CHAPTER EIGHT

HEALTH CARE AND INDEPENDENCE: “TRICKERY” AND “DEVIATION”

“Toubab[s]” deviant[s] within the life of the country that became independent.

Yasmine Marzouk

Refusing “Development”

The complications of this project become apparent once more. Throughout this work, I have played with the international aspects of the political economy of health care in Senegal. Sometimes I have done this quite overtly; at other times the manipulation has been implicit. Within the context of a political economic history, one of the major theoretical constructs presented here, underdevelopment theory—and of course, development theory—relies heavily on the argument of intervening powers from beyond the borders of the given nation-state to illustrate the ways in which both international and national class interests combine to promote dependency in the “underdeveloped” state. National class interests—the interests of the ruling classes, in particular—no matter how they are constituted, or how we might wish to portray them, by definition, must defend themselves against the interests of other classes—domestic and international. Such defense and aggression are indications of agency; an agency that has hardly been explored.

In the case of Senegal, certainly the notions of “center-periphery” dynamics can be extended and illustrated. Yet, even here, they, along with terms like “dependency,” “development”/“underdevelopment,” and even “independence” need to be redefined and re-contextualized. It occurs to me that the intellectual and conceptual parameters that marked the initiation of this project over twenty years ago have been expanded and refined. The critique that has ensued—critique of some of the icons of development/underdevelopment theory—reveal what, in fact, has been missed—gone unrecorded—in
the histories of this space and the development studies they supposedly ground.

The clarity of my own epiphany is lodged in two readings. The first is an examination of the possible meanings of the title of Axelle Kabou’s *Et Si L’Afrique Refusait le Développement*. The second is found in John Thornton’s “Introduction” to his work, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1200–1800*.

What I find intriguing, and possibly unintentional, in Kabou’s work begins with its title. This intrigue is underscored given that her work—though incisive, and an often scathing critique of Africa’s post-independence leadership and its inability to confront and solve the problems facing it—seems trapped in the dynamics of “elite” formation and their rationales for their lapses in leadership. Yet, it still raises the possibility that “development” might be defined in ways other than those that receive the greatest currency now. The title implies that there is another agency—or other agencies—lurking about, that need to be exposed and examined. The implication is that the margins may indeed form, and inform the center.

If Kabou’s title implies this, Thornton stridently tells us what is wrong with what was once the “radical” work of dependency theorists—many of whom I have quoted here.

However much they were committed to the study of the non-Western world, or however sympathetic they were to its people, they still agreed that the non-Western world, including Africa, had played a passive role in the development of the Atlantic... the effect was simply to reinforce the tentative conclusions of the French pioneers [the Annalistes] that Africa was a victim, and a passive victim at that, for it lacked the economic strength to put up an effective resistance.1 (Italics added)

Again, what I think Kabou alludes to, and Thornton references directly, is African agency—the power of various groups of Africans to act on their own behalf. In part, those actions are not simply phys-

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