



THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Inaugural Lecture

# RUNNING WHILE OTHERS WALK:

## KNOWLEDGE AND THE CHALLENGE OF AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT



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## Foreword

It was a great privilege for me to attend Thandika Mkandawire's inaugural lecture at LSE as the School's first Professor of African Development. Professor Mkandawire is a renowned public intellectual. His academic work on social policy, taxation, colonial legacies and many other topics is widely read and cited. Likewise, Thandika is widely known in development circles both without and across the African continent. This is not least because of his work at CODESRIA and for UNRISD.

*Running While Others Walk*, the text of Professor Mkandawire's inaugural lecture, typically does not shy away from saying that economic and social development is greatly to be welcomed in the ex-colonial world. Indeed, he argues strongly that 'Catching up has been driven by the emancipatory aspirations of developing countries themselves ... "Catch-up" goes as far back as the humiliating encounter with the West'. Being opposed to Development is not a sensible option. For one thing development comes in many forms. We shouldn't think of it as a singularity or something that needs to be capitalised. Nor is it a technology of rule that originates wholly in the West or which is always foreign to 'Africa's responses to its own historical experiences and social needs'. Bill Warren argued three decades ago that Western imperialism had blocked the expansion of capitalism in the non-western world. In his view, the collapse of imperialism would herald the growth of economic and other freedoms in the global South. Thandika Mkandawire comes close to endorsing that viewpoint here, although he is typically more troubled than Warren – let alone numerous boosters of globalisation or untrammelled economic growth – by the Faustian bargain that characterises all eras of rapid economic and social change. It's not easy to live one's life when "all that is solid melts into air", as Marx and Engels once put it. Even here, though, Mkandawire is robust in denying that Africans, particularly, are unable to see through some of the false gods and shady goods put before them, or that Africans can't deal with affluence or with the possibility of choice more generally.

Having made these and other points in the first part of his lecture – an exquisite reflection on the meanings and production of 'development' as a social category and praxis – Professor Mkandawire turns in the second half of his address to the question: 'Can Africa run at all?'. Here he takes aim at Afropessimism and African exceptionalism. Asia and Latin America can develop, the argument goes, but not Africa. Africa is different. It has special problems. Bad geography, tribalism, pervasive state failure. And so on. Mkandawire disagrees. He contends that 'Africa has been on its feet for some time and has run on several occasions'. More daringly, he suggests that as different African countries continue to catch up, they will need to invest far more in learning and higher education than did previous generations of late developers.

## Foreword continued

Africa's future lies with brains not brawn, he remarks, and if this future is to come to pass an insistent bias against the importance of higher education in Africa will have to be reversed, and with it an attendant mistrust of local elites. Mkandawire is certainly not blind to the means by which some of these elites have feathered their own nests, but he concludes his lecture by warning us against forms of anti-elite bias which then suggest that African leadership can only come from outside: from aid donors and NGOs. What's needed is a series of political battles within different African countries to ensure that the interests of different elites are made to match more squarely with those of non-elite groups. Empowering functioning and critical African university communities, Mkandawire concludes, is one part of that task.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart Corbridge', is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Stuart Corbridge  
Pro-director, LSE

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# Running while others walk: Knowledge and the Challenge of Africa's Development

**Thandika Mkandawire**, Professor of African Development,  
Department of International Development, LSE

It is a great pleasure and an honour for me to give this Inaugural Lecture as the first holder of the Chair of African Development at LSE. I am especially honoured by the presence of the Director as Chair of this lecture.

One unpleasant piece of news I received upon my appointment as Chair was that I would have to give an Inaugural Lecture. After months of trying to figure out what this entailed I learnt that the point about inaugural lectures is to give the new professors the opportunity to profess what they will be professing in the coming years. I also learnt from the Inaugural Lecture delivered by the eminent historian Richard Henry Tawney here at LSE in 1932 that one function of an Inaugural Lecture is 'to vindicate the claims of the department of knowledge represented by the lecturer against bold, bad men who would question its primacy' (Tawney 1933). I will not exploit the opportunity to pursue that traditional objective of professing what I will be professing. Instead I will follow Professor Tawney's suggestion, partly because I suspect that there are some 'bold, bad' men and women who would readily be persuaded by their current reading of the African situation that the name of the Chair – African Development – is something of an oxymoron and as bewildering a possibility in development studies as the bumblebee is in aerodynamics.

The title of the Chair I hold contains two words that, in recent years, have become contested in the world of research – 'Africa' and 'development'. The immediate problem with talking about 'Africa' is the danger of generalisation when dealing with a continent with 57 sovereign nations, seven time zones, thousands of languages and at least seven climates, with about a billion inhabitants and to my utter astonishment, 14 million not mutually consistent proverbs<sup>1</sup>. This immediately suggests that the title of the lecture will obscure the formidable complexity and diversity of the continent<sup>2</sup>. I can only justify the simplification on grounds of limitation of time. I will therefore beg your indulgence to accept that at the back of my mind I take the diversity of the continent seriously, and to accept also that Africa has a real and tangible social existence that validates it as an area of social study.

1 The information on proverbs is derived from the blurb of a special issue on Africa of *Granta*, the literary magazine

2 In the U.S. a survey found that 'mainstream Africanists across the spectrum of U.S. higher education appear to be divided with respect to what constitutes African Studies (Alpers/Roberts 2002: 13). Some thought it should include the whole continent, some thought it was about Africa South of the Sahara, while still others thought it should include the African Diaspora.

The second problem has to do with the weight of Africa in the world and the case for allocating any time to its study. From time to time African studies have been haunted by the 'spectre of irrelevance' (Martin and West 1995). For some the marginalisation of Africa in world affairs suggests the need for less attention to the continent. Indeed only some years ago *The Economist* declared that were Africa to disappear nobody would notice. The 'nobody' must surely exclude geologists, those involved in the disappearing act, the African Diaspora, the many friends of Africa and of course Western Union, the London Metal Exchange and FIFA.

However, even when we agree that Africa is not entirely a subjective construct and that it does have a palpable existence and that it does matter, we still have to address the academic question raised by the title 'African Development' which suggests that the Chair sits uneasily between, on the one hand, Area Studies, described by Benjamin Schwartz in his Presidential Address to the Asian Studies Association as 'modest, colourless and ambiguous' and, on the other hand, Development Studies whose relevance, morality, possibility, sustainability and health have all been seriously questioned in recent years.

People in the disciplines have often complained about the 'atheoretical' nature of Area Studies and have expressed fears that immersion in local minutiae can be fatal for one's intellectual standing. Students of Area Studies have often been under pressure to account for themselves to the disciplines and to prove that their work was relevant to the advancement of the disciplines. Noting that the disciplines denigrated African research and that, with the exception of anthropology, there is 'constant undervaluation of African research', a number of Africanists mounted what they called a 'counter-attack'. They published a book that sought to provide the answer to the question: 'What has been the contribution of research in Africa to the disciplines?' (Bates 1993). The 'defence for the study of Africa' varied in strength from discipline to discipline being, in my opinion, strongest for anthropology where Africa was considered the 'tap root of anthropology' and weakest with respect to economics. I believe Area Studies can serve the disciplines by, at least, setting the boundary conditions for their theories. They can also provide the link to reality that is essential to the advancement of knowledge and the vital material for giving social meaning to their theoretical exercises. Anyway, given the widespread poverty, the morally more persuasive question would have been: What are the contributions of the disciplines to its eradication?

My interest in development was ignited by a symposium in Malawi in 1962 which, as a young journalist in Malawi, I was assigned to cover. This was the first international conference organised by the new government run by the newly elected nationalists. It was funded by the Ford Foundation. Among the luminaries present was Walter Rostow, who seemed to have had a great influence on our new Secretary of Finance. Others at the conference included Nicholas Kaldor and D.K. Rao<sup>3</sup>. I didn't have the slightest clue as to how to report on the conference, and decided there and then

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3 The papers were subsequently published in a volume edited by E.F. Jackson (1965).



that if I should pursue my studies in journalism, then economics would definitely be my minor. As things turned out my career as a journalist was short-lived, although it did cost me 30 years of exile. During the conference I also learnt that the clamour for eradicating the 'unholy trinity of poverty, ignorance and disease' went beyond political sloganeering and that there were serious minds seeking to explore the problems of development and underdevelopment. I also learnt that history matters, but also that there were sharp differences over the lessons of history.



*Thandika  
Mkandawire as a  
young journalist  
in Malawi*

Over the years I learnt that not so many people were involved in research on developing countries as the symposium had impressed me was the case. In medical research, there is something known as the 90/10 problem – indicating that 90 per cent of medical research today is devoted to diseases that affect only 10 per cent of the population of the world. I suspect this highly skewed allocation of resources is true of the social sciences. While we can expect that much of the weight of studying developing countries will be borne by researchers in developing countries, it is important to persuade the finest minds in the world, regardless of their discipline or geographical location, to devote some time to thinking about the needs of much of mankind.

## Development and catching up

Let me now turn to the second aspect of the title of the Chair 'Development'. This too is not as unambiguous a term as it might seem, nor is it one over which there is general consensus in terms of its meaning, desirability and even its universal replicability. It too suffers from problems of definition and its problematic relationship with the disciplines. Thomas (Thomas 2000) has usefully identified three senses of looking at development: (i) as a vision, description or measure of the state of being of a desirable

society; (ii) as an historical process of social change in which societies are transformed over long periods; (iii) as consisting of deliberate efforts aimed at improvement on the part of various agencies, including governments, all kinds of organisations and social movements. These are obviously related. Visions that are totally unrealistic are likely to lead to quixotic deployment of efforts, while efforts without vision are likely to lead to confusion and waste. A misunderstanding of the spontaneous processes of the market or a wrong 'stylisation' of how the system actually works are likely to lead to wrong policies, a lesson Africans have learnt during the last two decades<sup>4</sup>. The mental map that policy-makers have of the economy and society has huge implications as to how they frame questions and what they consider are realistic aspirations and permissible solutions.<sup>5</sup>

### **Whose idea was it anyway?**

With the crises of the 1980s and 1990s in many developing countries the very notion of development and its study became suspect. People whose chosen vocation in life was to expound and reflect on problems of development, and devise ways of rescuing mankind from the jaws of poverty, were everywhere throwing up their hands in the air. Tomes were written on 'The Myth of Development', on 'Development in Crisis', on the 'Rise and Fall of Development', on 'post-Development'. For those with a Hegelian bent, history had come to an end and so had the need for visions. Now since Hegel had declared Africa is 'no historical part of the World' (Hegel 2007)<sup>6</sup>, there was no need to consult them before the peremptory declaration of its end.

Furthermore the question was raised about the very idea of development as people asked: 'Whose idea was it anyway'? What was driving a society to seek to catch up? Was it the seductive sirens of modernity that have mesmerised the lagging countries so much so that they are drawn into the rat race without fully understanding the consequences? Was it the compulsions of Western imperialism and its homogenising thrust? Was it the blind compulsions of the market now rechristened as 'globalisation'? Was it the Promethean compulsions of technology forcing all nations to converge towards some state that environmentalists suggest is unlikely to be sustainable? Or was it simply the fact that emulation is a consequence of all human exchange?

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4 I have discussed the problem of wrong 'stylisation' of African economies in (Mkandawire 1996).

5 Blyth makes the useful argument that economic ideas can be conceptualised in three ways – as institutional blueprints during periods of uncertainty, as weapons in distributional struggles, and as 'cognitive locks.' (Blyth 2001:)

6 Hegel's full statement reads: 'At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it-that is in its northern part-belong to the Asiatic or European World. Carthage displayed there an important transitional phase of civilization; but, as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History.' (Hegel 2007: 99.)

For those of neoliberal persuasion development was an ineluctable consequence and immanent feature of the workings of the market, so governments did not have to waste their time doing something about it. And if they did they were unlikely to do better than the market. Markets were efficient and efficiency would produce growth. The point was reinforced by a tendentious reading of the East Asian experience as market driven. Development as intentionality and the interventionism it spawned were seen as sinister ploys by groups of individuals seeking to capture public policy for individual gain. In addition Africans were told that even if the market failure were prevalent in all economies, the atypically worse failure of their governments left them with little option than to live with the market failures. And so in one fell swoop a large part of the prescriptive corpus of development studies was rendered irrelevant for Africa<sup>7</sup>.

In some views 'development' is seen as Eurocentric and as a bastard child of the enlightenment, in whose names heinous crimes slavery, wars of aggression, genocide, Gulags have been committed. For some the linear understanding of development gives a teleological direction to history. One should immediately point out here that to argue that history has no specific destination towards which humanity is going is not the same thing as to argue that a people cannot, at any given time, choose to go somewhere while fully cognizant that their choices will be circumscribed by the prevailing circumstances. Development or 'Catching up' is scathingly criticised as a repressive meta-narrative that privileges certain forms of knowledge while denigrating local ones<sup>8</sup>. Its advocacy in the developing countries is thus seen as acceding to notions of Western superiority etc.<sup>9</sup> For Escobar development has been a disaster: 'instead of the kingdom of abundance promised by theorists and politicians in the 1950s, the discourse and strategy of development produced its opposite: massive underdevelopment and impoverishment, untold exploitation and oppression. The debt crisis, the Sahelian famine, increasing poverty, malnutrition, and violence are only the most pathetic signs of the failure of forty years of development' (Escobar 1995: 4). Wolfgang Sachs has stated this proposition most forcefully. 'The idea of development lies as a ruin in the intellectual landscape and the time is ripe to write its obituary.' (Sachs 1992)

And so the combination of the abandonment of responsibility by African political class; the short-termism nostrums of 'Getting Prices Right', the focus on the all-too-frequent human disasters, and the solipsistic debates about modernity and post-modernity conspired to relegate 'development' to the dustbin of failed experiments in social engineering.

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7 This was part of the extensive literature that ruled out the possibility of 'developmental states' in Africa that I have discussed elsewhere (Mkandawire 2001). It also led to an institutional reform agenda that emphasised the restraining rather than the developmental or transformative roles of institutions (Mkandawire 2009).

8 This argument is forcefully made by Marglin and associates in (Marglin and Marglin 1990).

9 There is a vast literature making this case. It is usually associated with the post-colonial, post-modernist school of thought. (Abrahamsen 2003; Escobar 1995; Hopenhayn 2002; Munck and O'Hearn 1999; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997; Tucker 1999)

I do not believe that the quest for economic development is dead. Nor do I believe that the most dramatic efforts of catch-up by developing countries have been at the behest of the 'mission civilatrice' of the western powers. If anything at every turn the dominant powers have sought to disrupt the process by 'pulling up the ladder' (Chang 2002) or, in the worst cases, bombing countries 'back to the stone age'. 'Catching up' has been driven by the emancipatory aspirations of developing countries themselves and their understanding of the Western advantage that has sustained its dominance. 'Catch-up' goes as far back as the humiliating encounter with the West. It must surely be the case that these first victims of Jared Diamond's 'Germes, and Steel and Guns' must have understood that technology played a significant role in their subsequent defeat and subjugation. The point was memorably stated by Hilaire Belloc, the British essayist and historian, when he wrote:

*Whatever happens, we have got  
The Maxim gun, and they have not.*

I understand this became a Victorian nursery rhyme. Ironically the first people to suffer defeat by British colonial troops using the Maxim Gun were the Ndebele people, my ancestors from my mother's side. They too had their nursery rhymes about the encounter. And so as in many other parts of the world the earliest nationalist response to foreign domination included among other things something about catching up, if only in the manufacture of weapons of war. The 'Founding Fathers' of Pan-Africanism, such as William Blyden, were keenly aware of the imperatives of 'modernisation' if Africa was to escape the domination and humiliation it had suffered at the hands of the West and attain 'self-reliance and independence'<sup>10</sup>.

Almost from its very inception the post-World War II development discourse has had two strands: the Truman version, for which development involved both geopolitical considerations and humanitarianism, and the 'Bandung Conference' version that saw development in terms of 'catching up', emancipation and 'the right to development'<sup>11</sup>. The most astute critics of developmentalism (Escobar 1995,1990; Sachs 1992) focus their attention on the Truman version of developmentalism so that much of the criticism of developmental efforts and the so-called impasse of development was about the idea that the North was entrusted with the task of developing the South in its image<sup>12</sup>.

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10 William Byden cited in (Mudimbe 1988).

11 This understanding is eloquently captured by Richard Wright in his *The Color Curtain*, which incidentally has a preface by Gunnar Myrdal:

'The despised, the insulted, the hurt, and the dispossessed – in short, the underdogs of the human race were meeting. Here were class and race and religious consciousness on a global scale ... And what had these nations in common? Nothing, it seems to me, but what their past relationship to the Western world had made them feel. This meeting of the rejected was in itself a kind of judgement upon the Western world.' (Cited in Muekalia 2004: 8)

12 One of the few exceptions in this respect is Gilbert Rist who extensively discusses the conference and its subsequent implications on the international development agenda (Rist 2008).

These critics pay much less attention to the other source of developmentalism as an emancipatory project<sup>13</sup>. Consequently the issues they deal with revolve around the moral premises of helping 'distant strangers' (Corbridge 1994), the problems of the imposition of western narratives and practices, problems of 'elite capture', etc. The idea of 'catch-up' spawned entirely different concerns and criticism around concerns over poor elite capabilities and weak moral fibre, on lack of accountability and on their greed and growing inequalities, etc. Some of this criticism has been redeployed in the post-structuralist criticism of development, but one ought to bear in mind that the criticism was based on entirely different grounds of radical nationalism.

Beyond the more bellicose reasons for seeking to catch up, I believe that the propensity and possibility of emulation are the consequence of our common humanity and mutual intelligibility. The point I am making is that development and the 'catch up' aspirations driving it are not foreign impositions but part of Africa's responses to its own historical experiences and social needs. The development project has much deeper historical roots and social support than is often recognised<sup>14</sup>.

### **The Faustian Bargain**

Having said all this, one must fully recognise the problems that some of the critics of development policies and processes have identified. There are many 'social questions' that processes of rapid change have inevitably raised. Such processes are highly disruptive both in terms of social order and social vision.

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13 The historian Frederick Cooper observes: 'One cannot appreciate the power of the development idea without realising that the possibility that modern life and improved living standards could be open to all, regardless of race or history of colonial subjugation, was in the 1950s a liberating possibility, eagerly seized by many people in the colonies' (Cooper and Packard 1996:9).

14 The developmentalist impulses were not only confined to politicians and social scientists. Some of the most eloquent statements in defence of the quest for material developments were made by African writers who railed against cultural nationalism (such as Negritude) that they thought was backward looking. In an essay entitled 'Negritude is Crying Over Spilt Milk' (Taban Lo Liyong cited in Mnthali 1988: 15) Taban Lo Liyong stated:

'False starts – and quite a few of them – have been made in Africa. We may be failing in doing certain things, but most of us know the direction we are going – straight into the twenty-first century. And to arrive there we are not going the way our grand parents would have gone – on foot and by canoe. We shall fly, we shall go by missiles, we shall go with the white man, we shall go with the yellow man. And we shall go by all means.'

Criticising 'cultural nationalism' for its failure to come to grips with technological 'catching up', Abiola Irele, in a paper provocatively entitled 'In Praise of Alienation', quotes a Yoruba saying: 'Adaniloru k'oni logbon' ('One who causes you injury also teaches you wisdom') and urges Africans to embrace development even if it entails 'alienation'.

One major criticism of development is that somehow it became an end in itself. This may have become true over the years but among the pioneers of development the general idea was to reduce poverty. For some, like Arthur Lewis, development meant the widening of the 'range of human choices' (Lewis 1955), a view that has been given greater prominence and consistent expression by Amartya Sen. The dominant view was that all countries would have to pass through a vale of tears before they developed. More specifically, it was argued that the passage to economic development would entail greater inequality and sacrifices in terms of consumption and human rights. Amartya Sen has given this path of development the acronym BLAST to connote its Churchillian appeals to 'Blood Sweat and Tears'. This view was given considerable support by studies that suggested a high correlation between levels of income and attainment of growth, by econometric analyses that suggested that there were trade-offs between democracy and growth, or by the Kuznets hypothesis that in the process of development inequality would become worse before it got better. In light of these theories many African governments chose to suppress freedom in the name of development, leading the Burkina Faso Historian, Joseph Ki Zerbo, to sarcastically remark at the fiftieth anniversary conference of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA): 'Silence: Development in Progress!'. Much silence was imposed but all in vain.

In more recent years closer scrutiny has raised doubts about these 'Iron Laws'. We also know now that many things that were considered essential to development or as its inevitable consequences were simply not so. Many of the 'iron laws' and the trade-off they insisted upon have turned out to be contingent on a number of things including deliberate choices. Through the works of people like Amartya Sen (1999: 1933) we know that the moral premises of the means of development need not diverge from those informing the ends. Many of the ends – better education, better health and greater freedom – are also powerful transformative instruments for development. In the case of Africa it has simply been that two of the best performing economies – Botswana and Mauritius – were democratic while authoritarian rule has performed poorly.

I am also aware that such words as civilisation, colonisation, development, adjustment and globalisation have often come along with marching orders. It is also true that some have used Africa's aspirations as a ruse to sell the continent false gods, shady goods and crazy ideas. And some African leaders have used the desire for material progress to chain their own people to schemes that have led to meaningless 'sacrifices'. So a word of caution about the Faustian bargain involved in development is warranted. However, there is always the danger of paternalism in some of the observations that material progress and the affluence it has spawned will ineluctably lead to doom. The usual suggestion is that commitment to development is a reflection of a naive understanding of what it entails, or of ignorance of the experience of the West or simply evidence of mental subjugation to a Western vision. This view that Africans might be seeking to embark on something they know little about or that might bring them much grief has a long genealogy. Malinowski, in his introduction to Jomo Kenyatta's thesis written here at LSE, remarked on the dilemma of the African who had 'suffered the injury of higher education' and noted that 'an African who looks at things from the tribal point of view and at the same time from that of Western civilization experiences the tragedy



of the modern world in an especially acute manner'. Sometimes the paternalism is confined to the non-elites with the suggestion that it is only the 'Westernised' and corrupted elite that want development while the poor do not want it. This is often stated as a matter of fact, needing no further elaboration (Vries 2007). In much of all this there is not the slightest hint that these may be deliberate acts of emulation and learning to achieve certain desirable goals, and that there is considerable social and intellectual awareness of the choices being made<sup>15</sup>

## Running while others walk

Now, having established, in an admittedly circuitous way, the validity of the Chair of 'African Development', let me turn to the topic of the lecture. The title of the lecture comes from Julius Nyerere's statement that 'We must run while others walk'. This sense of lagging behind and the need for having to do everything to 'catch up' was shared by every nationalist in one form or another. Nkrumah's autobiography opens with the words from the poet Tennyson:

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15 By way of digression, at one of the General Assembly meetings of CODESRIA in the mid-1980s there was a lively debate on what would be the priority research areas. Hitherto to every research theme was attached the word development. 'Education and development', 'Mining and development', 'population and development', 'women and development' and so on and so forth. The issue was whether we should drop 'development' altogether. After some heated debate, 'development' was dropped not because 'development' had ceased to matter for Africa but because it was felt there were many other issues that the 'developmentalist' thrust of the research agenda tended to obscure. 'Development' is an important part of the African saga but it is far from being the only one.

*So many worlds, so much to do  
So little done, such things to be*

In other parts of the world and in an earlier time Nehru has stated the same point but with an important caveat about repeating the errors of the past.

*'We are trying to catch up today with the industrial revolution which came to the Western countries long years ago and made great changes in the course of the century or more.... We would be wise not to repeat the errors committed in its earlier stages, we would be wise to profit by them. We talk in terms of industrialisation. It is obvious to me that we have to industrialise India, and as rapidly as possible.'*  
(Cited in Jolly, et al. 2009: 59)

Others have gone down the same path, and some of what Hirschman called 'late, late-comers' (Hirschman 1968) are making progress in this respect. Indeed it has been argued that *the differentia specifica* of late industrialisation is precisely the purposefulness of the process.<sup>16</sup> I must at the outset declare that I share the sentiments and the sense of urgency behind them on unabashedly prosaic arguments that development, if properly defined, will reduce human material suffering, increase people's capabilities and widen their choices. Africa has not done well during the last two and half decades in virtually all social indicators. Indeed one of the great scandals of the last three decades has been the stagnation of one of the poorest part of the world economy<sup>17</sup>. Indeed in some writing Africa is synonymous with Franz Fanon's 'Wretched of the earth'. Africans are the dominant denizens of the world populated by the 'Bottom Billion' and are apparently the sole inhabitants of the Third World who have 'missed the boat' (Collier 2007) as others have moved on to become 'Emerging Economies'. All this may not be exactly true but it is not much of a consolation to know that Africans are not alone. So the situation is indeed critical and urgent.

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16 Alejandro Portes states this point thus:

'Early industrial development in northern Europe and the United States differed from late or contemporary development, for the former lacked the definitive teleological component of the latter. Ever since the international division between technologically advanced powerful nations and technologically backward poor ones became fact, rapid development has generally been the result of consciously guided process. The presence of development-oriented ruling groups, their effective control of the state, and their deliberate attempts to transform the social structure have been necessary, albeit not sufficient, conditions for national development (Apter 1971). Governments under the control of such groups have aimed at reversing those 'natural' processes of the international economy between their countries and developed ones' (p. 60, Alejandro Portes: *On the Sociology of National Development: Theories and Issues*. Author(s): Alejandro Portes Source: *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (Jul., 1976), pp. 55-85).

17 The Blair Commission described African poverty and stagnation as 'the greatest tragedy of our time'. (Commission for Africa 2005: 12)



Adding to the sense of urgency are the dire consequences of climate change predicted for Africa. Africa will suffer most from climate change not only because its climate will be the worst affected but because its underdevelopment will leave no room for coping. The avoidance of virtually every predicted disaster will require high levels of technological and social capability on behalf of the continent. The continent needs to embark on massive programmes of enhancing human capabilities, mobilising its individual and collective wisdom, improving its infrastructure and managing its water and energy resources. All this requires significant economic development.

The point about development is not simply to do with market failure but with intentionality. Although it is often tempting to give the 'market' some anthropomorphic characteristics such as edginess, anger, disappointment etc, the market, while producing social outcomes, has no social intentions which it somehow may have not reached because of 'market failure'. And once this dimension is understood then there is no alternative to purposeful, intelligent action. Markets, like other institutions, can be more or less harnessed for this purpose but they cannot set the goals and pace of the process. If societies wish to develop and if the process of development can be deliberately accelerated, then we need to better understand how existing economies actually function and devise ways of moving faster. These will involve some planning and strategising. No institution of the size of even the smallest African government, private or public, deploys the vast resources in its hands without a plan. Even the BWIs eventually found out that the carrying out of their modest programmes of poverty reduction required some kind of plan euphemistically described as 'Compressive Policy Framework' or 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers', the expressions 'framework' and 'Papers' being ideologically more palatable to the principals of the international institutions than 'Plans'.<sup>18</sup> All this, of course, brings us back to development studies and does away with Amartya Sen's 'Man without a Plan'.

## Can Africa Run?

Even after one has resolved the many philosophical questions about the meaning of development and the questions of agency, and established the urgency of rapid economic development one is still left with the question: Can Africa run at all? This is not an idle question. For some the idea of Africa walking, let alone running, is premature or unrealistic. For some Africa is a 'hobbled giant', or 'a continent in chains', 'a doomed continent', the 'Hopeless Continent' (Economist 2000) and therefore unlikely to run<sup>19</sup>. All this created the 'Except Africa' (Roe 1995:1065) caveat or the cavalier observation that something works 'including in Africa'. 'This works everywhere except Africa' is the staple not only of the press but of a considerable amount of some recent academic writing on Africa. In the more quantitative development studies

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18 For an informative account of the excision of such works as 'plan', 'strategy' from an official World Bank document discussing the 'East Asian Miracle' see (Wade 1996).

19 I have discussed the 'impossibility' arguments in a paper on the possibility of developmental states in Africa. See (Mkandawire 2001).

there appeared something that Englebert referred to as 'The mystery of the African dummy' (Englebert 2000). The mystery first appeared in Barro's regression analysis of determinants of growth which led to the conclusion 'there appear to be adverse effects on growth from being in Sub-Saharan Africa' (Barro 1991: 436). Subsequently the 'African Dummy' appeared to explain the source of 'Africa's growth tragedy' in all kinds of areas, and always had a negative coefficient even after taking into account ethno-linguistic diversity (Levine and Renelt 1992), level of investments, government consumption, school enrolments and political instability, red tape and the quality of the judiciary (Mauro 1995), prior 'social arrangements' (Temple and Johnson 1998), and geography (Sachs and Andrew 1997). Factors accounting for the sign of the dummy have included unfortunate history, levels of state legitimacy, Africa-distance from the equator, number of land-locked countries, number of borders, and ethnic diversity.

Both the qualitative accounts that all too frequently received sustenance from the harrowing images of Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Congo, Liberia and Sudan (to name only the usual suspects), and the quantitative evidence tended to reinforce the apocalyptic premonitions of the 'Coming Anarchy' and to favour the study of social pathology, and to highlight accounts of a landscape of unrelenting misery and misgovernment. This can breed despair and even disdain for the continent, and produced what Michael Chege (Chege 1997) refers to as the 'paradigms of doom'. It also produced radical shifts in mood by individuals. People who have switched from African studies to something else have apparently done so not as a result of their intellectual progression or curiosity but largely as a consequence of frustration with Africa's lack of progress. Gavin Kitching, one of the exciting Africanists in the 1980s was prompted to write, ten years after he had left African studies, *Why I Gave Up African Studies*. Kitching felt depressed 'both by what was happening to African people and by my inability even to explain it adequately, let alone do anything about it' (Kitching 2000). The piece attracted considerable attention in Africanist circles including the *Chronicle For Higher Education*. The author of the *Chronicle* article suggested that 'A spectre is haunting African studies – the spectre of Gavin Kitching' (Postel 2003). Adebayo Olukoshi, then Executive Secretary reacted angrily, suggesting that this might be good riddance<sup>20</sup>. Mamadou Diouf, a Senegalese historian, while acknowledging that Gavin Kitching was 'onto something very, very important,' felt that the debate the article sparked was wide of the mark in certain key respects:

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**20 Olukoshi wrote:**

'Such infantile outbursts by people immersed in an unreconstructed version of the White Man's burden and propelled by a misplaced sense of self importance hardly deserve to be taken seriously for the purposes of the task at hand. Indeed, African Studies may turn out to be well served by the decision of the likes of Kitching to quit the field and it may well surprise them that their departure has not been noticed by many.' (Olukoshi 2007:)

*'Kitching is saying, 'I gave up because we were not able to fix it, or to provide a sound intellectual framework.' But I don't know why Kitching thinks people are waiting for him to fix it. Why does he think that as a specialist on Africa he has to be part of the fixing process?'*

*(Cited in Postel 2003).*

As happens so often this bad news about Africa was unknown to Africans, with one African scholar remarking that he hadn't noticed that Gavin Kitching had actually left African studies.

Barrington Moore has suggested that such focus on social pathology can lead a 'sour-faced earnestness, not significant truth'. I believe that in the African case it accounts for the adversarial and prescriptive<sup>21</sup> stance taken by researchers towards local elites and the institutions they control. One way of avoiding such debilitating bouts of existential angst would be to work closely with African scholars who somehow seem immune to 'Afropessimism'.

An often cited script from West African Mamie Wagons reads: 'No Condition Is Permanent'. Development study would have been prepared for conjuncture had it borne this in mind. Instead the study of Africa was quite unprepared for crisis and conjuncture<sup>22</sup>. And so when two decades were lost these decades were then taken as the defining moments of African culture, politics, history and geography. It was as if suddenly the world had discovered that all along Africa had concealed its debilitating cultures of neopatrimonialism, lied about its ethnic diversity and pretended to have controlled its swarms of mosquitoes and other deadly beasts including 'Big Men' that were said to account for Africa's underdevelopment. Africa has been on its feet for quite some time and has run on several occasions. In their first decade of independence African countries enjoyed quite respectable rates of growth, at least when compared with the anaemic rates of growth of the following decades. Of the 20 fastest growing economies nine were African and only three of them were mineral rich countries. For the period between 1960 and 1975 African economies grew at the rate of 5.7 per cent. Many of the initiatives by international organisations on 'Meeting Basic Needs' or 'Redistribution with Growth' took this rate of growth for granted but sought to improve the quality of this growth. Hausmann and Rodrik

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21 Part of the problem with scholarship on Africa is its exceedingly prescriptive inclination. There is the personal side or simply a reflection of laying one's moral cards on the table. Goran Hyden in his Presidential Speech to the ASA suggested a number of explanations: 'One is the moral imperative that so many of us feel to do something for Africa' (Hyden 1996). In addition, there is the fact that considerable amounts of research on Africa have always been financed by the aid establishment of the time and that development studies to which it is closely allied are by their very nature a normative or policy science. What all this has done is to simply overwhelm efforts at trying to reconcile what is with what ought to be.

22 Much of the literature on conjuncture in Africa revolved around the effects of commodity prices on economic stability. It did not concern itself with crises endogenous to the economic model itself.

identify 'growth' episodes as eight-year periods during which economies grew about 3.5 per cent. To the apparent surprise of the authors such episodes were common among African countries. The problem in Africa is not the impossibility of attaining nontrivial growth rates over extended times but the stop-go nature of the process and adjustment policies to manage these cyclical trends.

In any case, recent events in Africa suggest that the 'prophets of doom' will be proven wrong. Here I am comforted by Albert Hirschman's astute observation: 'As soon as a social phenomenon has been fully explained by a variety of converging approaches and is therefore understood in its majestic inevitability and perhaps even permanence, it vanishes' (Hirschman 1981: 135).

## Importance of knowledge and learning

The idea of 'Running while others walk' has huge implications for knowledge acquisition and deployment. For the late-comer today there are many advantages. Lessons learnt *ex post* by the pioneers can be absorbed *ex ante* to avoid the mistakes of the past. The catch-up mode of proceeding is fraught with all kinds of risks. Great leaps forward have been made at great human cost, and the old adage 'look before you leap' assumes even greater force in social matters. 'Catching up' requires that countries know themselves and their own history that has set the 'initial conditions' for any future progress. They need a deep understanding of their culture not only for self-reaffirmation but in order to capture the strong points of their culture and institutions that will see their societies through rapid social change.

The idea of 'catching up' entails learning not only about ideas from abroad but also about one's capacities and weaknesses. The real issue about 'catching up' is not that of simply taking on every wretched instrument used by their pioneers to get what they have – wars, slave labour, child labour, colonialism, Gulags, concentration camps – but to finding more efficacious and morally acceptable ways of improving the life chances of millions of poor people. As Alexander Gerschenkron (1962) insisted 'catch-up' is anything but linear. The past of the forerunners does not intellectually draw the path that the followers must slavishly and teleologically follow. Late-comers do not have to 'perform like wind-up toys and to lumber through the various stages of development single-mindedly' (Hirschman 1981: 24). There would be no point in investing so much in the study of history if it involved simply regurgitating scripts that countries must follow. The 'Late, late, late' comers will need to study the paths traversed by others in order to determine the optimal sequencing in their conditions and to learn how to avoid errors of the past. The experience to look at is not only that of the front-runners but of virtually every development in every part of the world.

In the manner of Gerschenkron, I dare to argue that in order to catch up 'late, late late' comers will need to attain levels of education and learning that are far higher than those attained by the pioneers at similar levels of economic development. I would further argue that while earlier forms of 'primitive accumulation' relied on brawn, the new ones will rely more on brains. Increases in productivity will drive the catching

up processes much more than the mobilisation of financial and human resources<sup>23</sup>. One explanation for the brutality of the development process was that nations were groping in the dark. And finally I would also argue that this broader development agenda will call for much broader systems of education and knowledge than is suggested in the simple 'human capital' models or the 'education for all' campaigns that focus only on primary school education.

## Barriers to Knowledge Acquisition

Perhaps one of the surprises of developing thinking at the end of the Millennium was the recognition once again of knowledge as an important instrument in economic development and catch-up and as an important component of development<sup>24</sup>. In simple economic models knowledge has been treated as 'exogenous' and readily available on 'shelves' as a public good. In more recent years the acquisition of knowledge has been treated as something nations must invest in. While this is facilitated by the public nature of knowledge<sup>25</sup> it is equally true that nations will have to deliberately make themselves a fertile ground for learning and innovation. However, many factors have militated against the translation of this acknowledgement of knowledge into effective aspects of the development process in Africa.

### Anti Education Bias

The leveraging of existing and new knowledge for economic development demands the presence of local teaching, research and innovation capacities. Implicit in any model of economic development is an educational policy to reproduce the intelligentsia who are, in a Gramscian sense, organic to the development coalitions driving the process and a 'training regime'<sup>26</sup> to produce the requisite skills. For development as for many other areas the biblical injunction 'Know Thyself' applies. The wisdom of that injunction is now recognised by economists as they increasingly begin to see development as 'self-discovery', in the words of Houseman and Rodrik. It is also suggested by the furtive search by aid donors for African ownership of policy.

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23 This point is articulated by Abramovitz as follows:

'Those who are behind, however, have the potential to make a larger leap. New capital can embody the frontier of knowledge, but the capital it replaces was technologically superannuated. So the larger the technological and, therefore, the productivity gap between leader and follower, the stronger the follower's potential for growth in productivity; and, other things being equal, the faster one expects the follower's growth rate to be. Followers tend to catch up faster if they are initially more backward.' [Abramovitz, 1986 #1570: 386-7]

24 The World Bank published a special report on higher education which can be read as the final rejection of its 'rate of return' approach.

25 It is also the case that knowledge, through the introduction of intellectual property rights has had its public good attenuated and the late-comers may face serious barriers in acquiring knowledge as the pioneers 'pull up the ladder', to borrow a phrase from Ha Joon Chang.

26 On training regimes see (Thelen, 2001 #3153; Buechtemann, 1998 #3908).

In the immediate post-independence period no institution symbolised the early development and nation-building vision of the time as poignantly as the university. One has only to stroll along the now overgrown lawns and around the dilapidated campuses of African universities to understand the pride and hopes that were invested in these new institutions and the terrible losses that have been inflicted upon learning during the last two decades or so. The honeymoon between African states and universities did not last long.<sup>27</sup> There were two major sources of conflict between the universities and their governments. The first was over the reconciliation of one-party rule and academic freedom. African soil has been unusually hostile to home-grown ideas. Indeed, one thing that has made Africa so opaque has been the severe restrictions that have been imposed on the research communities in Africa both in terms of material infrastructure and academic freedom<sup>28</sup>. African scholarship has had to deal with the incontinent insistence on conformity and sycophancy by authoritarian rulers. The situation is captured by Kiyerbo when he argues that it was as if one had hung on the entrance to Africa the sign 'Silence, Development In Progress'. The second source of conflict was over the 'relevance' of the research produced in African universities. African governments tended to view universities as intended for the production of 'manpower' necessary to indigenise the civil service. And if they thought about research at all they wanted research that was relevant to 'development and nation building'. By the end of the 1980s, much of the civil service had been indigenised and the initial argument for university education was severely compromised by this achievement. However, with all these conflicts in mind, African governments still believed that universities mattered for the developmental projects even if only to produce the necessary 'Human Capital'.

The coup de grace against higher education was made by the World Bank in 1986 when it announced that the social returns for higher education were too low compared to those of pre-primary education. This was followed by advice and conditionalities to reduce state expenditures on higher education. Many donors followed the advice. And indeed in one case the local government embraced it to close down the only institution of higher education the country had. The combination of domestic repression and financial strangulation did great harm to African universities and education as a whole.

### **The Anti-Elitist Bias**

Closely related to the anti-education bias is the anti-elitist bias in recent development thinking. One remarkable feature of current debates on development is the visceral disdain and contempt for local elites that is shared across the whole ideological spectrum. Within current intellectual circles, regardless of whether you are Gaullist or Thatcherite in your respective countries the default position to hold vis-à-vis local

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27 I have elsewhere recounted the history of the relationship between African intellectuals and nationalists [Mkandawire, 2005 #12372].

28 On problems of academic freedom and the poor relationship between African intellectuals and national governments see (Ake 1993; Beckman, et al. 2006; Mkandawire 2005).

elites is some version of populism<sup>29</sup>. The anti-elitism ranges from an anti-urban bias to 'union bashing'. The new anti-elitism was often informed by extremely crude forms of materialism. One didn't have to carry out detailed studies on how these elites were formed, differentiated or organised. One could read of their existence and effects from a template about rent-seeking or clientelism that permitted all kinds of non sequiturs.

One central question in development is what Cowen and Shento refer to as 'trusteeship'. Who is entrusted with identifying what countries should 'catch up' to, and using what means? Who is to determine the pace of catch-up, how is the burden to be shared generationally and intergenerationally and what is the social basis of the entire project? These are weighty and crucial questions that have exercised the minds of many. In colonial times the answer was quite clear. Development is essentially an elitist project – not in the sense that it deliberately seeks inequality and the protection of the elite's interests, but rather in the sense that it presupposes the pre-eminence of the elites in both its elaboration and implementation. By its very definition, 'catch-up' implies knowledge about development. The colonial powers claimed that their pursuit of the '*mission civilatrice*' would modernise or develop the colonies. Nationalists challenged the colonialists on two grounds: colonialists had not developed their colonies and they really had no mandate to do so. Only a sovereign people could take that decision.

In the early days of the post-colonial period it was generally accepted that local elites would be entrusted with the task of elaborating the development paths for their respective countries. There was recognition of the enormity of the task faced by new leaders, but there was often the assumption that the new African elite would be up to the task. With the advent of the modernisation school, African elites enjoyed a brief period of positive accolades as agents of change who, with their charisma, would win over the adherence of their less enlightened fellow citizens to the development project<sup>30</sup>. There was some discussion as to how these elites would assume the reins of power. However, the real issue was what types of elites? In the radical nationalist circles, the choice was between a 'national' and 'comprador' bourgeoisie. Among the modernisation theorist school, the ideal types were national or class-based movements. There was generally a disdain or fear of mass movements driven by

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29 The Kenyan writer Wainaina has beautifully captured this in his satirical essay on how to write about Africa:

'The Modern African is a fat man who steals and works in the visa office, refusing to give work permits to qualified Westerners who really care about Africa. He is an enemy of development, always using his government job to make it difficult for pragmatic and good-hearted expats to set up NGOs or Legal Conservation Areas. Or he is an Oxford-educated intellectual turned serial-killing politician in a Savile Row suit. He is a cannibal who likes Cristal champagne, and his mother is a rich witch-doctor who really runs the country.' (Wainaina 2005)

30 Some of this faith in the new leaders bordered on the sycophantic and naïve adulation of local potentates. African leaders had the penchant of gathering around them foreigners that constituted the organic intellectuals to their idiosyncratic projects.

ethnic identities or religious particularism as these were. On the radical front the progressive agenda of nationalist movements and their challenges to the imperial order inspired a whole generation of young scholars to seek ways of being part of that exciting historical movement.

There were of course dissenting voices to this positive image of local elites. Fanon's characterisation of this bourgeoisie that had entered decadence and senility without ever experiencing the dynamic of a bourgeoisie was the most memorable. Marxists described this ruling class at best as a 'petty bourgeoisie' unlikely to perform the task of development. Radical nationalists characterised the ruling elite as 'dependent' and so afflicted by a 'colonial mentality' that they were unlikely to do much good. By the end of the 1970s the mood had begun to change. With the crisis of the 1980s local elites became the subject of derision as the state structures they dominated failed miserably. Many adherents of the modernisation theories began to lose faith in local elites on whom the entire project of modernisation rested<sup>31</sup>. For some the African leaders were impostors dressed up in Western garb but tragically primitive. The failure of the African elite to rally around a common project and their failure to resolve many collective problems they confronted undermined their legitimacy in the eyes of their own people. Not surprisingly within Africa itself this led to debates on governance and accountability long before this became a donor concern. The ascendant rational choice characterised local elites as 'rent seekers' and dismissed their developmental efforts and institutions as ruses for extracting rents from society.

The contempt for the local elite did not spare the academic community. The condescending running comments by visiting scholars on African scholarship and the self-serving devaluation of local expertise by visiting consultants became quite common. NGOs also joined the university bashing. They argued that focussing on higher education was privileging certain forms of knowledge while ignoring other sites for the production of knowledge. Instead they advocated 'community based' or more 'participating' processes in which 'grassroots' were the agents of their own emancipation. NGOs were said to possess considerable knowledge about strategies for by-passing, weakening, co-opting or coping with elites and the responses of those elites to such strategies' (Hulme 1994: 254)<sup>32</sup>. Many of the lacunae in knowledge in the developing countries could be imparted through workshops and networking.

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31 Writing on the loss of élan of the modernisation school, Gabriel Almond, a major figure in the 'Modernisation School', wrote:

'Over time as the new and developing countries and developing nations encountered difficulties and turned largely to authoritarianism and military regimes, the optimism and hopefulness faded, and along with it interest productivity and creativity abated'.

32 Strange as it may seem the purveyors of these ideas had themselves sought these insights from development courses in the developed countries. They had to go university to acquire the techniques for ensuring participation by the poor in the developing countries.



From here it is not far from asserting that the international NGOs will take the lead in the 'alternative development' process<sup>33</sup>.

### Lowered Vision

One effect of adjustment was to lower the visions of Africans, first by confining adjustment to stabilisation along a low growth path and second by insisting that the low growth rate was a 'success'. India's poor economic performance during the first three decades of independence earned it the sobriquet of the 'Hindu Rate of Growth'. There is the danger that growth rates only slightly higher than population growth become 'tropical rates of growth'. We see this as even the most ephemeral sign of 'recovery' is hailed as 'Africa on the move'.

With the vision of change thwarted by the many false steps towards industrialisation and by the disastrous impositions of nostrums from elsewhere there did not seem to be much need for education. Neither the focus on stabilisation and debt repayment nor the proposed development path were desperately in need of skills, based as they were on abandoning attempts at industrialisation and returning to the colonial '*mise en valeur*' extractive activities. There was no industrial policy, no policy on infrastructural development, no need for institutions other than the market and therefore no need for engineers, administrators, lawyers, social scientists etc. Key policies could be managed remotely from Washington, London or Paris with the help of a few economists in the Ministry of Finance and the central bank or, as in the aborted Kenya experiment, by highly paid 'Dream Teams' composed of Africans seconded from international financial institutions. Capacity building would be confined to meeting the needs of these foreign dominated programmes. Hence the huge investment in training African economists in the skills required for macroeconomic management even as universities were being run down. And for a while the model was premised on authoritarian rule.

The reduction of the development agenda to 'poverty reduction' did not help matters especially when it was assumed that 'pro-poor' policies were those that directly benefited the poor. One should recall here how the campaign for 'Education for All' was turned against university education. If earlier arguments against education were based on efficiency grounds (the 'rate of return' argument) the new ones were based on equity considerations in which primary education is 'pro-poor' and tertiary education is elitist.

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33 As Cowen and Shenton argue, '...in the face of the corruption of "Third World" leaders, trusteeship though none dare speak its name will have to be exercised by those who represent themselves as knowing and moral on behalf of those who are taken to be ignorant and corrupt' (Cowen and Shenton 1996: 473).

### The aid juggernaut

The study of Africa has been closely associated with foreign interests that have often compromised its integrity. It could have been the Church, the colonial master and now international financial institutions. In the literature of area studies there is recognition that research of the developing countries was shaped by imperial powers. It is often implied that with the end of colonial rule we are somehow out of the woods. Schwarz (Schwartz 1980) may be right in arguing that 'area studies have long since been disengaged from the circumstances of their origin.' The decontamination of African studies from its colonial underpinnings may have been successful, although there are still disturbing traces of it that rile Africans. However in more recent years two factors have defined area studies: the highly instrumentalised study of Africa induced by the Cold War, and now the demands of the aid juggernaut that have assumed the negative tasks of earlier studies of Africa.

The aid establishment today commands much of the intellectual resources devoted to development through its own research agenda, through the consultancy industry and through its selective support of research programmes and epistemic communities in developing countries. The reward system that the aid establishment dominates favours the report over the peer reviewed journal paper. Many academics inside and outside have been drawn into this system as they move freely through the revolving door linking academia, the consultancy industry, philanthropic organisations and international financial institutions. In the process, institutions of learning have, as in the colonial period, been harnessed to the task of remote management of the African continent.



Available data suggests that there are over 100,000 foreign experts in Africa at a cost of more than US\$4 billion. Dudley Seers wrote an article with the title 'Why visiting economists fail' (Seers, 1962:12670). Years later, Paul Streeten posed the question 'Why do failed economists visit?'. The question often heard in Africa is not why failed experts visit but why they repeatedly do so and why they are given the red carpet each time they revisit. Many answers have been proffered to the questions. These include: that these experts are forced down the throats of the recipient; the deceptive self-esteem by the experts themselves that is reinforced by the paradigmatic blinkers that obscure their failures, rendering them as resounding successes worth extensive emulation or revisiting; the experts' detachments or immunity from the consequences of their bad advice; the institutional amnesia of both donor and recipient nations; the perverse incentives in the aid world that make ignorance pay: self-interested deprecation of local knowledge and expertise by visiting experts; the complicity of a beleaguered scholarly community; the smallness of the local research community which does not yet constitute the critical mass necessary to challenge received ideas; the supine position with which foreign ideas are received by the recipient countries which do not dare to look the proverbial gift horse in the mouth: or what the effects of what Africans themselves call the 'colonial mentality' and the 'self-deprecatory' attitudes that Albert Hirschman identified among Latin American economists (Hirschman 1984).

### **Banking on Knowledge**

In light of the recognition that knowledge matters in development, in 1998 the World Development devoted itself to the theme of Knowledge for Development. Indeed the World Bank went so far as to reinvent itself as a 'knowledge bank' and other aid agencies followed suit and saw themselves as 'knowledge agencies'. Unfortunately the 'knowledge' referred to is quite specific and related more to managerial and developmental concerns, often around notions of 'Best Practice'. In fact what these agencies were concerned with was managing and disseminating the knowledge that they claimed they already had. In the World of Wolfenson:

*We have been in the business of researching and disseminating the lessons of development for a long time. But the revolution in information technology increased the potential value of these efforts by vastly extending their reach. To capture this potential, we need to invest in the necessary systems, in Washington and worldwide, that will enhance our ability to gather development information and experience, and share it with our clients. We need to become, in effect, the Knowledge Bank*  
*[cited in King, 2004: 3067].*

What they were effectively saying was not simply 'If we only knew what we know' but to the African, 'If you only knew what we know'. The agencies saw themselves as purveyors of knowledge which was already in their hands and were not concerned with research capacity in the South [King, 2004 :3067]<sup>34</sup>. The knowledge they were interested in was not one that enhances a society's critical capacity for learning and self-evaluation. And it is not knowledge that might be critical of its work in development, as several academics who have worked with Bank have eventually found out<sup>35</sup>.

## Some consequences of Understanding Africa

### Reduced learning and Research capacity

One severe consequence of the crisis has been the erosion of the capacity of Africa to know itself, let alone the rest of the world. It should be clear that Africa's self-understanding and its legibility to others will need a large dose of local scholarship. The current situation leaves much to be desired. According to a recent report, research in Africa produces about 27,000 papers per year which is about the same volume of published output as the Netherlands (Adams, et al. 2010).

Many close observers of aid have noted that aid is structured in such a way as to reduce the learning process. First, donors are generally speaking to themselves or 'ventriloquising'. There is simply no room for critical dialogue. Elliot Berg observes:

*'...there is a lack of autonomous intermediaries in heavily-aided countries. Donors spend much of their dialogue in discussion with captured institutions and officials who are direct beneficiaries.'*

Were donors good learners this disruption of learning by locals might be tolerable. However as it turns out aid institutions have proved to be poor learners (Kragh, 2000:12475). One consequence of all this is the sense by African policy-makers that they are involved in an endless process of reinventing the proverbial or capacity/building exercises. A cumulative process differs from one designed to simply spread or equip recipients with ideas deemed appropriate by whoever controls the purse.

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34 In the words of King and Macgrath:

'In reviewing the most recent preoccupation of agencies with both knowledge and capacity development, we would argue that the agencies have not started with the dramatic knowledge deficits of the South, nor with the key question of how KM could assist knowledge development in the South. A continuation along their present internal trajectories could be counter-productive; it could end up making agencies more certain of what they themselves have learnt, and more enthusiastic that others should share these insights, once they have been systematized. While on the external knowledge sharing side, there is still little evidence of dramatically increased support to knowledge development in the South.' (King and McGrath 2004)

35 Significantly Joseph Stiglitz is accredited for the World Bank's new emphasis on knowledge, a position he articulated in (Stiglitz, 1999 #4358). His subsequent fate suggests limits to the knowledge that the World Bank could relate to.

### The Dwindling Empirical base

The historian Tony Hopkins attributed some of what he called the 'quirk of reasoning' about Africa to 'the law of bad data,' which states that the less information is available the more firmly opinions about it can be held (Hopkins 1986: 1475). In the absence of locally produced monographs on local conditions, it must be tempting to fill in the missing data by extrapolations or simply reading off Africa from preconceived schema or by relying on convenient anecdotes. It could also be, as suggested by Robert Solow, that in these days of penury 'theory is cheap, and data are expensive' (Solow 1997: 57-56)<sup>36</sup>. Hopkins suggested that in more recent times the operation of this law has been particularly helpful to researchers wishing to confirm favoured conclusions without losing valuable time. Signs of a dwindling empirical base show up in the increasingly deductive approach to the African phenomena that obviate the need for too much discomfiting information. Many of these deductions are impervious to discomfiting evidence and research blithely marches on regardless of the many anomalies that African political life throws up. The weak empirical base also encourages analysis by analogy which is often based on misplaced abstraction of other countries' experience.<sup>37</sup> In one view Africans are displaying 'rational action' pursuing their individual utility. Their collective action can be derived from these premises of pursuit of private interest. At the other extreme African conflicts are entirely attributed to greed and completely devoid of any grievance that might give them some moral basis. For some the 'logic of neopatrimonialism' explains all policies and political practices. In both cases a kind of Panglossian gloss is given to the many malfunctionings that afflict Africa. 'That is how Africa works.' Or 'That is a rational response' to perverse incentives.

Furthermore the dearth of empirical evidence seems to account for the compulsion for the mindless labelling of a uniformly unhappy Africa. Africa has been a fertile spawning ground for epithets and labels to describe African states, countries or elites – the 'venal state', the 'prebendal state', the 'overdeveloped state', the 'rentier state', the 'vampire state', the 'petty bourgeois state', the 'dependent state', the 'neo-colonial state', the 'neopatrimonial state', the 'gatekeeper state' (Cooper) etc. These, colourful as they may be, definitely do not provide the analytical tools to assist one in predicting what a particular state will do under different circumstances<sup>38</sup>.

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36 One remarkable feature of the study of Africa has been the limited number of countries that feature in African studies. Young has observed that 'Africa has an extraordinary number of sovereign units (53 in 1999); however, comparative understandings of African political dynamics derive from a much smaller number of states that, by reason of their size, accessibility for research, or attractiveness as models, received disproportionate attention (for example, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, Senegal, and Congo-Kinshasa' (Young, et al. 2001)

37 Thus people can discuss 'land reform' in Africa based on experiences of Latin America although Africa is predominantly a continent of smallholder farming; 'land surplus economies' can be analysed as labour surplus economies of Asia; the new industries in Africa can be equated to senile infant industries of Latin America or Asia. These highly stylised narratives obscure the nuanced and highly differentiated politics of the continent.

38 It is, for instance, the case that the neo-patrimonial state has pursued a very wide range of policies in Africa. And even the same regime has in many cases pursued different policies at different times, none of which can be easily read-off for the neo-patrimonial characteristics of the state. Even more significantly, is that while the approach may explain the decline it is totally unable to discern, let alone explain upturns.

### **Neglect or Ignorance of what Africans think**

To the extent that development involves intentionality and what Hirschman referred to as ‘passions’ it is difficult to see how we can understand Africa’s problems and prospects without knowing the opinions, visions or myths held by some of the key historical agents. The issue here about these agents is not the brilliance of the insight of their thinking, or their occupation of high moral grounds or their native advantage<sup>39</sup>. Rather, the point is that the often contradictory and conflicted ideas that African elites hold even when erroneous can serve as an important index of their capacities and aspirations<sup>40</sup>. They can also suggest which foreign ideas are unlikely to find sustenance on African soil. As for the academic community, they matter if only because they are significant in the interstices between the state and civil society. African scholars themselves have taken seriously their own intellectual work, its social significance and how it impinges on their societies<sup>41</sup>.

In earlier studies of development in Africa there was considerable interest in what ideas and ideologies drove Africans, although much of this tended to confine itself to ideas of individuals or political parties in power<sup>42</sup>. With current focus on interest, greed, rent-seeking etc and institutions much less attention is paid to ideas which are simply dismissed as camouflage for crass material interests or are part of the metanarratives that are now held in contempt. One factor contributing to so much ignorance about Africa’s knowledge is its inability to represent itself due to the silencing of African voices by Africa’s own potentates. The collapse of the educational system, the parlous state of Africa’s publishing industry and the academic rituals and traditions of footnoting and citation, the self-inflicted misrepresentation by the many buffoons that somehow strutted and fretted on the centre stage of African politics – the Idi Amins, Bokassas, Mobutus etc.: the cumulative effect of all this was tantamount to self-erasure.

In addition there has been the selective reading of Africa that seems to include a studied avoidance of any reference to African writing that one must definitely have encountered. In some senses, the neglect is tantamount to the erasure of the considerable amount of work done in African universities. In the 1980s I attended a conference in the US on structural adjustment in Africa and Latin America. The conference brought together North American specialists and scholars from the two regions. From Africa there was Sam Nolutshungo, Mahmood Mamdani and me.

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39 As regards the moral issue there is sufficient material on the crass opportunism of members of this social class which is recorded in the literature cited above.

40 Gbedisimola Adeoti makes this that point even with respect to the peculiar genre of autobiographies of military generals that flourished in Nigeria in the days of military rule.

41 See for example (Amuwo, Bangura 1994; Diouf 1993; Falola 2001; Khan 1993; Mafeje 1993; Mamdani 1999; Mkandawire 2000,2002; Mnthali 1988; NDA 1987; Okonkwo 1984; Rajeshwar 1990; Williams 1998a;b; Zeleza 1992).

42 See for instance (Ake 1979; Folsom 1992; Gana 1986; Johnson 1967; Keller and Rothchild 1987; Mohan 1967; Seers 1983; Young 1982).

Towards the end of the conference Albert Hirschman, whom I had met at a conference at Bellagio, came to me and asked me why African scholars and Africanists did not seem to address each other or comment on each other's work while there were lively interactions between the Latin Americans and the Latin Americanists. I had no quick answer but he had put his finger on a major aspect of the study of Africa. Any student of Africa is confronted by two research communities that rarely interact. This shows up in the hiatus between the currency of topics and the datedness of the bibliography in African writing, on the one hand, and the dated content and current biographies of 'Northern' writers on the other hand. A lot is lost in this gap.

### **Unusable knowledge**

This process is producing a type of knowledge that is rarely useful to Africans either because it is hidden from them in confidential reports or it is in not easily understood languages. Reports by donors and the scribbling of their consultants enjoy little credibility in African circles which tend to hold them in poorly concealed contempt simply because they state the obvious or because many of these reports have doctored failures of their politically chosen allies. Local scholars have also learned that the concealment of information is a useful strategy in recycling one's ideas to visiting consultants. To sustain the charade and complicity, locals must feign ignorance so as to attend the lucrative 'capacity building' workshops.



This process has poisoned relationships between visiting scholars and the local academic community, turning the former researcher into the peripatetic consultant or the academic tourist. These may be stereotypes, and intentionally so, but they are not caricatures. The encounter between these two communities is no longer at the senior common room or seminar room but in hotel lobbies or resort areas where workshops are often held. To the experts the local scholar became some kind of informed native or what is nowadays referred to as 'local'. Or 'Southern counterpart' is an old description<sup>43</sup>.

### Signs of Change

During the last decade there have been signs of change in the economic and political landscape. Quite a number of countries in Africa have enjoyed positive rates of growth. It has been claimed that this is evidence that structural adjustment is finally working. I have my doubts. We were not told in 1981 that the time lag of the reforms would be 20 years. My own suspicion is that improved political conditions, improved terms of trade, technology-driven investment in telecommunications and debt relief explain some of the recovery, and to the extent that some of these are one-off improvements, the recovery is still on weak grounds as it is not based on improvements in human resources.

With all the trials and tribulations that have dogged the university in the last two decades, there are many positive signs.

The first is that Africa has the fastest growing university population in the world. This means that we can focus on problems of quality and equity. Here I would point to the strengthening and revitalising of the African faculty as the urgent issue. Second, democratisation has once again opened debates on the issue of education, and a more vocal middle-class unable to send their children abroad are making demands on their own governments. The struggles for democratisation and the greater freedoms enjoyed by society at large have not only widened intellectual space for academics and provided respite from the suffocating atmosphere of authoritarianism, but have also given greater political protection to universities as institutions.

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**43** Hountondji's depiction of the colonial division of labour in research is, alas, not a thing of the past:

'(The) essential shortcoming of scientific activity in the Colonies was the lack of this intermediate stage. We missed the central operation of theory-building. We only had the first and third stages of the process: (i) the data collection, the feverish gathering of all supposed useful information, and (ii) a partial, occasional and limited application of the research outcome to some local issues. The medium stage took place in the so-called 'Mother Country,' the colonial metropolis. The data collection was immediately exported to laboratories and research centres in the ruling countries...for theoretical or experimental processing and interpretation. The colony itself lacked universities, or, when it had any they were so poorly developed that they could only promote, at best, the proto-theoretical procedures necessary to enlighten the data collection process, and the post/theoretical procedures necessary for applied research in the final states.' (Hountondji 2002)



Third, the economics behind the arguments against financing higher education have been exposed to have been flawed<sup>44</sup>. There is renewed interest in higher education from international agencies, including the World Bank and private foundations. There are many useful initiatives by governments and donors in the area of education. We also have the mushrooming of private universities and centres of excellence. However, all these depend on public universities for their intellectual sustenance.

Fourth, universities have proved much more resilient than was initially believed, largely because of the enormous commitment by both faculty and students. One should add here the optimism of the African scholarly community itself, which has over the years fiercely defended university education. African scholars have also found mutual sustenance through the various research networks which have sustained intellectual activity during an extremely trying period and are likely to play a central role in the revival of the African intellectual community. Consequently, we do not have to begin from scratch as some donors are wont to.

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**44** Not long ago I participated in a panel at which the World Bank report on youth was presented by an official from the Bank. The report argued for more investments in youth if Africa was to develop. I asked the official how this could be reconciled by the position held by the Bank on the low rates of return of investment directed at education for that age group – secondary and tertiary education. There was a sigh of disbelief in the room as the official responded that there had been an error in the calculations.





## Conclusion

To conclude, economic development still remains high on the social and political agenda of African countries. This demands the revival and revitalisation of institutions of learning within Africa. For in a profound sense Africans must think themselves out of the current predicament of the continent. In the process they will have to draw upon their own resources and the vast knowledge that humanity has generated over the years. 'Running while others walk' will require much greater intellectual prowess than Africa has hitherto deployed. This, in turn, will require the revival of education in Africa not simply because knowledge serves development and the skills that are a prerequisite for a decent society but also because the expansion of systems of education in Africa and the full exploitation of the opportunities of learning require economic development to provide the necessary material wherewithal.

Furthermore since other parts of the world are unlikely to stop acting upon the continent and interact with Africans, it would help if all this took place with a modicum of knowledge on all sides. So the study of Africa is an important and urgent problem for all concerned with the fate of Africa. This is not to suggest that the study of Africa should be exclusively driven by this developmentalist agenda. Not all study of things African is necessarily developmental nor do I believe it should be in any explicit relationship to immediate developmental or pragmatic goals. Anyone ought to be able to study string instruments in Africa without being described as a 'development musicologist' or declaring that his or her mastery of any particular instrument will

reduce poverty in the host country. A people's existence is not defined only by their material conditions but also by their ideas and moral views. Africans do not live by bread alone. This said, bread matters.

I have suggested that the crisis of the African university is closely related to the crisis of development. Consequently 'bringing development back in' will require a revitalisation of the African University, its internal functioning and its relationships with the global world of knowledge. The African University matters to Africa. Increasingly the people in the highest échelons of political order and managerial systems of Africa are produced locally by a professoriate that is trained on the continent.

Finally, there is growing recognition that the existence of a vibrant research community is vital for the study of Africa. One particular aspect of the sociology of the study of Africa is what Young characterises as 'a singular preponderance of external scholarship' (Young, Neil, and Paul 2001: 255)<sup>45</sup>. For a while in the 1960s and 1970s it did seem that this historical imbalance would be soon corrected. This was reversed in the 1980s, with negative consequences for the study of Africa. So in a sense the enhancement and utilisation of African research are in the self-interest of the Africanist community<sup>46</sup>. I believe the academic community must support their counterparts in Africa as they struggle against the ravages of the consultancy syndrome that rewards reports over refereed academic papers, against the repressive practices and criminal negligence of their respective national governments and against the pressures for the commercialisation of educational systems. Universities should not wait for the initiatives of governments and donors. Instead they must seek ways of creating autonomous spaces for interacting with each other within a 'commonwealth of scholars'. This will entail changes in the current relationship between African scholars and the university communities elsewhere. This immediately places a heavy burden on the African University itself. If they want to be attractive intellectual partners they will have to significantly improve their performance.

LSE has vast intellectual resources that can contribute to a new relationship between African Universities and British Universities. It is within this larger context of the aspiration of economic development and the vital role of knowledge that I would like

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45 Hopkins has remarked:

*'Knowledge of Africa, as presented by modern scholarship, has been fashioned by outsiders to a much greater extent than is the case with any other continent. Imagine for a moment that the history of the United States, or prescriptions for its economic health, derived almost exclusively from alien experts. We have no means of knowing whether the historical or the prescriptive literature would be better or worse for this experience, but we can be sure that it would be very different. This difference would arise from an altered set of research priorities, which in turn would be influenced by a complex of cultural predispositions, including – in some measure – various beliefs about aliens.'*

46 In the words of Goran Hyden, speaking as President of the ASA: 'Because African studies are so closely tied to what is going on in Africa, our first obligation must be to facilitate continued scholarship by our colleagues based there' (Hyden 1996: 15).

to place LSE's African Initiative. The establishment of a new Chair on Africa should not be interpreted as in any way suggesting that LSE is bereft of scholarship in this field. On the contrary, the Chair should be seen as the recognition of the work done on Africa at LSE over the years. LSE has no specialised centre on Africa. This may be a blessing in disguise. There is an impressive cohort of researchers working on Africa across the disciplines. I believe this anchoring in the disciplines may minimise the sense of drift one sometimes notices in area studies. One can only hope that the presence of Africanists within the disciplines will turn the attention of some non-area specialists to the social dramas of the developing countries. They can also serve as the bridge between African scholars and their respective disciplines.

**And if Africa will have to run, the university will have to sprint.**

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## The LSE African Initiative

*'As Africa confronts its challenges, seizes its opportunities and seeks to take its rightful place in the world polity, the continent and its leaders must assume the responsibility for shaping their own destiny. The [economic] crisis has injected a palpable sense of urgency which I'm positive will be accompanied by innovation in crafting new, pragmatic approaches.'*

Taken from Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala's  
September 2009 Public Lecture at LSE

### The London School of Economics and Political Science

The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) is a place of ideas, where contemporary global challenges are debated, tough questions asked, solutions developed and ideas put into action. From its location in the heart of London, the School links to communities across the world, from formal academic partnerships to advisory work with governments and international organisations.

LSE enjoys long standing links with Africa through its staff and students, and encompasses within its alumni and friends a significant number of leading individuals from across African civil society, business and government. Illustrious alumni include Jomo Kenyatta, the first President of Kenya, and three Presidents of Ghana, most recently John Atta Mills, elected to office in 2009. In addition, researchers from the School's Methodology Institute were recently selected to guide the third Ibrahim Index of African Governance by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation.



### The LSE African Initiative

It is a view held by many that greater opportunities and avenues need to exist to enable larger numbers of talented Africans to achieve the success that they deserve. At LSE, we believe that a key part of the solution is reinserting Africa into the global debate, enabling the rest of the world to learn about and from Africa, and vice versa. Only with stronger systems of exchange and inclusion will African civil societies be better placed to develop and maintain strong and sustainable institutions and systems.

The LSE African Initiative will engage with African institutions and talent to develop connections, encourage accessibility and promote knowledge exchange. This long term collaboration will inspire and support generations of African students and scholars, equipping them to play a part in reframing the discourse and enabling African voices and perspectives to participate in effecting positive change both within the African continent and globally. It is a partnership based in equality and mutual respect.

The initiative's foundation seeks to confront the barriers and inequality that exist for African students and scholars, in terms of both access to educational opportunities outside of the African continent, and exchange and partnerships between African institutions and those elsewhere. It recognises a deeply held belief that the School is uniquely placed to support African peers in creating successive generations of academics, business leaders, entrepreneurs, politicians, lawyers and social workers who know how to facilitate positive change.

### **Where support is needed**

The LSE African Initiative comprises many elements for which funding, from £10,000 to £2.5 million, is sought:

- Endowing and naming of a professorship in perpetuity (Chair in African Development)\*
- Junior and Senior Research Fellowships
- Summer Schools in Africa
- Research and dissemination projects
- Scholarships (Undergraduate and Masters)
- Events
- PhD student collaborations
- Academic and institutional partnerships

\* Currently held by Professor Thandika Mkandawire, former Director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, with funding secured for a maximum of three years between 2009-12.

### **Recognition of your support**

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