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Author
Hildebrand, Stanley J.

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A NEW PARADIGM IN AFRICAN STUDIES

by

Stanley J. Hildebrand*

Introduction

This paper is partially a response to Pat Manning's recent invitation to "participate in a continuing campaign to elucidate the influence of ideology on historical writing." Manning correctly points out the pervasive influence of ideology in interpretations of African history which is a considerable step beyond what is still regarded by some as "the autonomous role of ideology." It should also be noted that this idea is hardly a new one, going back at least as far as Karl Marx. In spite of being a timely reminder, there are some problems with Manning's article; for example, I find it difficult to comprehend how ideology can be both a "major hindrance" and lead to "advances" in history. Rather than replying to Manning in detail, however, this paper will outline an alternative approach to the topic.

I share Manning's hope that history will gradually be set on a more scientific basis. As a starting point, then, it would perhaps be appropriate to borrow a concept from the sciences. Thomas Kuhn uses the idea of the paradigm to view the historical evolution of the natural sciences. Using this concept, it will be argued here that the historiographical issues raised by Manning can be more meaningfully seen in terms of differing paradigms than in terms of ideological disputes. Moreover, Manning's classification of the ideological origins of historians of Africa according to four national divisions, three classes, and three racial groups, amounting to thirty six possible categories is unnecessarily complex. Identifying the paradigm within which any writer operates is both simpler and more analytically useful.

*Michael Medland, Carol Thompson, Dennis Spande, and Mitchell Stengel made valuable criticisms on an earlier draft.
Paradigms

According to Kuhn, a paradigm "stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community." This is one of the major ways in which Kuhn uses the word although not the one he prefers for his analysis of the natural sciences. It is, however, the one that has been applied in the social sciences and the one that will be used here. A paradigm, then, is a collection of theories, beliefs, values, as well as methodological elements to which a group is committed and functions as a guide to investigation and research. Thus, a paradigm provides the conceptual framework in which research is conducted; it determines which questions will be asked and determines the form that answers must assume.

While many argue that the social sciences are in a pre-paradigm stage, the rationale for using the concept has been expressed as follows:

...the model or paradigm-surrogate constructed for this purpose does not exist as such in the work of any one individual or group...; rather it is a composite which extrapolates the most salient common elements of various apparently diverse approaches. I shall not attempt to prove the existence of a paradigm-surrogate or consensus on fundamentals; rather, having postulated its existence, I shall describe its main tendencies and implications... such overgeneralizations must be the cost of gaining perspective... (Emphasis in original.)

Two specific applications of the paradigm concept in the disciplines of political science and economics are noteworthy. Both sketch and criticize the standard paradigm as well as point to the features of a new radical one. A comparison of the two applications reveals considerable agreement indicating that the paradigms they refer to are essentially more encompassing ones. It is in this sense that the paradigm will be used here and while it is more expansive than Kuhn's restricted meaning, it is operationally useful in an analysis of social science scholarship on modern Africa.

For purposes of this paper, the two paradigms will be labelled the orthodox and the radical. The major elements of both paradigms will be outlined before they are applied in an analysis of the literature. An interdisciplinary approach, a
well established tradition in African studies, will be used although most of the citations are from history and economics. This is perhaps appropriate, however, since they represent opposite ends of the social science continuum with reference to how "scientific" they are.

The basic feature of the orthodox paradigm is that it "takes the existing social order for granted, which means that it assumes, implicitly if not explicitly, that the capitalist system is permanent." Its distinguishing characteristics are the emphasis on harmony of interests, the equilibrium or stability of the system, and the non-ideological nature of research. The present system, it is held, functions to the advantage of all segments of society or it is at least capable of rectifying contemporary injustices. With reference to equilibrium, economists stress the long run tendency for markets to return to equilibrium, while political scientists study policy and decision making processes which emphasize political stability or gradual orderly change. Again, it is the harmonious functioning of the system rather than conflict that is stressed. Finally, there are the arguments proclaiming the end of ideology in both research as well as the contemporary social order. Thus, it "does not seem necessary to retread familiar ground to show that economics as a positive science is ethically - therefore politically - neutral."13

There are, of course, differing viewpoints within the orthodox paradigm. It is largely agreed that the contemporary unprecedented wealth of the western world is due to industrialization and ultimately to the emergence of capitalism. Since the present (capitalist) economy has performed so well, it is, therefore, worth preserving (conservatives) or reforming (liberals). While the former desire minimal government influence in a laissez-faire competitive economy, the latter argue for more government intervention in reforming some of the abuses of monopolistic aspects of the present system.14

The distinguishing features of the radical paradigm, on the other hand, are conflict, contradictions and irrationalities, and a class analysis of society. Radicals contend that the capitalist system (or some contemporary derivative thereof such as a mixed economy) is an inherently exploitative economy since a minority benefits at the expense of the majority; hence conflict is inevitable and prevalent. Conflicts are exacerbated by the many contradictions and irrationalities in contemporary society. Further, since conflict is primarily between classes defined by their relationship to the forces of production, society can best be analyzed in terms of class struggle.
Opposing views on the international economy illustrates the conflict between paradigms. In the radical paradigm, the international order is depicted as follows:

The hierarchy of nations which make up the capitalist system is characterized by a complex set of exploitative relations. Those at the top exploit in varying degrees all the lower layers, and similarly those at any given level exploit those below them until we reach the very lowest layer which has no one to exploit. Disregarding juridical categories, we can call those at or near the top of the hierarchy "metropolises" and those at or near the bottom "colonies."16

The capitalist system is also held to be expansionist so that it has come to incorporate all areas of the globe within a "single capitalist world-economy."17 According to the radical paradigm, then, international capitalism is an exploitative and expansionist system; in short, it is predicated on imperialism. "Imperialism is not a matter of choice for a capitalist society, it is the way of life of such a society."18

The orthodox paradigm pictures the international economy as benefitting all participants via trade and thus allowing each to develop its comparative advantage. Exploitation or imperialism is not a part of the paradigm; consequently, introductory economic textbooks do not mention them. Imperialism, it is held, is not inherent in any particular type of economic system;19 hence, one assumes, it is considered to be outside of the discipline of economics. According to this paradigm, development occurs with the diffusion of capital, technology, skills and so on from the more to the less developed world. The international economy, therefore, functions in the harmonious interests of all participants.

The characteristics of the capitalist system posited by the two paradigms are obviously totally different; their views of social reality are, in fact, irreconcilable. This is, of course, inherent in the situation when more than one paradigm exists contemporaneously.20

Emergence of the radical paradigm in African studies

A new paradigm - the radical paradigm - has recently emerged in African studies; more accurately, this paradigm has been applied in social science research on Africa. The scholarly literature on modern Africa has essentially been within the
orthodox paradigm. Several recent publications, best symbolized by Walter Rodney's How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,¹¹ have presented an interpretation that radically departs from orthodox theory. On an analytical level, Rodney's central concern is not to prove that Europe underdeveloped Africa; rather accepting it as a given (in accordance with the radical paradigm), he documents how it occurred historically. This interpretation signalled the emergence of the radical paradigm in the field. The conflict between this view and orthodox theory can best be understood in terms of the opposing paradigms.

Several objections can be anticipated. The emergence of a new paradigm is usually in response to a crisis in the old one which, it could be argued, has not occurred in African studies. Kuhn notes, however, that often "a new paradigm emerges, at least in embryo, before a crisis has developed far or been explicitly recognized."²² One could also contend that the recent publications referred to do not represent a break since there have always been similar interpretations, the works of Soviet and East European Marxists being examples. These works, however, have not previously been incorporated into the English scholarly literature, but there are also other western viewpoints that do not fit into the orthodox paradigm. These can best be seen in terms of "anomalies" which usually arise when empirical data does not conform to existing theory.²³ Manning perceives this possibility when he posits that "a critic who finds socially objectionable the conclusion that colonialism was beneficial to Africans will attempt to minimize the importance of the conclusion."²⁴ He also correctly points out that Jean Suret-Canale occupies a unique (anomalous?) position in the field. Suret-Canale's careful documentation of the exploitative nature of French colonialism could not be fully reconciled with orthodox theory and thus has received relatively little attention.²⁵ The same could be said of some earlier examples.²⁶ Another contemporary example is Basil Davidson, who did not fit into the orthodox paradigm for several reasons. Firstly, Davidson began writing surveys of the African past at a time when the overwhelming emphasis, especially in history, was on the acquisition of new knowledge; the accumulated data did not yet warrant a comprehensive synthesis.²⁷ Secondly, Davidson not only wrote on topics such as African liberation movements when they were still taboo in scholarly circles, but was partisan in doing so.²⁸ Although Davidson's unorthodox behavior could conveniently be excused since he had come to the field by way of journalism, his work was too important to be ignored.

These few examples illustrate that there have always been some who did not neatly fit into the orthodox paradigm. The
point is that their work has been seen as pointing to anomalies within the existing paradigm. Thus, Suret-Canale and Leys could show the inconsistencies between French and British colonial theory and practice without establishing a new paradigm. Rodney's book, on the other hand, did precisely that. It is a holistic interpretation of the African experience which incorporated and explained the previously observed anomalies into a new analytical framework. It is not only an alternative view of African history but in direct opposition to existing theory resulting in an irreconcilable conflict between paradigms within African studies.

There are various indications of this paradigm conflict. According to Kuhn, the relative merits of paradigms cannot be debated since each "group uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigm's defense." Thus, it is noteworthy that Rodney's book has been mentioned but not really discussed in scholarly circles; witness the absence of reviews in the established journals. This is in direct contrast to other recent publications, such as that of A.C. Hopkins which has received extensive attention both in the literature and informally. The contrast is especially significant considering that both are economic syntheses providing different frameworks in which to view existing data. The difference is obvious: the former presents a new paradigm while the latter is fully within the established one. There is, in short, no adequate way of coming to terms with Rodney within the orthodox paradigm. There are other indications as well. Consider, for example, the use of the word "exploitation". In the earlier colonial literature, it meant the development or making use of resources. In the radical paradigm, it is used in conjunction with imperialism and refers to an individual or group taking unfair advantage of another. In the contemporary orthodox literature, therefore, the word is either avoided or used qualifyingly. Moreover, the gestalt switch that a change in paradigms necessitates is painfully obvious in a recent book by E.A. Brett. While the analysis of colonialism is within the radical paradigm, his introduction indicates that his "conversion" is not yet complete.

The best evidence of a conflict on the paradigm level comes from an examination of the contemporary literature. The radical paradigm was applied to African studies primarily from the study of underdevelopment and dependency theory. This is a more encompassing field including not only Africa but the Third World in general. The literature in this area is extensive and illustrates that divergent views originate in conflicting paradigms.
The Paradigms Applied

This section outlines the two major opposing views of underdevelopment and traces the origins of the divergence to differing paradigms. These are termed opposing views rather than a debate since controversy on substantive issues occurs mainly within paradigms rather than across them. Conflicting interpretations on the origins of, the perpetuation or persistence of, and the proposed solutions to underdevelopment will be sketched. A specific issue relating to each of these will be discussed to illustrate opposing positions but not to empirically test them.

The Origins of Underdevelopment - In the orthodox paradigm, underdevelopment is seen as a lower stage on the development ladder. The western world, it is argued, experienced more rapid economic growth than other areas in the last five centuries and consequently it is now more developed. According to this view, western nations passed through the stages in which the underdeveloped countries now find themselves. Underdevelopment is thus the result of the failure of certain peoples and their economic systems to keep up with more progressive ones. The recently revised nomenclature of "more-developed" and "less-developed" reflects this view.

In the orthodox paradigm, then, underdevelopment is accepted as given; it is simply an early stage of growth. It is noteworthy that this position assumes a monolithic theory of development. Western economic organization (the market system, industrial society, etc.) is seen as a universal experience which, by diffusion, will help all other societies toward economic growth as well. It logically follows that contact with the West, including colonialism, was beneficial to non-western peoples in that it initiated or accelerated the process of modernization and development.

In the radical paradigm, on the other hand, underdevelopment in the Third World is seen as the result of western exploitation that originated with the development of the European-based mercantile and the subsequent colonial system. An inherent aspect of both systems was the transfer of economic surplus from non-western areas to Europe, as in the triangular trade of the mercantilist era. This transfer fostered the development of the latter and the underdevelopment of the former. Thus development and underdevelopment are the twin results of the same dialectical process; one implies the existence of the other. The ultimate effect was to render Third World economies structurally dependent on the international capitalist system.
Underdevelopment is thus seen not as an historical given, but the result of the dialectical evolution of international capitalism. The orthodox notion of universal stages of economic growth is dismissed since in some areas, "underdevelopment followed upon and did not precede development." Contact with the West, therefore, did not aid the Third World but rather retarded its growth; that is, it fostered the "development of underdevelopment."

An issue which brings out the conflicting views is the question of the profitability of colonialism. There has been a lively debate within the orthodox paradigm as to whether European governments and commercial interests benefitted from the possession of colonies. The issues include amounts of capital invested, rates of return, colonial budget restraints, content and volume of trade, and others. In the radical paradigm, the idea of an "imperial balance sheet" is ludicrous; that the West profited from the expansion of its capitalist system is considered tautological:

It would be an act of the most brazen fraud to weigh the paltry social amenities provided during the colonial epoch against the exploitation, and to arrive at the conclusion that the good outweighed the bad.

Thus Rodney does not attempt to prove the assertion; rather, taking it as a given, his concern is with the mechanisms and results of exploitation.

Opposing views on the origins of underdevelopment are related to differing interpretations of European imperialism and colonialism which in turn are based on different paradigms. The radical assertion that capitalism is inherently exploitative must be questioned or denied before the profitability of colonialism can be debated.

The Persistence/Perpetuation of Underdevelopment - It is now generally conceded that the gap between the more and less developed countries is still widening. Underdevelopment, therefore, continues. In the orthodox paradigm, the problem is the persistence of underdevelopment; according to the radical paradigm, underdevelopment is perpetuated.

Orthodox theory holds that underdevelopment continues because of the inadequate evolution (along capitalist lines) of Third World economies. Although western technology, economic institutions, and a basic infrastructure have been introduced, they have not fully penetrated or transformed
traditional societies. The result, it is contended, is that Third World countries have dual economies. They are usually depicted in terms of subsistence versus cash economies or the traditional versus the modern sector and are used to explain phenomena such as mining enclaves, remnants of feudalism (especially in Latin America), and the like. Viewed within the orthodox paradigm, the major obstacles to development include: low domestic savings rates and thus problems of capital formation; the lack of indigenous entrepreneurial skills, specifically in "management control and technology"; high population growth due to the lag in the decline of fertility rates; distortions due to disparate marginal productivity rates of labor in the subsistence and cash sectors; corrupt governments; rigidities of indigenous social structures; and, more generally, the failure to reach the "take-off" stage.

These problems are aspects of the central idea that capitalism has not sufficiently penetrated or been institutionalized in the economies of underdeveloped countries.

Since underdevelopment, in the radical paradigm, is due to the structural dependence on the international economy, it logically follows that it is perpetuated by the maintenance of this relationship. The West perpetuates its dominance by keeping the economies of the Third World dependent on trade. These nations still export mainly primary goods and import manufactured products, causing the spill-over and spin-off effects from higher level processing to be accrued in the metropoles. Thus, individual sectors of underdeveloped economies are more closely linked to the developed world than to each other, resulting in the "disarticulation" of these economies. Development is also impeded by the fact that an economic surplus is systematically drained from underdeveloped areas along a chain of intermediary stages toward the West. Thus, in spite of investments, loans, grants, and aid, there is a net capital flow from the Third World to the developed nations. It is further contended that the dependency relationship has been sophisticated in the contemporary world by the illusion of independence in the former colonies. It is, however, merely a return to informal empires; that is, the emergence of a comprador class in underdeveloped countries has rendered direct control superfluous. An indigenous political elite and an incipient bourgeoisie has replaced Europeans in official government but cooperates closely with metropolitan businessmen to exploit the resources of the Third World.

Opposing positions on the effects of international trade on development illustrates that views on the persistence/perpetuation of underdevelopment are derived from conflicting paradigms.
According to the radical paradigm, the classical theory of trade may be valid in an analysis of relations between advanced countries but not between partners at widely divergent levels of development. In the latter case, trade inevitably works to the disadvantage of the less developed partner. Thus, the "development of the United States dates from the rejection by the American settlers of the free trade imposed by the British." Rather than provide incentives for new growth, trade suppresses indigenous industry and is the initial state in the incorporation of new areas into the capitalist system.

Solutions to Underdevelopment - In the radical paradigm, the proposed solution is to break the structural economic dependency of underdeveloped countries on the international capitalist system. Thus, "the development process must begin by transforming the economy from its colonial, externally-responsive structure, to one which is internally-responsive." Dependency is to be broken by establishing socialism either by a peaceful transition or through revolution. Western models are, therefore, inherently inapplicable to the process of development in the Third World.

There is considerable diversity of opinion within the orthodox paradigm but all recommendations are premised on the continuation of capitalism. The conservative line emphasizes the further institutionalization of capitalism: greater savings and thus capital formation, increased primary production and international trade, encouraging foreign investments, adapting foreign technology and capital for industrialization, and so forth. In essence, the solutions consist of following the model or process of western development.

Liberals, perceiving some anomalies in the orthodox paradigm, advocate reform of the status quo. Contact with the developed areas, it is held, has been beneficial to the Third World and should be continued. Western technology and models, however, must be used without becoming dominated. Others believe that reform within the developed world is the key. One noted economist has suggested that the solution to the dominance of monopoly capital is the organization of a "countervailing power". This concept has been considered relevant for underdeveloped areas as well. Another indicates that there is a liberal wing and a blindly anti-communist one in the U.S. State Department; hence support of the more enlightened (liberal) foreign policy would be at least a partial solution. All recommendations within the orthodox paradigm assume that the solutions to underdevelopment must be sought within the capitalist system.
An issue on which the conflicting views can be compared is that of aid as a solution to underdevelopment. Many conservatives oppose aid, pointing out that it is neither a necessary or sufficient condition for development and that it promotes a psychological dependency on foreign capital. Moreover, the Third World should be forced to develop on its own as the West did. Radicals also oppose aid but for different reasons. The amount of capital aid given is seen as negligible since the net capital flow is in the direction of the developed world in any case. Furthermore, aid leads to increased exploitation since it is essentially an integral part of the foreign policy of the capitalist countries. Liberals, on the other hand, favor increasing aid as a contribution to the meager capital resources of underdeveloped countries; in fact, an elaborate argument (the two-gap model) of the need for foreign exchange to overcome a low domestic saving rate as well as the balance of payments problems, has been advanced.

The differing positions are derived from the respective paradigms. Faith in the economy of the West leads conservatives to recommend the full institutionalization of capitalism while liberals contend that some reforms in the international capitalist system such as more aid to the Third World will foster development. According to the radical paradigm, only a disengagement from the inherently exploitative international capitalist economy is the ultimate solution to underdevelopment.

It may therefore be concluded that opposing views on the origins and persistence/perpetuation of, as well as solutions to underdevelopment are the result of conflicting paradigms. Given the respective paradigm, the positions logically follow. Similarly, the recent publications of Rodney and others represent not merely yet another interpretation of the African experience but one that is irreconcilably in conflict with the orthodox view; in short, it is the application of the radical paradigm to African studies. It is significant primarily not because it presents new facts; rather, it provides a new paradigmatic framework within which to view existing data.

Mr. Stanley J. Hildebrand is a candidate for a Ph.D. degree in African History at Michigan State University, East Lansing. He originally comes from Canada.
Footnotes


5. Ibid., p. 175.


8. Respectively, Ibid. and the special issue referred to in #6 above.

9. Both terms are problematic. The former comprises liberal and conservative positions and is usually referred to as bourgeois by Marxists. The latter, by and large, is Marxian in approach and methodology and many prefer that term. The crucial difference between the radical and the classical Marxian approach is perceptively dealt with in William J. Barclay and Mitchell Stengel, "Surplus and Surplus Value," Review of Radical and Political Economics, (forthcoming).


20. Kuhn, p. 103.

21. Tanzania Publishing House, 1972. Other notable ones in this vein are Giovanni Arrighi and John S. Saul, *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa* (New York, 1973) and the translation of Samir Amin; see his *Accumulation on a World Scale*, 2 Vols. (New York, 1974) and *Neo-Colonialism in West Africa* (New York, 1974). Another significant example is the founding of the journal *Review of African Political Economy* (1974). It should be noted that I am dealing primarily with the English literature on Africa and that the items mentioned represent only the tip of the iceberg.

22. Kuhn, p. 86.


24. Manning, "Notes, p. 246."


27. For critiques of the orthodox notion of cumulative knowledge, see Kuhn, *passim*, and Bodenheimer, "The Ideology," pp. 11 ff. This view still prevails at universities; thus Ph. D. candidates are required to do "original research" which means an exhaustive study of a micro-topic to multiply the building blocks to be used later in an overarching synthesis rather than a critical reevaluation of existing theoretical constructs.


29. Kuhn, p. 94.

30. After three years, it has finally been reviewed by Martin A. Klein, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, VII, 2 (1974), pp. 323-28. Some of Klein's criticisms are valid but on others he clearly misses the point; whether or not exploitation was/is due to a conscious decision is not crucial to Rodney's argument. Individual motivation in history is a preoccupation in the orthodox paradigm - not in the radical one.

31. An Economic History of West Africa (London, 1973). The rave reviews this book has received are surprising since the analytical framework is that of the free market which goes back to at least Adam Smith, thus hardly new or innovative.

32. Witness also the occasionally vociferous arguments with obvious lack of communication in African Studies Association annual meetings when exploitation and imperialism are raised.


34. Thus the remark by A. G. Frank that he has "long since given up debating with liberals, considering it a waste of time," *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution* (New York, 1969), p. xvi, and alternately P. M. Sweezy's comment that academics in the U.S. have refused to take Marxist


37. See chapter 1 in both Rodney, and Frank, "Latin America."


39. Frank, chapter 1. Thus, it is claimed that the recent phenomenal economic growth of Japan was possible primarily because it escaped western imperialism/colonialism and thus dependency. See P. A. Baran, The Political Economy of Growth (New York, 1957), pp. 158 ff.


41. Rodney, p. 224.

42. On this issue, Manning clearly misses the point in his "Notes," as well as his "Analyzing the Costs and Benefits of Colonialism," African Economic History Review, I, 1 (1974), pp. 15-22. The debate as to whether colonialism was a Good or Bad Thing is carried on entirely within the orthodox paradigm. As indicated, radicals take the European exploitation of Africa as a starting point. For an incisive historiographical analysis of colonialism, see Y. Chernyak, Advocates of Colonialism (Moscow, 1968).


44. This concept was first advanced by J. H. Boeke, Economics and Economic Policy of Dual Societies (New York, 1953) and is now generally accepted in conventional theory.


51. Rostow, "The Stages."


53. Amin, "Accumulation," I, pp. 16; 286-91. Amin's two volume work is subtitled "A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment." It is the most devastating and comprehensive critique of orthodox theory in the field to date.


58. Claude Meillassoux, "Development or Exploitation: is the Sahel famine good business?," *Review of African Political*


60. A. M. Babu, "Postscript" in Rodney, p. 313. See also Amin, I, p. 32, and Clive Y. Thomas, Dependence and Transformation. The Economics of the Transition to Socialism (New York, 1974).


67. Some American government officials apparently agree. According to Eugene R. Black, former President of the World Bank and advisor to President Johnson,

Our foreign aid programs constitute a distinct benefit to American business. The three major benefits are: (1) Foreign aid provides a substantial and immediate market for U.S. goods and services. (2) Foreign aid stimulates the development of new overseas markets for U.S. companies. (3) Foreign aid orients national economies toward a free enterprise system in which the U.S. firms can prosper.
