Itinerario (2025), **49**, 423–436
doi:10.1017/S016511532510020X

Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

Check for updates

ARTICLE

A British Approach to Colonial Development? Community Development Rhetoric in British Late Colonialism (1940s–1950s)

Naïma Maggetti

University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland
Email: naima.maggetti@unige.ch

Abstract

Community development represents the synthesis of post-war British colonial development policy. Officially used for the first time in 1948, in Arthur Creech Jones' definition community development was a movement based on the active participation and cooperation of local community members promoting a better life for the community, encompassing all forms of improvement in the areas of agriculture, public health and sanitation, infant and maternal welfare, and the spread of literacy. The main purpose of this article is not to delve into the community development projects themselves but to discuss the ways this concept was implemented, used, and promoted by Britain in two different spaces: the colonies and the United Nations. These two contexts are pivotal for the promotion of the post-war British colonial rhetoric. In the colonies, British colonial discourse pursued two intertwined goals: on the one hand, the relegitimisation of the colonial empire and, on the other, the preparation of the transition to independence in order to maintain an influence that would replace political rule and physical presence. The United Nations were used instead by the British as an arena to internationalise their colonial policy and establish their legitimisation.

Keywords: welfare colonialism; British colonial discourse; United Nations; Colonial Office publications; late colonialism

John Darwin defines the late colonial state as a hyperactive phenomenon, engaged for many reasons in relentless developmentalism.[1] Its concerns - economic planning and social welfare - were closely linked to those that characterised the metropole's domestic politics at the same time. Specifically, those concerns allowed British legislators and colonial governments to claim that they were engaged in spreading modernity where it was most needed. In Darwin's view, this may help explain why, in what appears in retrospect to be the last flicker of life of the colonial era, the plans and projects of the colonial state were able to use so much idealism and energy.[2] Joseph M. Hodge and Gerald Hödl point out that through the implementation of policies and instruments aimed at the development of the colonies, "British and French colonial officials and leaders aimed not only to preserve the colonial state, but

[1] The "proactive or developmental state" is one of the six features – the others being the dense state; the big state; the security state; the self-destruct state; the open state - used by John Darwin to characterise the late colonial state. See: John Darwin, "What Was the Late Colonial State?," *Itinerario* 23: 3-4 (1999), 76-81.

[2] John Darwin, "Last Days of Empire," in *The Ends of European Colonial Empires: Cases and Comparisons,* eds. Miguel Bandeira Jeronimo, Antonio Costa Pinto (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 272-273.

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Leiden Institute for History. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that no alterations are made and the original article is properly cited. The written permission of Cambridge University Press must be obtained prior to any commercial use and/or adaptation of the article.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press

also to reinvigorate it by transforming it into a more effective instrument of development in order to re-legitimize the colonial mission."[3] According to Frederick Cooper, although at the time of independence the tool of development was used by imperial powers to maintain a link with their former colonies despite their loss of formal power over them, this ideology was originally intended to support the empire.[4] The new international context of the post-war period made it necessary to transition to new forms of domination and justification of the imperial project: this is why, as Joanna Lewis reminds us, "welfare imperialism" was at the heart of the last phase of the British Empire.[5] In this context, the ideology of development, in its economic and social declinations, and the discourse that stemmed from it, constituted one of the major arguments structuring the rhetoric justifying the persistence of the British colonial Empire after the war.

Within this framework, "community development" represents the synthesis of post-war British colonial development policy, whose blueprint was produced during the Second World War.[6] Officially used for the first time in 1948, in the Secretary of State for the Colonies Arthur Creech Jones definition, community development was an idea and a movement – based on the active participation and cooperation of local community members – promoting a better life for the community.[7] This article discusses the ways community development rhetoric was implemented, used and promoted by Britain in two different spaces: the colonies and the United Nations. These two contexts were pivotal for the promotion of post-war British colonial rhetoric – justifying the persistence of the British Empire – which was structured by five main arguments: colonial development, in its economic and social declinations; the idea of partnership between the metropole and the colonies conceptualised by Lord Hailey at the beginning of the 1940s in order to replace the concept of trusteeship; the idea of progressive political development leading to the stage of self-government; and world stability as well as the responsibility of Great Britain towards its territories. These arguments formed the lexicon which contributed to the creation of the myth of liberal imperialism which in the official rhetoric guided British colonial policy after the Second World War.[8] In the colonies, British colonial discourse pursued two intertwined goals: on the one hand, the legitimisation of the colonial empire in the eyes of the colonial

[3] Joseph M. Hodge and Gerald Hödl, "Introduction," in *Developing Africa: Concepts and Practices in Twentieth-Century Colonialism*, eds. Joseph M. Hodge, Gerald Hödl and Martina Kopf, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 15. See also: Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard, "Introduction," in *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on History and Politics of Knowledge*, eds. Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 7-9.

[4] See the work of Frederick Cooper who was one of the first researchers to highlight this issue: Frederick Cooper, "Modernizing bureaucrats, backward Africans, and the development concept," in *International Development and the Social Sciences. Essays on the history and politics of knowledge*, eds. Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 64-92; Cooper and Packard, "Introduction", 1-41; Frederick Cooper, "Development, Modernization, and the Social Sciences in the Era of Decolonization: the Examples of British and French Africa," *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, 10 (2004), 9-38.

[5] Joanna Lewis, "The British Empire and World History: Welfare Imperialism and 'Soft' Power in the Rise and Fall of Colonial Rule," in *Colonialism and Welfare: Social Policy and the British Imperial Legacy*, eds. James Midgley and David Piachaud, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2012), 17-35.

[6] The two Colonial Development and Welfare Acts were passed during the war in 1940 and 1945. In her 1944 book, the anthropologist Lucy Mair showed that the implications of the war for broadly welfare programmes was under consideration already during the war, see: Lucy Mair, *Welfare in the British Colonies* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1944).

[7] The National Archives (TNA), CO 994/4, Creech Jones Circular to the African Governors, 10th November 1948.

[8] Naïma Maggetti, "Les ambiguïtés de la fin de l'Empire: Relégitimer le projet impérial britannique à l'époque de la décolonisation (1945-1957)," (PhD diss., University of Geneva, 2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press

populations and, on the other, the preparation of the transition to independence in order to maintain an influence that would have replaced political rule and British physical presence. The United Nations were used instead by the British as an arena to internationalise their colonial policy and assert their legitimacy in an international context more and more hostile to colonialism. As this article will point out, community development will appear as a key discursive device in both contexts.

The first part of the article will examine the definition of community development and its role in the larger post-war context of colonial development. The second part will delve into the community development rhetoric promoted in the colonial context through a specific source, the magazine *Today*. This illustrated magazine was produced by the Colonial Office and published by the Central Office of Information every six weeks between 1946 and 1957, for a total of eighty-seven issues. Its goals were threefold and clearly expressed by the Colonial Office: it was designed for the broad purpose of making British contributions to colonial progress better known in the Colonies; to awaken an appreciation of the advantages which derived from membership of the British Commonwealth; and finally, to introduce instructive features which would have direct application to colonial problems.[9] Through the analysis of the photo-reportages contained in the magazine, it is possible to investigate the promotion of social and community development rhetoric in the colonies and to highlight the different forms and objectives of the projects implemented. Finally, the third part of the article will address the United Nations context. Struggling in the post-war anti-colonial context, the British tried to use the United Nations bodies to assert the international legitimacy of their Empire and defend the sovereignty over their colonies.[10] After the creation of the United Nations, British delegates tried to emphasise the benevolent and supposedly progressive nature of their colonial project and its conformity with the principles of the Charter, while stressing that those principles inspired Britain's colonial policy long before the existence of the international organisation.[11] When criticism became more intense from 1948-49 onwards, delegates were driven to further mask their imperialist intentions behind voluntarist rhetoric by addressing colonial issues as diplomatically as possible, while British policy remained intransigent in substance. From then on, London opted for a strategy of emphasising the achievements in its colonies, the British colonial experience and the goals of post-war colonial policy. A careful analysis of the debates held at the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories – which to quote Jessica L. Pearson was "an unofficial structure for international oversight"[12] – shows that the British representatives put forward the community development doctrine and rhetoric in the thematic sessions. An analysis of such debates will show that community development allowed British representatives and experts to present their government's alleged unique approach to colonial development, as well as to build synergies with other committee members and to assess the duality of the concept.

[9] TNA, INF 12/172, Mr. Underwood to Mr. Harrison, 6th February 1951.

[10] On this subject see: Naïma Maggetti, "La Grande-Bretagne à l'ONU dans les années 1940 et 1950: sa défense d'un colonialisme 'libéral et éclairé'", *Relations Internationales* 177 (2019), 31-44; Wm. R. Louis, "Public Enemy Number One: The British Empire in the Dock at the United Nations, 1957-1971," in *The British Empire in the 1950s. Retreat or Revival?*, ed. Martin Lynn, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), 186-213.

[11] Great-Britain was not the only colonial power which used the United Nations as a forum, see for example Jessica L. Pearson's article on the joint mobilisation of Britain, France and Belgium in the defence of colonialism: Cf. "Defending Empire at the United Nations: The Politics of International Colonial Oversight in the Era of Decolonisation," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45: 3 (2017), 525-549.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 525.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Defining community development: "not perhaps a masterpiece of streamline English"[13]

In the framework of post-war development craze, community development represents the synthesis of post-war British colonial development policy, as noted in the beginning of this text.[14] It was inspired by the concept of mass education which derives from early 1930s ideas of rural reconstruction and village education in Africa and Creech Jones' considerations on the importance of adult education in the context of social conflict in the West Indies and Rhodesia in the late 1930s.[15] Although the concept is not clearly defined in the 1944 report on "Mass Education in African Society,"[16] which was the culmination of two decades work by the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies (ACEC), it emerges as a generalised education that aims to improve the quality of life of a community. A crucial aspect was that the community should be actively involved and, if possible, initiate these projects. The new African policy promoted by Arthur Creech Jones and Andrew Cohen, head of the Colonial Office Africa Department, since 1947 placed the principle of community development and a reformed bureaucratic structure at the centre of colonial administration. As underlined by Joanna Lewis, this new policy was built on the post-war confidence in "the semiology of propaganda and the belief in the universal message of modernisation."[17] According to John Holford, this new African policy – which emphasised a greater integration of Africans in the political process and the development of more participatory local governments –, as well as criticism from educationalists and anthropologists who had doubts about the concept of mass education from the outset, led the Secretary of State to abandon it in favour of the concept of community development.[18] This concept emerged for the first time from the Cambridge Conference of 1948 on "The Encouragement of Initiative in African Society," which was chaired by Andrew Cohen and attended by members of the ACEC along with members of the Colonial Office, experts and officers from the main branches of the Colonial Service in the various African territories.[19] The term was first used officially in November of the same year in a letter from Creech Jones to the governors of the African colonies and was defined as:

> A movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and, if possible, on the initiative of the community, but if this is not forthcoming spontaneously, by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it, in order to secure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement.[20]

[13] TNA, CO 1045/296, Report of the Ashridge Conference on Social Development, 3rd-12th August 1954, Chairman's Opening Address.

[14] For an history of the concept and its evolution see the article by Rosaleen Smyth, "The Roots of Community Development in Colonial Office Policy and Practice in Africa," *Social Policy & Administration* 38: 4 (2004), 418-436.

[15] See Joseph M. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of Colonialism* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), ch. 6.

[16] Colonial No. 186, Colonial Office, Mass Education in African Society, London: HMSO, 1944.

[17] Joanna Lewis, "The Ruling Compassions of the Late Colonial State: Welfare versus Force, Kenya, 1945-1952," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 2: 2 (2001), 11.

[18] John Holford, "Mass Education and Community Development in the British Colonies, 1940-1960: A Study in the Politics of Community Education," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 7: 3 (1988), 174.

[19] The presence of academic experts as speakers at the conference (Dr. Margaret Read, University of London; Miss Margery Perham, University of Oxford; Professor W. A. Lewis, University of Manchester; Prof. C. H. Phillips, SOAS) highlights the close relationship between the Colonial Office and British Academia after the war and their role in informing policies and implementing a research agenda for the colonies. On the role of anthropology and the entanglements between colonialism and sociology see: Audrey I. Richards, "The Colonial Office and the Organization of Social Research," *Anthropological Forum* 4: 2 (1977), 168-189: George Steinmetz, "A Child of Empire: British Sociology and Colonialism, 1940s-1950s," *Journal of History of Behavioral Sciences* 49: 4 (2013), 353-378.

[20] TNA, CO 994/4, Creech Jones Circular to the African Governors, 10th November 1948.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press

In the Cambridge Conference and Creech Jones' definition, community development was a movement aimed to promote a better life for the community, encompassing all forms of improvement in a wide range of different fields: "agriculture by securing the adoption of better methods of soil conservation, better methods of farming and better care of livestock; in the field of health by promoting better sanitation and water supplies, proper measures of hygiene and infant and maternity welfare; and in the field of education by spreading literacy and adult education as well as by the extension and improvement of schools for children."[21] The community development policy aimed to encourage colonial populations to actively participate in the establishment and execution of local development plans that would have benefited the whole community.

It is interesting to highlight the duality of the concept of community development, noted above. On the one hand, it was intrinsically linked to the social development of the colonies, while on the other, it was part of the process of self-government, a self-declared objective of post-war British colonial policy. The active participation and collaboration of the population in programmes aimed at community welfare were to contribute, in the spirit of Creech Jones, to instilling a spirit of solidarity between the different members of the community and a sense of shared responsibility.[22] The latter was essential for achieving individual and community well-being, which was one of the British prerequisites for the achievement of self-government. The relation between social development[23] and community development is clearly stated in the report of the Ashridge Conference on Social Development, which was held from 3-12 August 1954 and was attended by the heads of Social Welfare and Community Development Departments, administrative and professional field workers from thirty colonial territories. In the first section of the report the two concepts are described as "inseparable" and community development is presented as "an agent of social development."[24] Community development thus appeared as an appealing concept in post-war British colonial policy, since it outlived the late 1940s to be continuously mobilised well into the 1950s. It was a successful new iteration of colonial development that promoted the improvement of living conditions in the colonies along with the apparent preparation of colonial populations for self-government. Community development projects were disseminated throughout the empire from its first formulation, providing material for publication for *Today* magazine.

Promoting social and community development in the colonies

Today offers a privileged source to investigate the promotion of social and community development rhetoric in the colonies. It was an illustrated magazine produced specifically for a colonial audience by the Colonial Office between 1946 and 1957 and distributed to the colonial empire. Its publication was the result of the Colonial Office's desire to replace *War in Pictures*, a magazine distributed throughout the Empire to promote the British war

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] Creech Jones' conception of education was strongly influenced by the concept of "social responsibility." In his opinion education was not only about personal enrichment but also a tool that must be made available to the community. This view was expressed in the report 'Mass Education in African Society' (Colonial No. 186, Colonial Office, Mass Education in African Society, London: HMSO, 1944) and during an official visit in East Africa in 1946, see: FCO Historical Collection, King's College London, Press Reports of Mr. Creech Jones Visit to Kenya 1946, "Mr. Creech Jones Preaches Gospel of Hard Work: Self Help and Service to Others," *East African Standard*, 2nd August 1946.

[23] In the Ashridge Report, social development is defined as: "the whole process of change and advancement in a territory, considered in terms of the progressive well-being of society and of the individual." CO 1045/296, Report of the Ashridge Conference on Social Development, 3rd-12th August 1954, Section I.2: Definitions.

[24] TNA, CO 1045/296, Report of the Ashridge Conference on Social Development, 3rd-12th August 1954, Section I.3: Definitions.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press

effort in the Second World War. *Today* was published in English, Hausa, and Swahili and distributed throughout all the colonial territories as a propaganda tool to promote British colonial rhetoric. With an initial print run of 63,650 copies in 1946, this was increased and stabilised at 100,000 copies in 1952.[25] Concerning the composition of the magazine, it was characterised by a large proportion of images, mainly pictures from the various territories of the empire but also from Great Britain, and short texts, easily accessible to an elementary educated public. The issues were generally built around seven sections that clearly defined *Today*'s editorial line.[26] From this list it is possible to draw two main themes that structure the magazine: firstly, Britain's contributions to the progress in the colonies and its achievements; secondly, the representations of Britain and the desire to give an accurate picture to the colonial audience of the metropole and its inhabitants - of the *British Way of Life* - and to show the interest of the British public for the colonies.

The theme of colonial progress is widespread is widely spread in all the issues of the magazine and the British contribution to the economic and social development of the colonies is also broadly emphasised. The tenth issue of the magazine, published in winter 1947, which features King George VI on the cover consulting a book, is mainly devoted to the history and progress of the colonies between 1939 to 1947 and to the trends of British colonial policy. This timespan was described by the magazine's editors as "the most eventful eight years in the history of the British Empire." The Colonial Development and Welfare Acts (CD&WA) of 1940 and 1945 are presented as "important milestones of colonial progress which express the will of the British people to take steps to promote the development of the resources of the colonies and the welfare of the colonial people."[27] As a way of increasing a positive view of these and of emphasising the benevolent and altruistic character of British colonial policy, it is stressed that these acts were initialised in a wartime context:

> in spite of the inevitable preoccupation with fighting and the grim task of winning the war, the ultimate goal of expanding economic development, social progress and increased political responsibility for colonial peoples was never lost sight of; indeed, even in the darkest days, steady progress towards that goal was continued, and plan were laid for its more rapid achievement once victory was assured.[28]

Furthermore, the road to progress, referred to in the magazine as "Towards a better living," is depicted through a reportage on the advances in agriculture, health, education and social welfare. Among the achievements highlighted are the mass education programs implemented since 1944. Through these developmental policies and their visual representation in the magazine, the British aimed not only to preserve the colonial state but also to reshape it by transforming it into a tool for re-legitimising the colonial project and promote it to the colonial populations.

The economic and social development theme is depicted widely through all the issues of *Today* and ten photo-reportages are devoted to portraying and promoting community development projects implemented throughout the empire. Out of the ten, six concern

[25] INF 12/167, Today: Quantities and Distribution, 3rd June 1951.

[26] i. Contributions by Britain to progress in the colonies; ii. Achievements in the colonies, showing how particular colonies were tackling particular problems of common interest; iii. British people at work, to show especially that people in Britain work with their hands and take a pride in their skill; iv. Problems of health and agriculture, and how they are tackled in Britain or in the colonies.; v. How Britain organised activities which have, or could have, their counterpart in the colonies; vi. A general interest feature; vii. New pictures of events, especially in Britain, of particular interest to the colonies. Cf. INF 12/172, Mr. Underwood to Mr. Harrison, 6th February 1951.

[27] *Today* n°10, 1947, 15.

[28] *Today* n°10, 1947, 15. Quote from a report presented by Arthur Creech Jones to the British Parliament in July 1947.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Africa (four on Nigeria and two on Kenya) and four Asia (two on Malaya and two on Fiji), spanning from 1947 to 1956. As for the themes illustrated in the articles, they show the variety of community development fields addressed: mass education (Nigeria), co-operative societies (Malaya), healthcare and hygiene (Malaya), housing (Fiji), infant and mother care (Nigeria), roads building (Nigeria), rehabilitation (Kenya), improving community spirit between students (Nigeria). Each reportage is composed by a short text and a series of pictures representing the characteristics of the project and the people involved. The following three examples offer a glimpse of the community development projects carried out in the African colonies and the lexicon attached to it. First, a reportage published in 1948 presents a mass education project in Udi, Northern Nigeria, adopting the mass education terminology.[29] A short text accompanying the images states that the project is run by Nigerians and aims to teach people in the most rural parts of the country to read and write and is "likely to be taken as a model for similar campaigns in other parts of Africa." It also underlines that the mass literacy campaign is not seen as an end in itself but is used as a tool to "awaken interest in anything that can improve the living conditions of these people." The second article deals with maternity homes and mother care in Eastern Nigeria, financed by women on a cooperative and share-holding basis, topics (reproduction and the role of women in the production process) that were to concern all colonial powers in the late colonial moment. It highlights the "growing sense of community action" among the Ibo people.[30] The caption accompanying the pictures of smiling mothers and healthy babies underlines that the Ibo community "know that setting up such social services as maternity homes, better water supplies and sanitation, they are making a better life for themselves and their children." The third example is very interesting because, in Kenya, community development served an additional purpose. It was used as a tool for "rehabilitation" and re-education in the Mau Mau detention camps.[31] This was a prerogative of the Minister for Community Development, while the reabsorption of released detainees fell under the responsibility of the Minister of African Affairs.[32] In a photo-reportage included in the 64th issue of *Today* (published in 1954) about the work of Benaiah Apolo Ohanga, the Kenyan Minister for Community Development and the first African to gain access to the Kenyan cabinet, the "rehabilitation" of Mau Mau is described as his most important task:

> The community development in Kenya today means more than organising clubs for handicrafts and sewing bees. It aims at reshaping the warped minds of those Kikuyu and other related tribes who have been duped into following the Mau Mau's campaign of terror. Many of these have been gathered into camps where they are learning to be useful citizens again.[33]

This case is just one of those in which idioms of development were clearly related to those of security.[34] In the official rhetoric, the British sought to present decolonisation as the

[29] *Today* n°15, 1948.

[30] *Today,* no. 43, 1951.

[31] On the Mau Mau repression, community development, and the detention camps, see: Caroline Elkins, "The Struggle for Mau Mau Rehabilitation in Late Colonial Kenya," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33: 1 (2000), 25-57.

[32] TNA, CO 822/1671, Telegram to the Secretary of State for Colonies from Kenya, 28th January 1958.

[33] *Today* no. 64, 1954.

[34] See Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, "Repressive developmentalisms: idioms, repertories, trajectories in late colonialism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire*, eds. Martin Thomas and Andrew Thompson, (Oxford: OUP, 2018), 537-554.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press

culmination of the "liberal"[35] imperial project. This interpretation, which Larry J. Butler describes as a "long-cherished national myth," argues that unlike other European colonial powers, Britain managed to disengage from the Empire in a relatively peaceful manner, focusing on political reform and economic and social development in the colonies, both of which were necessary steps towards self-government.[36] In reality, this myth clashed with the reality of events. As Sarah Stockwell and Larry J. Butler point out, there was a considerable gap between the British perception of a liberal, enlightened and benevolent imperial mission and the often-brutal nature of colonialism on the ground. Especially during the 1950s, British colonial policy fell victim to a paradox: in its determination to maintain a form of liberal imperialism, Britain increasingly relied on repressive methods.[37] This repression was an expression of the security state, which according to John Darwin is one of the main features of the late colonial state. The Kenyan example portrayed in *Today* represents a clear intersection between community development and security and military issues. In addition, in the conception of community development applied in Kenya, there is a willingness to go further in the objective of shaping colonised populations "in the image of the British", which was one of the long-term objectives of colonial policy in order to maintain influence in the post-colonial states.

Using a rather simple arrangement of text and pictures, *Today* magazine presents community development as an actual achievement of British colonial policy, albeit deeply ingrained in the complexities and tensions of late colonialism. Not only does it portray apparently successful projects in domains as diverse as literacy, healthcare and political involvement, its content is specifically addressed to colonial populations who should thus be convinced of the value of themselves becoming involved, as Africans are portrayed not only as recipients but also as the actual actors of community development. This was a key goal at the time: it served important rhetorical aims, demonstrating, supposedly, local acceptance and compliance with particular projects of social change. *Today* magazine thus gives a pictorial version of the principles of community development being applied on the ground: higher living standards and social development along with the preparation for self-government (the case of Minister Ohanga being the ultimate example). Nonetheless, the publication of the Colonial Office reiterated the leading role and even the superiority of the British, who acted as gatekeepers of the whole process, from the implementation of the projects to their depiction on the pages of the magazine.

Advocating for British community development at the United Nations

> Apart from the widespread misrepresentation in America and Asia of the British position, it is probably now felt that the Special committee has its uses as a sounding board to show the constructive work being achieved in the British colonies.[38]
>
> *The Times*, 19 August 1950

[35] Sarah Stockwell, "Imperial Liberalism and Institution Building at the End of Empire in Africa," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46: 5 (2018), 1010. On the rhetoric of liberal imperialism see Maggetti "Les ambiguités de la fin de l'Empire: relégitimer le projet impérial britannique à l'époque de la colonisation (1945-1957)."

[36] Larry J. Butler, "British Decolonization," in *Crises of Empire,* eds. Martin Thomas, Bob Moore and Larry J. Butler, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 16. In his contribution to the collective book edited by Miguel Bandeira Jeronimo and Antonio Costa Pinto, John Darwin, refers to it as a 'shameless falsehood.'Cf. John Darwin, "Last Days of Empire," 272.

[37] Sarah Stockwell, *The British End of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 11; Butler, "British Decolonization," 71.

[38] TNA, CO 936/44/6, "UN and Colonial Territories, Attitude of Britain Modified," *The Times,* 19th August 1950.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press

The Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories was created as an *ad hoc* committee in 1946-47 and renewed annually until 1949, when the General Assembly, at the request of the Indian, Soviet, Chinese and Venezuelan delegations, discussed the possibility of making it permanent. In the end, it was the solution proposed by the United States, i.e. to renew the Special Committee for a period of three years, that was adopted by the majority of the members and applied from the 1950 session onwards, despite the firm opposition of Great Britain, France and Belgium.[39] This year represented a new beginning for the Committee, whose semi-permanent character led to a change in the way the meetings were conducted. It became a forum for discussion of specific topics, with each annual session devoted to a specific subject, namely: education, economic conditions and social conditions in the non-self-governing territories.[40] The British government's strategy towards it is well summarised in a note of 1950 by the Colonial Office which stated that: "without compromising on the basic principle of accountability, our [British] objective is to get entirely away from the defensive and negative attitude we have often been driven to adopt in the past, and to use the Special Committee and later the Fourth Committee, as a forum for gaining maximum publicity, in a positive and vigorous way, for our aims and achievements as a colonial power."[41] The British were represented on the committee, in succession, by John Fletcher-Cooke (1947-1950), Will Mathieson (1951–1953), former head of the Economic Relations Department of the Colonial Office, and B. Gidden (from 1954). Coming from the ranks of the Colonial Office, they served as Colonial Affairs Advisers in the British delegations to the United Nations and had the duty to promote the strategic principles put forward by their government.

With the introduction of the thematic sessions, the new configuration of the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories became the ideal place for the British delegation to promote specific achievements in the colonies and to highlight British expertise in the fields of education, economy and social welfare, relatable to such territories. Community development appeared as a handy argument. The use of expertise was part of the strategy promoted after the 1949 *annus horribilis* and aimed to overcome the loss of legitimacy, to counter criticism and to gain international approval, and less condemnation. 1949 is considered a major turning point in British colonial policy at the United Nations. The session of the Fourth Committee (held from 20-5 September 1949) proved to be a nightmare for the British, to an extent that the Colonial Office issued a memorandum to explain the attitude of its delegation, which rejected eight out of the ten proposed resolutions and abstained in two cases.[42] Notwithstanding the British delegation's arguments, all of the resolutions were adopted by the General Assembly and Britain was defeated on all counts. For its detractors, the non-collaborative attitude demonstrated by the British highlighted the ambiguity and contradiction between the reality of the facts and "the enlightened and progressive colonialism" they claimed to represent. This defeat led to the realisation that the position of the delegates at the United Nations made Britain appear to be "an imperialist and reactionary power"[43] and to the implementation of a more positive strategy that focused on highlighting the achievements of the British colonial policy.

[39] General Assembly resolution 332 (IV), *Establishment of a Special Committee on Information Transmitted Under Article 73(e) of the Charter,* A/RES/332 (IV), 2nd December 1949.

[40] For the period under consideration, the themes are discussed as follows: education, 1950, 1953 and 1956; economic conditions, 1951, 1954 and 1957; social conditions, 1952, 1955 and 1958.

[41] TNA, CO 936/44/6, Brief prepared by the Colonial Office on the 'United Kingdom representative on the Special Committee on information transmitted under art. 73(e) of the Charter' circulated for the consideration of the Stering Committee of International Organizations, 10th August 1950.

[42] Cmd. 8035, *Memorandum on Proceedings relating to Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories*, London: HMSO, 1950.

[43] CO 537/4589, H. D. Hughes M.P to A. Creech-Jones (CO), 7th December 1949.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press

This debacle led to the inclusion in the delegation of a series of experts who were charged with presenting the situation and progress in the British Non-Self-Governing Territories through "long and detailed"[44] speeches, enriched with concrete examples of achievements reached and difficulties encountered. Although British archival documents do not provide the background to the choice of experts, it is possible to justify it by their skills and professional background.[45] For the period considered, five experts were involved in the committee's discussions: William E. Ward, Special Adviser on Education and chairman of the 1948 Cambridge conference discussion group on the content of mass education; J. L. Leyden, Economic Advisor for East and Central African Territories; Wilfried H. Chinn, Social Welfare Advisor and Eric Pridie, Health Advisor and Chief Medical Officer at the Colonial Office. Their expertise was used to explain the principles and accomplishments of British policy in the fields under discussion.

A careful analysis of the committee's debates shows that the British representatives put forward the doctrine of community development throughout the thematic sessions.[46] Henry Hopkinson claimed in his speech to the Fourth Committee on 21 October 1952 that community development was the "main characteristic of British colonial policy."[47] The community development argument served a triple purpose that allowed British representatives and experts: to present their government's allegedly unique approach to colonial development (although similar move were being made by other colonial powers), to respond to criticism accusing British colonial policy of using developments in social welfare and education as a snare aimed primarily at creating complacency among the colonised populations rather than instilling political responsibility and the qualities necessary for self-government,[48] and to establish synergies with other committee members. Wilfried H. Chinn, one of the British experts in the committee, was one of the leading proponents of the doctrine and one of the best-placed people to discuss it. In his role as Colonial Office Social Welfare Advisor (1948-1961), member of the Colonial Social Welfare Advisory Committee and of the Advisory Committee on Mass Education (Community Development) he had first-hand experience of visiting British African and Asian territories and writing a series of reports detailing social conditions in these countries. Chinn presents community development as the "backbone of British policy in African territories"[49] and defined it as "a movement designed to promote a better life for the whole community, with the

[44] TNA, CO 936/44/6, Letter from J. Martin (CO) to J. Fletcher-Cooke (CO), 4th August 1950.

[45] For similar trajectories of gradual involvement of expertise as politics see: Joseph M. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007).

[46] See the following sessions of the Committee: United Nations, General Assembly, Third Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.61 (9th October 1952); United Nations, General Assembly, Fourth Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.81 (28th August 1953); United Nations, General Assembly, Fourth Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.83 (1st September 1953); United Nations, General Assembly, Fourth Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.110 (20th April 1955); United Nations, General Assembly, Fourth Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.169 (15th April 1958).

[47] Cmd. 8747, *Report of the Proceedings of the First Part of the Seventh Session of the United Nations Held at New York 14th October-22nd December 1952*, London: HMSO, 1953.

[48] Result of a survey carried out by the Foreign Office in 1949 in United Nations member countries described by British as "anticolonial" which highlighted what Colonial and Foreign Office officials described as the most widespread prejudices about the colonial empire: TNA, CO 537/5135, Measures to Counteract Adverse Effect of UN Voting Against the UK over the Colonies, [s.d] 1949.

[49] United Nations, General Assembly, Third Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.61 (9th October 1952).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press

active participation and through the initiative of the community."[50] According to Chinn, the population's initiative was the main component of the doctrine:

> Its [community development] success was largely dependent upon the initiative taken by the people themselves, and when such initiative was not forthcoming, the aim of the administration was to arouse and stimulate it. The emphasis on the community development technique stemmed from the realization that the only way to combat inertia was to make a conscious effort to get into the minds of people to think in human rather than administrative terms. However excellent a social program might be, it could not benefit the community if the people did not believe in it.[51]

This quote is twice as interesting. Firstly, it shows the active promotion of the community development approach which included a series of activities that were in line with the themes at the heart of the discussion of the committee such as, to name but a few, literacy campaigns, public hygiene, the construction of schools and hospitals, soil conservation and agriculture. Secondly, the wording used by Chinn as "arouse, stimulate, combat inertia, get into the minds of people" enable to point out the still paternalistic approach behind the doctrine.

Community development programmes were applied, with varying degrees of intensity or success, to all territories under British responsibility. According to Chinn, with its mass education programme in the rural areas set up with the cooperation of the villagers, the Gold Coast represented the spearhead of the programmes.[52] Chinn's presentation to the committee also provided an insight into how the programmes worked on the ground through the example of Uganda. The Social Welfare Advisor praised Uganda for its pioneering work in initiating "team systems of community development."[53] These teams were constituted entirely by Africans (one leader and from six to ten members) and aimed to "persuade people in the provinces to improve their standard of living through demonstrations to groups of villagers or through advice to individual families."[54] We see here that the use of this type of team highlights two important aspects: the underlying paternalism that characterises the ulterior motive of these programmes, as was noted above; and the use of African staff, which was part of the British attempt to, in principle, "empower" African populations, on the one hand, and, on the other, to emphasise the "partnership" that was supposed to characterise the relationship between colonisers and colonised after the Second World War, along the lines defined by Lord Hailey in 1942.[55]

The interest of the community development concept also lies in the advocacy of the interdependence of the economic and social dimensions of development, an important aspect that shaped the thoughts of many politicians, bureaucrats and experts dealing with

[50] Definition taken from the report of the Ashridge Conference quoted by the Brazilian representative Mr. Frazao in his intervention in the debate on social conditions in 1955. See: United Nations, General Assembly, Sixth Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.113 (16th May 1955).

[51] United Nations, General Assembly, Third Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.61 (9th October 1952).

[52] In his speech to the Committee, Chinn also presents the community development projects implemented in Kenya, Uganda, Jamaica, Malaya and Hong Kong. United Nations, General Assembly, Third Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.61 (9th October 1952).

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] *Ibid.* There is unfortunately little information in the sources on the selection process of the African teams.

[55] Introduction of the *partnership* notion by Lord Hailey during a speech held at the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society on 28 May 1942. Cf. Lord Hailey, *A Colonial Charter: address to the Annual Meeting of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, 28 May 1942*, (London: Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, 1942), 4-5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press

late colonial situations, and related challenges, in different colonial empires. During his intervention in the 1955 debate on social conditions, British representative Gidden highlighted the importance that the British government attached to community development, the essence of which he characterised by these words: "a new society can only be built by the combined and coordinated efforts of government and the people, in town and country, at all levels."[56] In his intervention Gidden underlined the complementarity between economic and social progress, pointing out that the social changes brought about by economic development were likely to lead to the development of "social ills such as slums, vagrants, petty crime and juvenile delinquency,"[57] another connection that was argued for by many in other colonial formations. As per their promoters, community development programmes were therefore used in the colonial territories in a preventive way, to anticipate the impact of economic development - such as industrialisation and urbanisation - on colonial societies and to create "stable urban communities, infused with a spirit of mutual help."[58] It is interesting to note that Gidden draws a parallel between the Industrial Revolution that disrupted English society in the nineteenth century and the economic development in the colonies, in order to emphasise that the experience gained from this revolution was made available to the colonies and realised through the community development programmes.

The analysis of the committee's discussions also makes it possible to grasp the abovementioned duality of the concept of community development. While it was intrinsically linked to economic and social development, it was also part of the process of self-government in the colonies. According to Gidden, the active participation and collaboration of the population in programmes aimed at social welfare were pivotal in instilling a spirit of solidarity among the various members of the community and a sense of responsibility – which was seen as indispensable for achieving well-being at the individual level and for society as a whole – a prerequisite for self-government.[59] This interpretation was shared by the United States representative, Curtis C. Strong, who in an intervention in the 1955 committee debate described community development as "an approach in contrast to 19th century colonialism, the extension of which could contribute significantly to the achievement of self-determination, which is essential to the fulfilment of the objectives of Chapter XI of the UN Charter."[60] The American support for British community development can be considered a success of the rhetoric promoted by British representatives, but it could also be explained by pragmatic reasons. During his intervention, Strong linked the United States interest in community development programmes to the United States Point Four Programme and the United Nations technical assistance programme to underdeveloped countries, the former of which could be a tool to implement the latter.[61] The support of the United States was not isolated within the committee: the French supported the

[56] United Nations, General Assembly, Sixth Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.110 (20th April 1955).

[57] *Ibid.* On the same topic, see also Chinn's intervention in the same debate: United Nations, General Assembly, Sixth Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.111 (11th May 1955).

[58] United Nations, General Assembly, Sixth Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.110 (20th April 1955).

[59] United Nations, General Assembly, Sixth Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.113 (16th May 1955).

[60] Ibid.

[61] United Nations, General Assembly, Sixth Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.113 (16th May 1955). For other explanations on the American experience of community development see: Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2015).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press

British initiative because they themselves were pursuing a similar doctrine in their colonial territories, which was called *éducation de base,*[62] while other members of the committee without colonial responsibilities, such as Brazil and India, also expressed a positive opinion and praised British work.[63] Throughout the 1950s, the emphasis on community development programmes allowed British representatives at the United Nations to prove Britain's commitment to the welfare of colonised populations on the international stage and at the same time to align themselves with the programmes of other United Nations bodies such as UNESCO – whose first director-general, Julian Huxley, had himself been a member of the ACEC in the 1930s and took part to the 1948 Cambridge conference – that increasingly envisioned community development as a legitimate tool for development *tout court.*[64] Not least, in an international context where the balance of power was gradually tilted against colonialism, development became a tool of propaganda replacing the discredited notion of the "civilising mission." Furthermore, the promotion of the community development doctrine allowed Great Britain to perpetuate the colonial project by adorning it, from a discursive point of view, with the moral legitimacy necessary to maintain its sovereignty over the non-self-governing territories and avoid any international interference in their administration.

Conclusion

Community development was at the core of the post-war British colonial development policy and was used as a key rhetoric device in both colonial and United Nations contexts. This dual use shows the elasticity of the concept. The analysis of the narrative surrounding the community development projects in the colonies complies with the British post-war rhetoric of relegitimising the colonial empire while at the same time shaping colonised populations in "the image of the British," as exemplified by the *Today* reportages. Moreover, this narrative highlights the underlying persisting paternalistic approach of the colonial policy. It is perhaps in its use for colonial populations that community development was more closely interlocked with the concept of late colonialism and two of its main features. On the one hand, it was a clear manifestation of the "proactive or developmental state," made up of a profusion of projects aimed at improving the living conditions of imperial subjects which characterised not only the British Empire but the other colonial empires as well. On the other hand, community development was a tool of the "security state," which as stated by John Darwin, "was the ultimate recourse of colonial rule when threatened with armed resistance by the colonial population."[65] Specifically, in the case of Kenya, *Today* highlighted the use of community development as a rehabilitation device in the Mau Mau detention camps.

The study of the debates held at the United Nations the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing-Territories makes it clear that community development was a

[62] On the *éducation de base* see the works of Damiano Matasci: *Internationaliser l'éducation. La France, l'Unesco et la fin des empires coloniaux en Afrique (1945-1961)* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2023); "Reforming the Empire. Fundamental Education and Colonial Development in West French Africa, 1945-1956," *Paedagogica Historica. International Journal ofthe History of Education*, 57 (2021), 228-245.

[63] On this subject see the following two sessions: United Nations, General Assembly, Sixth Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.112 (13th May 1955); United Nations, General Assembly, Sixth Session, Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, A/AC.35/SR.113 (16th May 1955).

[64] In the early 1950s some British community development projects became part of the UNESCO associated projects, on this topic see: Matasci, *Internationaliser l'éducation. La France, l'Unesco et la fin des empires coloniaux en Afrique (1945-1961)*, chp. 3. More general, on the UNESCO see: Joseph Watras,"UNESCO's Programme of Fundamental Education, 1946-1959," *History of Education* 39: 2 (2010), 219-237; Philip W. Jones, *International Policies for Third World Education: Unesco, Literacy and Development* (London: Routledge, 1988).

[65] Darwin, "What Was the Late Colonial State?," *Itinerario* 23: 3-4 (1999), 79.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press

tool used to legitimise the continuation of the British Empire on the international arena. It allowed British representatives and experts to present their government's renewed approach to colonial development, as well as to build synergies with other committee members. Finally, both the colonial and the United Nations context prove the duality of the concept of community development which, in the spirit of Creech Jones, was intrinsically linked to the social development of the colonies and was also a part of the process of self-government.

Naïma Maggetti is a Senior Researcher at the Maison de l'Histoire, University of Geneva. She holds a PhD in Contemporary History from the same institution, where her doctoral dissertation examined the re-legitimisation of the British imperial project in the late colonial period. Her research explores the history of the British colonial empire, with a particular focus on colonial discourse and visual culture, especially photography.

Cite this article: Maggetti, Naïma, "A British Approach to Colonial Development? Community Development Rhetoric in British Late Colonialism (1940s–1950s)," *Itinerario* 49, no. 3 (December 2025): 423–436, https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X

https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511532510020X Published online by Cambridge University Press