
“Develop”, at what price? From Colonialism to Developmentalism: Discursive breaks and post-colonial continuities in the discourses of Truman, Sarkozy and Macron on francophone West Africa

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doi.org/10.51505/IJEBMR.2026.10603 URL: <https://doi.org/10.51505/IJEBMR.2026.10603>

Received: May 18, 2026

Accepted: May 25, 2026

Online Published: Jun 05, 2026

Abstract

This article analyzes the relationship between colonialism, developmentalism and post-colonialism from the speeches of Truman in 1949, Sarkozy in Dakar in 2007, Macron in Ouagadougou in 2017 and the Africa Forward Summit in Nairobi in 2026. Based on a critical analysis of discourse, it shows that the Western language on African development evolves from technical assistance to partnership and then to strategic co-investment, without removing power asymmetries. Truman establishes a hierarchy between developed countries and underdeveloped regions; Sarkozy acknowledges colonial fault while making Africa accountable; Macron shifts the discourse to cooperation, local transformation and shared sovereignty. However, Europe remains central in financing, expertise, technology and priority setting. The article argues that the break with the colonial order presupposes an effective African sovereignty of development, based on productive transformation, technological and cognitive mastery, financial capacity, regional integration and the production of African categories of progress. The Nairobi guidelines will become emancipatory only if co-investment is reintegrated into an endogenous development logic, open to partnerships but centered on the accumulation of African capacities.

Keywords: colonialism, developmentalism, postcoloniality, Francophone West Africa, development sovereignty

JEL Code: F54 , N37 , O10 , O19 , P16

1. Introduction

The issue of development in Africa could not be separated from colonial history. In French-speaking West Africa, French colonization has profoundly transformed the economic, administrative, educational, political and symbolic structures of societies. It has introduced infrastructure, school systems, administration, trade channels and forms of international integration. But these mechanisms were mainly organized around a logic of extraction, primary specialization, political control and integration subordinated to the needs of metropolises.

After independence, the vocabulary of development gradually replaced that of the civilizing mission. Aid, cooperation, expertise, partnership and modernization have replaced the explicit categories of colonial domination. Yet the question remains: do these new discourses mark a real break with the colonial order or do they constitute a postcolonial reformulation of asymmetrical relations in the development process?

Four speeches shed light on this issue. The first is Harry S. Truman's inaugural speech of January 20, 1949, including his "Point IV", which is often considered one of the founding acts of international developmentalism. In it, Truman proposes to put American scientific and industrial advances at the service of the so-called « underdeveloped » regions, while affirming that the old imperialism has no place in this new vision of progress. From this perspective, development appears as a declared break with direct colonial domination, but also as a new hierarchy between those who hold science, capital and technology, and those who need to be developed.

The second is Nicolas Sarkozy's Dakar speech, delivered on 26 July 2007. It recognizes colonial misconduct, exploitation and plunder of resources, but also affirms that colonization is not responsible for all of Africa's contemporary difficulties. This discourse introduces a tension between historical recognition, relativization of colonial causality and accountability of African societies.

The third is Emmanuel Macron's Ouagadougou speech, delivered on November 28, 2017. In it, Macron acknowledged the crimes of European colonization, asserted that there was no longer an « African policy of France, » and called for a new relationship based on youth, partnership, renewed aid, and common challenges.

The fourth speech is also delivered by Emmanuel Macron in Nairobi at the Africa Forward Summit on May 12, 2026. It marks a strategic shift by affirming the overcoming of aid in favor of co-investment, shared sovereignty, local transformation and strategic autonomy.

The central question of this article is: do the speeches of Truman, Sarkozy and Macron reflect a real break with the colonial order or a gradual reconfiguration of the Western discourse on African development, from technical aid to strategic co-investment?

This article contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it proposes a longitudinal comparison of major Western political discourses on Africa, from Truman's developmentalism to the contemporary language of strategic co-investment articulated in Nairobi. Second, it conceptualizes the evolution from technical developmentalism to strategic developmentalism, showing how asymmetrical relations are historically reconfigured through changing vocabularies of aid, partnership, sovereignty and geoeconomic cooperation. Third, by integrating contemporary African-led initiatives and debates on endogenous development, the article connects postcolonial analysis with current discussions on industrial transformation, regional integration and strategic autonomy in Africa.

2. Concepts and methods

2.1 Concepts

The analysis of the relationship between colonialism, developmentalism and post-coloniality implies clarifying the notions that structure the article. These allow us to understand how Africa, particularly French-speaking West Africa, has been conceived, administered, represented and integrated into the world economy. They also make it possible to question the continuities between colonial domination, development aid, cooperation, partnership and co-investment.

Colonialism refers to a system of political, economic, territorial and symbolic domination by external power over dependent societies. In French-speaking West Africa, it was not limited to territorial occupation or direct administration. It organized the economies around resource extraction, raw material production, taxation of levy, forced labor, centralized administration and infrastructure oriented towards the needs of the metropolis. It thus constitutes a historical matrix that has produced institutions, social hierarchies, school systems, economic circuits and representations whose effects have survived independence.

Developmentalism extends and transforms this matrix. It refers to the discourses and policies that make development a universal goal, associated with growth, industrialization, technical modernization and the improvement of living conditions. Harry S. Truman's inaugural address in 1949, including his "Point IV" marked a defining moment: while proclaiming a break with imperialism, it substituted for the colonial hierarchy a hierarchy of developed countries, possessors of science, capital, and expertise, and underdeveloped regions, defined by want and assistance. Where colonialism claimed to civilize, developmentalism intends to modernize.

Post-coloniality allows us to capture these movements. It refers not only to the post-independence period, but also to a historical situation in which formerly colonized societies are still traversed by economic, institutional, symbolic and discursive legacies resulting from colonization. It therefore calls for avoiding two simplifications: to equate any Western discourse on African development with a simple colonial repetition, or to consider that the recognition of colonial crimes and the vocabulary of partnership are enough to break with the colonial order. The challenge is rather to analyze reformulations, displacements and persistence.

In this context, neo-colonialism refers to the forms of domination that remain after independence, when States have legal sovereignty but remain dependent from the productive and strategic point of view. In French-speaking West Africa, it is manifested in particular by dependence on raw materials, low local processing, external aid, debt, asymmetry of trade agreements, the presence of multinationals and the influence of external partners in the definition of public policies.

Sovereignty of development is therefore a central concept. It refers to a society's ability to define its own goals, instruments and trajectories of transformation. It goes beyond formal political sovereignty and presupposes mastery of productive, cognitive, financial and technological

capacities. The question, then, is not only whether Africa is receiving aid, benefiting from partnerships, or attracting investment, but whether it actually has the power to set its own development agenda.

Finally, the notions of discursive rupture and postcolonial continuity serve as operating concepts. Discursive disruption refers to changes in vocabulary and justification: from civilizing mission to technical assistance, from aid to partnership, and then to strategic co-investment. Post-colonial continuity refers to the persistence of asymmetrical relationships despite these changes, including the ability to identify problems, set priorities, fund solutions and evaluate results. A breakdown in vocabulary does not necessarily mean a breakdown in structure.

Thus, the transition from colonialism to developmentalism does not correspond to the outright disappearance of the colonial order, but to its discursive and institutional reconfiguration. An analysis of the speeches of Truman, Sarkozy and Macron shows this evolution: Africa appears successively as an underdeveloped space to modernize, a continent responsible for its destiny, a partner of Europe, and then a strategic actor of shared sovereignty. However, this progress will only constitute an effective break if it is accompanied by a real shift of decision-making power towards African societies.

2.2 Theoretical framework

This article offers a critical reading of the relationships between colonization, developmentalism, neo-colonialism and post-colonialism. It is based on the idea that the development of Africa, particularly of French-speaking West Africa, cannot be understood independently of the economic, institutional and symbolic structures inherited from the colonial experience.

In this regard, the theories of dependency recall that colonization not only constituted political or administrative domination, but also produced a sustainable economic structure, based on extraversion, the export of raw materials, weak industrialization and the subordinate integration of Africa into world capitalism. From this perspective, underdevelopment is not a mere historical backwardness; it results from an asymmetrical relationship in which African economies have been organized as resource-producing peripheries and consumers of manufactured goods. The work of Nkrumah (1965) by Rodney (1972) and Amin (1973) thus makes it possible to think of the continuity of economic dependencies after political independence.

A second theoretical approach is the criticism of development. Thus, for Rist (2001), development is not a neutral notion: it is based on a Western belief that all societies should follow the historical trajectory of the West. In this sense, Truman's 1949 speech was a seminal moment: societies that were formerly colonized were gradually being called « underdeveloped. » Development then becomes both a promise of progress, a standard for ranking societies and an instrument for legitimizing a new relationship between industrialized countries and regions considered to be lagging.

A third key to reading is provided by postcolonial approaches, which show that domination also passes through representations. Fanon (1961) highlights the lasting psychological, cultural and political effects of colonization. Said (1978) analyses the production of the East as an object of knowledge and power, while Mudimbe (1988) shows how Africa was invented through the categories of colonial sciences, missions and European administrations. Mbembe (2000) continues this reflection by describing postcolonization as a space marked by the persistence of imaginations, practices and power relations inherited from colonization. These approaches make it possible to analyze the discourses studied not as mere political statements, but as devices for producing meaning about Africa, its history and its future. The work of Bayart (1989) and Cooper (2002) also helps nuance the analysis by recalling that postcolonial African states are not mere receptacles of external constraints, but spaces for appropriation, negotiation and recomposition of colonial legacies.

A fourth entry is a matter of historical institutionalism. The work of Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2001), as well as Nunn (2007), underscores the persistent effects of colonial institutions on contemporary development trajectories. In francophone West Africa, this perspective sheds light on the persistence of centralized institutions, extroverted economies, administrative systems oriented towards control and public policies insufficiently oriented towards productive transformation.

These four approaches are articulated around a central question: do Western discourses on African development help to overcome the asymmetries inherited from colonization or to reformulate them in the language of aid, partnership, co-investment and shared sovereignty? The notion of African sovereignty of development allows to answer this question by pushing the analysis of the only political vocabulary towards the actual conditions of power: who defines the priorities, who finances the solutions, who controls the technologies, who captures the value and who sets the criteria of progress?

2.3 Corpus

The corpus consists of four political speeches that each crystallize a particular moment in the Western discourse on African development: Harry S. Truman's inaugural speech of January 20, 1949, including his « Point IV »; Nicolas Sarkozy's speech in Dakar of July 26, 2007; Emmanuel Macron's speech at the University of Ouagadougou of November 28, 2017, as well as his speech at the Africa Forward Summit in Nairobi of May 12, 2026.

These speeches were selected because they allow us to observe a discursive trajectory ranging from technical assistance to strategic co-investment. Truman inaugurates the modern language of development; Sarkozy reactivates colonial memory by articulating it to an injunction of African responsibility; Macron in Ouagadougou proposes a partnership refoundation, before enshrining, in Nairobi, African development in a logic of shared sovereignty and strategic autonomy. Together, these texts allow us to analyze the vocabulary breaks and postcolonial continuities in the way the West thinks about Africa and its development.

2.4 Method of analysis

The article adopts a qualitative approach based on critical discourse analysis. This approach does not regard political discourses as mere circumstantial statements, but as devices for producing meaning. They name realities, prioritize problems, designate responsibilities, legitimize solutions and symbolically organize relations between actors. Analyzing them therefore amounts to questioning what they say about Africa, but also the position from which they speak, the categories they mobilize and the power relations they make visible or invisible.

To operationalize the analysis, the four speeches constituting the corpus were subjected to a thematic and interpretive coding process. A first reading made it possible to identify recurring lexical forms, semantic patterns and argumentative structures related to development, colonization, partnership, sovereignty and asymmetrical relations. These recurring elements were progressively organized into analytical categories derived both from the theoretical framework and from the empirical material itself. The analysis therefore combines deductive coding, based on dependency theory, postcolonial studies and the critique of developmentalism, with inductive coding emerging from the speeches.

In order to ensure comparability across historical contexts, all speeches were analyzed using the same analytical grid. The coding focused on the way each discourse defines Africa, diagnoses its difficulties, formulates solutions, frames colonial history and constructs relations of power between Africa and Western actors. Interpretations were developed through systematic comparison between the four speeches, with particular attention to shifts in vocabulary, narrative framing and the persistence or transformation of asymmetrical structures.

The analysis is based on six dimensions. The first concerns forms of categorization: it examines how Africa, African societies or poor regions are named, from the « underdeveloped » regions at Truman to the strategic actor of global sovereignty at Macron in Nairobi. These designations guide the understanding of the problem and place Africa in a special place in the world order.

The second dimension concerns the diagnoses made. It identifies the causes attributed to African difficulties: technical backwardness, colonial heritage, internal political responsibility, institutional deficit, weak local transformation or dependence on global value chains. The third concerns the solutions proposed, be they technical assistance, development aid, partnership, co-investment, institutional reform, productive transformation or strategic autonomy.

The fourth-dimension questions the relation to colonization: is it denied, recognized, relativized, outdated or reformulated? The fifth concerns asymmetries, i.e. the power to name problems, set priorities, fund solutions, set standards and evaluate results. It makes it possible to distinguish vocabulary breaks from structural breaks.

Finally, the sixth dimension concerns African sovereignty. Is Africa conceived as an object of aid, a recipient of assistance, a partner of cooperation or a strategic subject capable of defining its own objectives? This question is the guiding thread of the article, because the effective exit from

the colonial order is not only measured by the change of vocabulary, but by the ability of African societies to define their own trajectories of transformation.

3. Results

3.1 Truman: development as technical assistance

Harry S. Truman's inaugural speech in 1949 was a seminal moment in the history of international developmentalism. Through « Point IV », Truman proposes to put the scientific, industrial and technical advances of the United States at the service of the « underdeveloped » regions. Development is presented as an enterprise of progress, based on the dissemination of knowledge, investment, increasing productivity and improving living conditions.

This formulation marks a marked break with classical colonial imperialism. Truman argues that the United States seeks neither territory nor privilege, and that former imperialism, understood as exploitation for the benefit of foreigners, has no place in this new vision of progress. Development thus appears to be a moral and technical alternative to direct colonial domination. However, this rupture remains partial. Poor regions are defined primarily by their lack of science, technology, capital, industry and productivity. The West remains on the side of knowledge, expertise, and responsiveness, while the societies to be developed are on the side of need and assistance. Truman's speech therefore substitutes a technical mission for the civilization mission: it no longer colonizes in the name of civilization but modernizes in the name of development.

Thus, Trumanian developmentalism inaugurates a new grammar of North-South relations. It breaks with territorial imperialism but maintains a hierarchy between those who define progress and those who should benefit from it.

3.2 Sarkozy: colonial misconduct and Africa's accountability

Nicolas Sarkozy's Dakar speech, delivered in 2007, is part of the colonial memory. It recognizes that Europeans came to Africa as conquerors, took land, imposed their beliefs, languages and norms, and exploited resources that did not belong to them. This recognition is a break with the rhetoric that minimized or obscured colonial violence.

But this recognition is immediately accompanied by relativization. Sarkozy argues that colonization is not responsible for all of Africa's contemporary difficulties, including wars, dictatorships, corruption, fanaticism, waste, or pollution. The diagnosis then shifts from the colonial legacy to the internal responsibility of African societies.

The most controversial point of the speech is the idea that « the African man has not entered history enough ». This formula transforms the question of development into a problem of relation to time, modernity and progress. It tends to interpret African difficulties not only as the product of historical and economic structures, but as the expression of a cultural or historical deficit.

The Dakar speech thus appears deeply ambivalent. It acknowledges the colonial fault but reconfirms an old representation of Africa as a backward continent, prisoner of tradition and called to enter a temporality of progress defined from the outside.

3.3 Macron in Ouagadougou: partnership as a rhetorical refoundation

The speech delivered by Emmanuel Macron at the University of Ouagadougou in 2017 seeks to produce a break in tone in the relationship between France and Africa. Macron claims that there is no longer an « African policy of France » and refuses to speak of Africa as a homogeneous bloc. It emphasizes the plurality of the continent, the diversity of its trajectories and the need to build a new relationship.

The speech explicitly recognizes the crimes of European colonization and inscribes them in French history. This recognition marks an important difference between more defensive or relativistic discourses. But the focus is on the future: African youth, mobility, education, entrepreneurship, democracy, climate, security and employment become the main registers of the proposed relationship.

The advanced solution is a renewed partnership. Macron advocates closer-to-the-ground official development assistance, more evaluated, more open to NGOs, businesses, students, and local actors. It also proposes shifting the Franco-African face-to-face relationship to a broader framework between the European Union and the African Union.

This partnership rhetoric marks a notable evolution. Africa is no longer presented only as a recipient of assistance, but as a partner for a common future. However, France and Europe remain central in the financing, support, evaluation and networking of solutions. The proclaimed partnership reduces the lexicon of domination but does not entirely remove institutional asymmetry.

3.4 Macron in Nairobi: strategic co-investment

The Nairobi speech of 2026 introduces a major shift in the French discourse on Africa. While Ouagadougou's speech focused on the refoundation of the France-Africa relationship, Nairobi broadens the framework to an Africa-Europe relationship embedded in global geo-economic recompositions. The discourse is no longer just memorial or partnership; it becomes strategic. In it, Macron asserts that the relationship between Africa and Europe must be based on lucidity, respect and the will to share an agenda. The triptych of peace, prosperity and sovereignty structures the discourse. Africa is presented as a key player in international stability, economic transformation, energy transition, artificial intelligence, the formal economy, value chains and strategic autonomy.

The most significant shift concerns the shift from aid to co-investment. Macron argues that Europe should no longer be based on aid, but on shared investment. This co-investment concerns

productive sectors, infrastructure, human capital, technologies and African and European businesses.

This evolution partially responds to the criticisms of classical developmentalism. Africa is no longer just described as a space of need or a beneficiary of cooperation, but as a strategic partner. However, this recognition remains ambivalent. African sovereignty is valued, but it is also linked to Europe's needs for strategic autonomy. Africa therefore appears both as a subject of sovereignty and as a lever for European repositioning in global competition.

The Nairobi speech thus marks the transition from a partnership-based to a strategic development. It goes beyond the traditional language of aid, but it maintains a central question: does co-investment allow for a real shift of decision-making power to African societies, or is it a new form of asymmetric interdependence?

Table 1. Summary table of results

Speech	Dominant Category	Diagnosis of the African Problem	Proposed solution	Main asymmetry
Truman, 1949	Underdevelopment	Technical, productive and scientific backlog	Technical assistance, capital, productivity	Asymmetry of knowledge and expertise
Sarkozy, 2007	Colonial Memory and Accountability	Colonial heritage, but also African responsibility	Entry into history, responsibility, modernity	Cultural and moral asymmetry
Macron, Ouagadougou, 2017	Partnership	Common challenges: youth, security, climate, employment, democracy	Renewed aid, cooperation, Europe-Africa relationship	Institutional and financial asymmetry
Macron, Nairobi, 2026	Co-investment and shared sovereignty	Dependence, low transformation, strategic marginalization	Co-investment, value chains, strategic autonomy	Geo-economic and technological asymmetry

Source: Author

4. Discussion

4.1 A real transformation of Western language on Africa

The analysis reveals a gradual transformation of Western discourse on Africa. Truman's language of technical assistance progressively gives way to colonial memory, partnership and finally strategic co-investment. This evolution reflects the incorporation of some postcolonial criticisms into Western developmental discourse.

However, these discursive shifts do not necessarily imply a transformation of power relations. The vocabulary changes from aid to partnership and then to co-investment, but external actors largely retain the capacity to define priorities, mobilize resources, structure value chains and evaluate progress. The speeches therefore reveal less a disappearance of asymmetry than its historical reconfiguration.

4.2 Misplaced rather than erased asymmetries

The nature of asymmetry changes across the four speeches. In Truman's discourse, it is primarily technical and scientific: The West possesses knowledge and productivity, while poor regions are defined by lack. In Sarkozy's speech, asymmetry becomes cultural and historical, as African underdevelopment is partly interpreted through a deficit of historical agency and modernity. In Ouagadougou, asymmetry takes an institutional and financial form. Africa is recognized as a partner, yet cooperation remains structured by European funding, expertise and evaluation mechanisms. In Nairobi, asymmetry becomes geo-economic and technological. Co-investment and strategic autonomy may open new opportunities, but dependence can persist if technologies, standards, finance and value chains remain externally controlled.

The speeches therefore do not reproduce colonial discourse identically; they reformulate it through new languages of cooperation, partnership and strategy.

4.3 The progressive rise of Africa's discursive status

A major evolution concerns Africa's discursive position. In Truman's speech, Africa appears mainly as an underdeveloped space requiring modernization. Sarkozy presents it as historically wounded but responsible for its future. Macron in Ouagadougou frames Africa as a partner of the future, especially through youth and entrepreneurship, while Nairobi presents it as a strategic actor in global sovereignty and geo-economic transformation.

This evolution is significant because Africa is no longer portrayed solely as an object of aid. Yet symbolic recognition does not automatically translate into effective sovereignty. The central issue remains whether African societies can genuinely define priorities, control technologies, capture value and shape their own criteria of progress.

4.4 From technical to strategic development

The comparison of the four speeches highlights a broader transformation of developmentalism itself. Development first appears as technical modernization with Truman, then as responsibility and modernization with Sarkozy, partnership with Macron in Ouagadougou, and finally strategic co-investment in Nairobi.

This strategic orientation can already be observed in several contemporary initiatives linking Africa and external partners. Co-investment increasingly concerns sectors such as energy infrastructure, critical minerals, pharmaceutical production, digital technologies and industrial transformation. European and African actors have, for instance, promoted partnerships around

battery value chains, local vaccine production after the COVID-19 pandemic, and digital governance infrastructures. At the same time, African institutions such as Afreximbank and the African Development Bank have expanded industrial financing mechanisms intended to strengthen local productive capacities and regional integration. These examples illustrate how strategic autonomy is progressively framed not only as a political principle, but also as a struggle over technology, industrial capacity, finance and control of value chains.

Nairobi's discourse marks an important shift by emphasizing local transformation, sovereignty and mutual interests. Nevertheless, this strategic developmentalism remains ambivalent because Africa's sovereignty is also integrated into Europe's search for strategic autonomy in a context of global competition.

4.5 African sovereignty as a criterion for real rupture

Ultimately, the main criterion for assessing a real break with the colonial order is African sovereignty of development. A genuine rupture cannot be reduced to rhetorical recognition of colonial violence or to the replacement of aid by partnership and co-investment. It requires effective control over productive transformation, technologies, financing, value chains and development priorities.

The Nairobi discourse opens such a possibility, but it does not guarantee it. The transformation will remain partial as long as Africa continues to occupy mainly the position of strategic resource, market or geopolitical partner within externally structured agendas.

4.6 African sovereignty as a criterion for real rupture

Although this article primarily examines Western political discourses on Africa, African intellectual and political traditions have long produced alternative conceptions of development and sovereignty. African actors have not remained passive recipients of developmentalist narratives; they have continuously contested externally defined models of modernization and dependency.

From the anti-colonial period onward, thinkers such as Nkrumah (1965), Fanon (1961) and Amin (1973) criticized the persistence of economic and political domination after formal independence. Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism emphasized that political sovereignty could coexist with external control over finance, trade, technology and strategic decision-making. Fanon highlighted the psychological, cultural and political continuities of colonial domination, while Amin argued that unequal integration into global capitalism maintained African economies in subordinate positions characterized by primary specialization and dependency. These perspectives challenged the assumption that development necessarily implied convergence toward externally defined Western trajectories.

Other African and postcolonial scholars further deepened this critique. Rodney (1972) demonstrated how colonial extraction historically contributed to African underdevelopment,

while Mudimbe (1988) and Mbembe (2000) showed that domination also operates through the production of categories, representations and epistemic hierarchies about Africa. These approaches stressed that sovereignty is not only political or economic, but also cognitive and symbolic.

More recently, African political agendas have increasingly emphasized endogenous transformation, industrial sovereignty and regional integration. Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) reflect efforts to promote local value addition, industrialization, technological upgrading and stronger regional markets (African Union Commission, 2015). Such initiatives seek not only economic growth, but also greater African control over productive capacities, strategic resources and development priorities. Contemporary initiatives such as Afreximbank's industrial financing mechanisms, regional pharmaceutical production projects and African digital sovereignty strategies further illustrate the growing effort to relocate development priorities and productive capacities within the continent.

From this perspective, the Nairobi discourse partly incorporates long-standing African demands by emphasizing local transformation, strategic autonomy, industrial investment and regional value chains. The shift from aid to co-investment also reflects a partial recognition of critiques directed at traditional developmental assistance. However, these evolutions remain incomplete insofar as the principal financial, technological and normative instruments continue to be largely structured by external actors.

African responses therefore reveal a central tension. On the one hand, the evolution of Western discourse opens new opportunities for investment, industrialization and strategic cooperation. On the other hand, African intellectual and political traditions continue to warn against the risk that partnership and co-investment may reproduce new forms of asymmetric interdependence if control over technology, finance, standards and value chains remains externally concentrated. The inclusion of these African perspectives highlights that the debate on development is not simply a Western conversation about Africa. It is also a field of contestation in which African actors actively formulate competing narratives of sovereignty, progress and transformation.

5. Conclusion

Analysis of the speeches of Truman, Sarkozy and Macron shows that the transition from colonialism to developmentalism has transformed rather than eliminated asymmetrical relations between Africa and the West. From technical assistance to partnership and strategic co-investment, the vocabulary evolves, but the central issue remains the distribution of power: who defines priorities, finances transformation, controls technologies, captures value and establishes the criteria of progress?

The study highlights a progressive transformation in the discursive status of Africa. In Truman's discourse, Africa appears primarily as an underdeveloped space requiring modernization through external expertise and capital. Sarkozy's speech acknowledges colonial violence while

simultaneously emphasizing African responsibility. Macron's speeches in Ouagadougou and Nairobi further shift the discourse toward partnership, strategic autonomy and shared sovereignty. Africa is increasingly presented not simply as a recipient of aid, but as a strategic actor in global economic and geopolitical transformations. Yet this symbolic recognition does not automatically imply effective sovereignty.

The Nairobi proposals mark an important turning point in this evolution. By advocating the transition from aid to co-investment, emphasizing local transformation, regional value chains, industrial sovereignty, technological cooperation and strategic autonomy, the Nairobi discourse partially integrates long-standing African and postcolonial critiques of traditional developmentalism. It recognizes that the future of Africa-Europe relations cannot rely solely on assistance mechanisms, but must involve productive investment, infrastructure, innovation, human capital development and shared industrial capacities. However, these proposals remain ambivalent insofar as Africa's sovereignty is still partly framed within Europe's own search for strategic repositioning in an increasingly competitive global order.

For francophone West Africa, the central challenge is therefore to transform this discursive inflection into effective sovereignty of development. Such sovereignty cannot be reduced to formal political independence or rhetorical partnership. It requires the capacity of African societies to define their own development priorities, direct investments toward locally determined objectives, progressively control technologies and value chains, and elaborate autonomous criteria of progress. In this perspective, endogenous development does not imply isolation or rejection of international cooperation; rather, it refers to a development process whose center of decision-making lies within African societies themselves.

The Nairobi orientation also highlights several conditions necessary for such a transformation. First, endogenous development presupposes productive transformation capable of moving African economies beyond dependence on raw material exports and subordinate integration into global value chains. Second, it requires technological and cognitive sovereignty based on education, research, innovation, data governance and the production of locally grounded knowledge. Third, it calls for stronger domestic financial capacities through the mobilization of savings, regional financial mechanisms, development banking and better retention of locally generated value.

This sovereignty of development must also be conceived at a regional scale. More effective regional integration in francophone West Africa appears essential for building larger markets, coordinated industrial policies, regional infrastructure, collective bargaining capacity and integrated value chains. At the institutional level, it further requires planning and regulatory capacities capable of coordinating development strategies while involving universities, research centers, businesses, local authorities, youth, women and professional organizations in the definition of transformation agendas.

Ultimately, the decisive challenge remains epistemic and political. A genuine postcolonial rupture cannot result solely from changing the vocabulary of aid or partnership. It requires a displacement of the very place from which development is conceived. As long as Africa continues to be primarily defined externally as a market, a reservoir of resources, available labor or a strategic support for foreign powers, the rupture remains incomplete. It will become effective only when African societies fully produce their own diagnoses, development narratives, categories of progress and horizons of transformation.

By comparing four historical moments of Western discourse on Africa, the article contributes to postcolonial and development studies by showing how developmentalism evolves from technical assistance to strategic co-investment, while continuously reconfiguring asymmetrical relations through new vocabularies of partnership, sovereignty and geo-economic interdependence.

From this perspective, the Nairobi proposals should be understood as an opportunity rather than a guarantee. Their emancipatory potential depends on whether co-investment becomes a lever for the accumulation of African productive, technological, institutional and cognitive capacities rather than a renewed form of asymmetric interdependence. The future of Africa's development sovereignty therefore depends less on the rhetoric of partnership itself than on the effective redistribution of economic, technological and strategic power.

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