;" and "promoting effective participation in project development and implementation."[27] Despite the rural population's disconnect from this language that describes the government's involvement in their activities, this development language is deployed in order to describe and presumably attain funding for the services the delegation seeks to provide.

[26] Pieter De Vries, "Don't Compromise Your Desire for Development! A Lacanian/Deleuzian Rethinking of the Anti-Politics Machine", in *Third World Quarterly*, (2007).

[27] The Divisional Delegation of Agriculture and Rural Development Meme, "Its Structure and Functioning," Print.

Although the development system is problematic at the conceptual as well as material levels, it cannot simply be eliminated. Development is a structure that delivers failures, inequalities, and resources. In Kumba, the Community Development office receives funds from the AfDB through the Rumpi Project, which seeks to increase participation and reduce poverty in the agricultural sector. Resources are then distributed to farmers and CIGs. The elimination of the development structure would ultimately banalize needs in the same way that development banalizes needs when it fails. Eliminating access to resources farmers and CIGs rely on, which happen to be steeped in the development system, would needlessly eliminate access to resources based on association. The reality is that resources are delivered to the farmers and CIGs in Cameroon based on development's logic and the elimination of this system would create a detrimental void for these groups.

De Vries attempts to answer the question of what is to be done in such a conundrum by saying that the subjects of development should reassert their power and refuse to compromise on their needs. Instead of allowing development to define their needs, they should define their own needs. Central to this call is the imperative that people hold onto their own images and community practices that they desire, rather than being co-opted by the latest trends in the development logic.[28]

In Cameroon, such a model that De Vries proposes can be seen in the relationship farmers and CIGs have with the agricultural technicians and Community Development office. In order for farmers and CIGs to receive funds from the government, they must first form groups and then propose a project which fulfills an

[28] De Vries, "Don't Compromise Your Desire".

identified need. It is then the capital's job to approve or disapprove the project. This fits De Vries' model because rather than the government or an outside group approaching the people with what they perceive their need to be, the people define their own needs and projects and then approach their government for the funds and resources necessary. While a certain amount of power exists in the relationship between the government and the CIGs and farmers, namely that it is up to the government to decide whether or not to support the proposals based on its own perceptions of needs, at the very least, the projects are defined by the people meant to be the recipients rather than those providing the means.

This method cannot overcome structural issues that privilege the neo-liberal market and its neo-colonial tendencies. To do so would require an overhaul of international relationships and the institutions that sustain them, as well as the ideologies that assign value to a particular, Western experience of the world over other experiences. De Vries certainly presents an imperfect solution. This represents a malleable opportunity for the people to not compromise their self-defined needs and simultaneously challenges the development paradigm while working within its entrenched constraints. Rather than engaging with the development market tools that are theorized to naturally lead to a more perfect society, the needs of the people must be engaged with in a way that respects their definitions and experiences.

Conclusion

This project sought to understand how international development is conceptualized at the local level compared to how it is conceptualized at the global level. Furthermore, it sought to understand the underlying assumptions that result in these differences and the potential problems associated with both the divergences and the assumptions. What I found is that in Cameroon the gap between conceptions of development are reflected in the production of cocoa and the consumption of chocolate. While the average Cameroonian is able to grow cocoa and receive assistance to do so, he/she is not necessarily able to afford the transformed product: chocolate. This is not to say that chocolate is nowhere to be found in Cameroon, but rather that its presence as a luxury good stands in stark contrast to the ubiquitous nature of cocoa in southwest Cameroon.

As the distance between cocoa and chocolate and production and consumption is understood, it becomes apparent that the neo-liberal economic development paradigm is an inadequate remedy for social ills. Rather than resolving social problems, neo-liberalism often contributes to those problems by embodying a neo-colonial relationship between the West and the Global South. In the case of cocoa in Cameroon, monopolistic cocoa buying from farmers and exporting to European production sites acts as one of the extractive colonial processes that subjugates citizens in Cameroon while the West profits. It is long overdue that the assumptions which universalize a particular society's development and privilege the market as a means of individual freedom be challenged for their exacerbation and continuation of global inequalities.

References

African Development Bank Group, "African Development Bank", Retrieved from http://www.afdb.org/en/about-us/african-development-bank-afdb/.

Berthoud, Gerald. "Market", in *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*. Wolfgang Sachs (ed.) (London and New York: Zed Books, 1991).

Danaher, Kevin. "Introduction", in *50 Years is Enough: The Case Against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund*, Kevin Danaher (ed.) (South End Press, 1994).

Dasgupta, Simanti. "Rethinking Participation: Water, Development, and Democracy in Neo-Liberal Bangalore", *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, (2012).

De Vries, Pieter. "Don't Compromise Your Desire for Development! A Lacanian/Deleuzian Rethinking of the Anti-Politics Machine", in *Third World Quarterly*, (2007).

Devex, "Rumpi Area Participatory Development Project in Cameroon," (2009), Retrieved from https://www.devex.com/projects/tenders/rumpi-area-participatory-development-project-in-cameroon--5/54668.

Government of Cameroon, (18 June 2009), "Cameroon: Letter of Intent", Retrieved from https://www.imf.org/external/np/loi/2009/cmr/061809.pdf.

Esteva, Gustavo. "Development", in *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*. Wolfgang Sachs (ed.) (London and New York: Zed Books, 1991).

International Monetary Fund, (13 August 2012), “Cameroon: Staff Report for the 2012 Article IV Consultation”, pp. 27, Retrieved from https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2012/cr12237.pdf

Ferguson, James. *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Haag, Diana. “Mechanisms of Neo-Colonialism: Current French and British Influence in Cameroon and Ghana”, (Barcelona: *Institut Catala Internacional per la Pau*, 2011).

Palley, Thomas. “From Keynesianism to Neoliberalism: Shifting Paradigms in Economics” (2004).

The Rumpi Project, “About Rumpi,” Retrieved from http://rumpi-project.tripod.com/id2.html.

The World Bank, (30 September 2014). “Cameroon Overview: Strategy”. Retrieved from http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cameroon/overview#2.