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## **ADDRESSES**

### **Scales of suffering, Orders of Emancipation: Critical Issues in Democratic Development in Africa**

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## **Introduction**

May I begin this address by first and foremost congratulating The Nordic African Institute on its assumption of the important age of 40 years? As in the life cycle of humans, the age of forty is an important milestone in the biography of institutions and countries, and although it is only a short period from the point of view of larger historical time, it is an appropriate and convenient point to stop and take stock of what have been one's achievements, contributions and of course, weaknesses in life.

It is my understanding that as an institution the Nordic African Institute has been very fortunate to have been part of the terrain that has tried to offer scholarship and knowledge production on Africa in this part of the world, not only in the service of Nordic interests, but also in the genuine pursuit of knowledge and truth that recognises the importance of the subject of knowledge as also both a producer and consumer. In this regard, your attempts at understanding and interpreting Africa, for whatever reasons, have not been from the point of view of Africa as the 'perpetual other', but also from the point of view of a methodological empathy that has accepted Africans as legitimate producers of knowledge and as respectable and valid interpreters of Africa. You have indeed been one of the earliest genuine pace setters of this trend before it became one of the politically correct traits of parts of the liberal Western academy. This is one reason why I am sure I share this platform not only to celebrate with you, but also to share my reflections on certain aspects of development that has been engaging my attention.

I would like to see this time as an opportunity for genuine sharing about concerns that can be said to be central to the whole theme of this conference, that is, 'Knowledge, Freedom and Development'. My topic is: 'Scales of suffering, Orders of Emancipation: critical issues in democratic development in Africa'.

In recognition of the condition of existence of not only Africans, but billions of other teeming humanity, I want to explore with you in this paper, the issue of 'suffering', as a trait and quality of the outcome of recognisable human agendas and social projects. I know that this is a very difficult terrain outside of theology and psychology (disciplines that have monopolised the discourses on suffering and redemption both in their secular and spiritual manifestations), but I believe that another dimension of the failure of our analyses and our practices of development is that we have never seriously attempted to incorporate what can be called the distribution of distress, misery and suffering into our considerations. We have examined poverty, exploitation and domination either

as objective or/and in certain cases unacceptable dimensions of social and political existence. We have however, often not linked these to the concrete burdens and experiences of actually existing human beings. It is possible that by operating with abstractions and sanitised analytical categories, we have protected ourselves as social scientists from the often messy and untidy dynamics and occurrences that often define ordinary peoples' engagements with the political and economic initiatives and agendas that both global and national elites and institutions create. We have therefore ignored important elements that make up major aspects of concrete human experiences. As these experiences continue to influence not only our politics, but also our sociology, it is important that they begin to have a more prominent place in our analyses. Thus, when we talk about issues such as poverty and inequality, social stability and upheavals, about various actions, events and human efforts directed at creating lives and livelihoods, ensuring individual and collective well being, and improving the human condition, we can not effectively do this without seeing how they embody the qualities of 'suffering and distress', either in structures or processes and how these are unevenly and unequally distributed.

This is an elementary lesson that the great literary works of Africa by writers such as Achebe, Soyinka, Sembene Ousmane, Negib Mahfouz, Nadine Gordimer and Ngugi wa Thiongo have taught us and which as I shall point out later, has not been absent in the consideration of some of our important social scientists and development theorists. I hope that by examining some important social projects and agendas, such as 'development' and 'democracy', that have been key elements of some of the major transitions in recent African history, from the perspective of the scales and distribution of suffering, and in relation to their manifestly declared goals, their failures and disappointments, we might be able to ask the question: whatever happened to 'development and social transformation' in Africa?

### **A Story as Entry-point**

I want to begin to address these issues by telling a little true story that forcefully conveys to me some of the questions that we are struggling with. Some time ago, I had the opportunity to visit a development project in one of our African countries. This was a land rights/human rights project in a small village on the outskirts of one of the largest cities in Africa. It was an attempt to provide legal aid and human rights advocacy to farming communities that were being made landless and disinherited by banks and state corporations for their indebtedness. In actual fact, their experience was as a result of having been encouraged, about 10 to 15 years earlier( in the mid-eighties), to borrow money to improve and modernise their enterprises. They had been approached to borrow to buy tractors, farming implements, improved seeds and all the other elements of modern agricultural production that were seen as parts of and necessary for 'development.

The farmers ranged from small holders to those with sizeable medium holdings. Their assets included land, tools, crops and livestock. Less than five years into their credit situation that was initially defined in medium to long terms, changes began to occur in the national and global economy. A key occurrence was the new regime of economic deregulation, particularly that of the interest rates and other related forms of liberalisation that removed subsidies on farming inputs such as fertilizers, imported seedlings, veterinary materials, equipment and related items. Suddenly farmers who have been paying their loans back gradually over the years, found out that their indebtedness had trebled or quadrupled.

Many of the farmers had paid more than the initial principal they borrowed. But they found that they were still heavily indebted. They were being taken to court, sometimes detained without trial at police stations, and were having their properties seized and auctioned without proper notice and due process. Their vulnerability and ignorance were being exploited in the most brutal manner by an unholy alliance of the State Credit Corporation, the Agricultural and commercial banks and the law enforcement agencies.

These farmers found some support and defence in the presence of an organisation of urban-based human rights lawyers who specialised in land rights and pursued the protection of their rights and properties. The stories were sordid enough and included evidence of 'red tapism', rigid rules and laws, some corruption and plenty of ignorance. But there was the question of the other combination of factors that seemed to make both the lawyers and the farmers helpless, and that was the fact that there were certain forces beyond them were at play here. These were forces that defined new interest rates for their loans, new currency exchange norms for what they imported and new prices for their products. These were forces very far from this little village deprived not only of services and infrastructure, but also of understanding and more significantly, justice. Here, we are dealing with a nation state, the Agricultural Credit Banks, the commodity boards that have suddenly being shut down or disempowered, the police and judiciary, some commercial banks, and a vague and shadowy international system that has changed the rules of the game mid-way by pressurising the government to liberalise and remove what were in effect social protection covers for these villagers.

An added point is that according to the farmers' testimonies, corroborated by some officials and local scholars, the farmers were encouraged to borrow when their country had not only a lower interest rate for agricultural credit, but also a stronger national currency that has now being subjected to a wave of massive and multiple devaluations.

Sad, but you might ask what is special about this situation. Is this not the state of the world and many African countries today? Indeed, this is why I have refused to name the country, because it could be any of our African countries. The story itself as it is, poses enough questions about the lures and meaning of development, the importance of knowledge and information about risks and of course, the uneven and unequal vulnerability of different actors in our economies and societies. They are questions that have been posed by scholars ranging from those with global reputations such as the Nobel laureates Joseph Stiglitz and Armatya Sen, to fresh graduate students grappling with the so-called first principles of conventional development theory (Sen, 1981, 1992, 1999). But beyond all the questions above, I was struck by other facts. At the meeting I am referring to, women and young people were almost completely absent, and when they present they came as supporting actors, to do things such as bring in chairs and tea.. It became clear here that we were dealing with potential multiple struggles and structures of domination and exploitation (Mustapha, 1996). We were operating in a society and economy where women were severely disadvantaged, and where structures and social behaviour reinforced the disadvantages. Rural women in particular in this context experienced multiple jeopardies. They were not able to own productive land directly, as a result of cultural and religious obstacles, they were often 'infantilised', denied of a wide array of rights while saddled with obligations and responsibilities and were expected to be mute or invisible players.

Around us the village was the conventional picture of rural poverty. It had poor sanitation with open sewers, human and animal waste, and garbage everywhere. There were no services such as regular supply of running water and electricity. It was clear to me that what we had here were

layers of neglect, grievances, deprivation, exploitation and domination. I asked why women were not at the meeting, and was told that they were not only busy, but that in this case, we were dealing with issues that concerned mainly adult men. I wanted to know about women's property rights, and women's access to land and other resources. My questions were deflected. I was becoming a source of irritation here. We were talking about human rights, about the bigger problems linked to the livelihoods of the community and of course the presence of the almost unshakeable authoritarian ruler and his henchmen. Yes, there was this great struggle for democratic transition and this big issue of peace in the region. There was also this supposedly big struggle with Western hegemony and its domination of both the national and global economies and the introduction of all these terrible conditionalities with aid and loans.

And here I was, asking about insignificant secondary matters, about the smaller issues. The concern was with the greater 'sufferings' of the whole nation, the people, the masses, and the region. It was with the significant emancipatory priorities, and not the 'lesser' problems of women and youth, particularly peasant ones for that matter. I tried to make the link between the injustice of the indebtedness of the farmers, the question of regional peace, and the position of the village women, but it was obvious that I was being disruptive and overstepping my role as a visitor. My concern with the 'politics of the lesser issues' and the 'secondary' emancipatory projects was neither understood nor appreciated.

Though my guides were sympathetic, I was the one who displayed a lack of understanding and maybe cultural sensitivity. But in my understanding, we have here a challenge and questioning not only of our conceptions and definitions of development and struggles for rights and social justice, but also of our practices and the way we understand them. I have always seen development as liberation from want, undue suffering and distress, and as an issue of priorities about how societies and peoples make choices, create spaces and places for the attainment of collective and individual well-being, and provide the opportunities for these within a context of justice and equity. In my scale of values, I have never thought we could weigh one set of injustices above or below others or continue with some while we pursue the end of others. It seems to me that the struggles with the 'greater' injustices will never be won if we are not sensitive to or struggle against the 'lesser' injustices. And who does the weighting anyway?

And perhaps, this is the endless dilemma of our 20<sup>th</sup> Century emancipatory projects. I mean the tension between our concentration on the great structural liberations and moments meant to produce massive changes and resolve the perennial troubling issues of our times, and the concern with improving and changing the more concrete conditions of the ordinary persons and the relationships in which they are embedded in identifiable groups, communities and institutions. It is a key dilemma of development as a social project.

But the question is, can this be 'development in practice', the expression of what we see on a daily basis in people's lives? Can we approach development without confronting the inherent inequalities and inequities that are located in the organisation of ordinary human existence? Can we transform and transcend development, as we know it, without confronting the hierarchies and scales of sufferings and distress, and the inequality in the orders of emancipation?

The story of this little village tied it up for me. All the ingredients were there, presented in a short moment of confrontation and interaction. There was the power of a relatively powerless state - powerless in relation to the outside international system and unable or unwilling to protect its own vulnerable people, but a state that sees itself as powerful and ready to unleash its force of repression on those who question its power and legitimacy from within. There was the inequality

between state corporations, international donors, the banks, their officials and the farmers. There was the knowledge divide tied around and manipulated by vested interests and the inequality between members of the community, particularly between men and women, brown and 'brownier', old and young. Of course, there were the real differences on what really mattered and how these were decided.

This story is the story of most of Africa with different variations in detail. It is a story that reminds us that after almost forty years of political independence, and many more with experimenting with different forms and notions of 'development', we still have to grapple with the first principles.

We have to get back to the basics of the notion and practices of development as they relate to the lives of ordinary peoples, to its constitution, the nature of its wide array of players, to the distribution of power and knowledge, and of course, that of suffering and misery.

These are the considerations that I will like us to engage with as we think about whatever we understand as Africa's development, and more so, of Africa's entry into a new age in the social transitions of contemporary human history. This is an age, which for the want of a better word has been described by numerous authors as the 'age of globalisation' (a notion which in itself is ideological, as well as descriptive of a series of processes and phenomena). These considerations are important because Africa's entry in to this age has been driven by several forces, some of which have rejected the usefulness of the discussions of issues and questions such as inequality and inequity. The emphasis has been on poverty blamed on and ascribed to its victims; and wealth, well-being and social directions and entitlements of society and peoples as determined by an impersonal but efficient market. But as revealed by evidence of goings on in global capitalism, its think-thanks and corporate board rooms, we all know that this 'almighty market' is neither impersonal nor that efficient in certain areas (Stiglitz, 2002). In my view, it is time to bring inequality back on the agenda. This is because more than a sanitised and superficial project of dealing with poverty reduction, the problem of inequality can take us back to the roots of poverty. It can lead us to a meaningful way of addressing the unblocking of the channels that constrain the energies and creativity of large numbers of Africans currently compelled to function below their optimal capacities.

Indeed, this moment is appropriate for reflection and stock taking on what history and transitions in Africa have been all about, in the past fifty to sixty years. A period that is insignificant when compared to the time frame represented by the pyramids of Egypt or the rock art of Namibia and the Niger Republic. Yet it is a time frame in which many Africans in a life time and in one country, have lived through colonisation, seen independence, experienced military coups, fought at least one civil war and have elected both a parliamentary style Prime Minister and an Executive President.

Talking about development, this same time frame has seen Africans subjected to externally-driven strategies ranging from import substitution industrialisation with 'unlimited supplies of labour', through those of 'redistribution with growth', the 'basic needs approach' and 'integrated rural development', to that of export-led growth. More recently, the ordinary African has had to deal with two to three decades of structural adjustment programs (which gave the era its name of that of crisis and adjustment), and is now learning the ropes of 'poverty reduction strategy programmes', (PRSPS). Africans today continue to struggle with what all of these are about, as there has been no significant upward turn in their well being in the last two decades (IFAD, 2001). This is why it should not surprise anybody if people are asking the question: whose development is it and for what? It is to this that we now turn.

## **Whose development is it?**

This question is indeed a valid question for many Africans. For them, the development approaches and strategies mentioned above mean nothing. They neither understand them nor see them significantly transform their lives. Indeed, the beneficiaries of these ‘developments’ are increasingly becoming numerical minorities in African societies, when the trend should have been for greater expansion and inclusion. In order to understand why this amount of distance exists between the peoples and one of the key processes and phenomenon meant to define their lives, let us examine the historical context of the idea and process of development for most of what constitutes sub-Saharan Africa today.

Of course, this has to be put in the context of what I call key social transitions in the contemporary history of Africa. By this, I refer to key historical moments of social change of systemic importance. These are moments of change that involved the modification or/and transformation of institutions, social values and social action in directions that constitute a break or shift from previous ways of organising society, culture, economy and the polity. Such moments may be the result of internal evolution or may have been induced by external forces such as conquests, new technologies, or some major trading contacts and related upheavals. They are often the products of interaction between internal and external forces and often give rise to qualitatively different patterns and dynamics of society and economy, demography and geography. Let us examine how what we have come to know as development is related to this.

In spite of several decades of use, the notion of development as applied to the process of transforming the economy and society remains contested (Escobar, 1995, Leys, 1997). We need not delay ourselves with the details of the linkages between the various paradigms and the way they understand the substance of development; the point is that this variety in the application of the notion is one of the key contributions of the field itself (Leys, 1997). We also need not detain ourselves asking how the notion has evolved to take on more holistic and humanistic forms that have incorporated elements of social and environmental justice, equity, participation, democracy and rights (Leys, 1997, Sen, 1999, Mkandawire, 1998). The conventional history of the notion has been that of the growth and transcendence of its more ‘economistic’ and sectoral origins to an increasingly inclusive, holistic and emancipatory notion with several qualifiers such as ‘human development’, ‘social development’, and ‘sustainable development’.

It is however a history that has been queried in terms of its origins, the gap between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘practice’, the ‘diagnostic’ and the ‘prescriptive’, and the agendas that the different perceptions and conceptions of the notion embody. There are thinkers today who believe we should drop the idea of development and they are on both the right and the left of the ideological spectrum (Escobar, 1995:15). In fact, the core thinking of the neo-liberal and structural adjustment orthodoxy had abandoned ‘development’ as a goal and focused more on ‘adjustment’ and ‘growth’. And of course, there are those who feel we should reclaim and re-appropriate the notion of development as both a guide to our efforts and as an explanation and description of processes around us (Aina, 1993). This seems to me to be the key issue: that for many, the history and origins of the notion, the process, and its practices are too compromised. But are they unsalvageable? Should we just drop the discourse and look for another way, another mode of understanding and construct, for the collective struggles of peoples to better themselves materially while at the same improving their total well being? This is because the notion and process suffer from a kind of ontological entrapment, development is what many peoples and countries want to

be, are struggling to be, and are yet not! It remains an elusive object of desire. It also has an ideological component.

Also, what is the relationship between the more emancipatory and liberatory aspects of the notion and the actually existing conditions and situations of millions of ordinary Africans? What practical lessons can we learn about the gaps in the ways people live and how the structures and processes they daily experience are theorised? Are our discussions of development that are emancipatory and transformational in a positive sense mere fictions and products of our imagination of a better world? Or are there out there significant if small changes that are making differences in and to people's lives? I want to argue that there are possibilities for concrete changes in the lives of ordinary peoples and that development as emancipatory and transformational is neither fiction nor the figment of our imagination. I am sure that it is now clear that I am on the side of those who want us to re-appropriate and reclaim the notion and practices of development. This is because there are actually existing examples of lives and livelihoods that have been and are being transformed all over the world (Escobar, 1995; Sen, 1999, 35-53), just as there are examples of many lives and livelihoods experiencing degradation and increase in suffering and misery. It seems to me that the issue is about examining possibilities without submitting to monolithic forms and expressions of outcomes. We need to be clear that that development is about the possibilities, and unintended and sometimes unpredictable outcomes of the intentional search and construction of human beings, and their societies and communities for their material and other well-being. I want to add that there are no guarantees that positive outcomes will always be attained, which is why the factor of intentionality is very important. It is also why as a notion and process it is valid that it retains the objective of improving human well-being that transcends the merely economic. In that sense, development is not an ideal, but a gigantic and perpetual human work-in-progress that communities, societies and some states undertake.

The progressive humanistic and emancipatory nature of development is clearly stated by Armatya Sen (1999:3), who declares that:

Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over-activity of repressive states.

This is why it is important to interrogate whose agenda it carries at any given time and to weigh its scales of suffering and their distribution. When we talk about agendas, we now have enough evidence about the loss or lack of innocence of the 'development process', particularly as it has so far been applied to Africa. This is especially so when we think of the ideology of 'developmentalism'. Historians of Africa have clearly made the linkages between the transition from colonial rule and Africa's adoption of developmentalism.

According to Zeleza (1997:200), '...developmentalism was born during the Great Depression and bred into a hegemonic discourse in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The seeds were sown with the 1929 British Colonial and Welfare Act. They turned into sturdy developmentalist weeds under the Colonial development and Welfare Act of 1945. It was in colonial Africa that most of these seeds and weeds were nurtured. It was there that the term *development* lost its naturalistic innocence and acquired the conceited meaning of economic growth modeled on the West'.

Escobar (1995:26-27) has also confirmed that:

The slow preparation for the launching of development was perhaps most clear in Africa,

where a number of recent studies suggest...there was an important connection between the decline of the colonial order and the rise of development. In the interwar period, the ground was prepared for the institution of development as a strategy to remake the colonial world and restructure the relations between colonies and metropolises. As Cooper (1991) has pointed out, the British Act of the 1940s - the first great materialization of the development idea - was a response to challenges to imperial power in the 1930s and must thus be seen as an attempt to invigorate the empire. This was particularly clear in the settler states in southern Africa, where preoccupations with questions of labor and food supplies led to strategies for the modernization of segments of the African population...(Escobar, 1995:26-27).

Zeleza (1997), in a closer examination of 'Colonial Developmentalism', advises us to go a little bit further than Escobar's points above and to see the complexity and multi-sided nature of colonial developmentalism, especially, the fact that the subjects of colonial territories were not mere passive subjects on which the colonial rulers acted without receiving a response, and who in many cases initiated the actions.

For Zeleza (1997:225):

The Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1929, was one of the many instruments the British state developed to deal with simultaneously, the crisis of legitimacy in the colonial empire and of capitalist rationality at home. It was part of the response to growing anti-colonial resistance in the empire and anti-capitalist revolt in the metropole. It represented, therefore, a defensive, conservative discourse, one that recast the role of the state and framed development as a managed process.

The literature on African experience with colonisation has pointed out that the colonial mission had the dominant objective of transferring resources to the colonial powers from the colonies through direct exploitation, unequal exchange and other economic mechanisms (Zeleza, 1993). Therefore, if a key agenda of early developmentalism in Africa was renegotiating colonial relations and domination with the former subject territories, then it was clear that the development process pursued was not African peoples' development. Of course, there were agents and intermediaries who benefited but the process was not about transforming structures and relationships for the purpose of improving the well being of most ordinary Africans. That was why it was a narrow sectionalist and limited project that neither fundamentally changed structures and relations, nor improved the well being of large numbers of Africans beyond a limited privileged few (Zeleza, 1997: 236-237). The question is what happened with independence.

The foundations of the economies and societies of large parts of Africa were being laid at the moments of the nationalist struggles of the 1940s and 1950s and colonial developmentalism contributed to the process of restructuring productive structures and relations that accommodated new African players as intermediaries and agents, thereby creating and/or reinforcing new forms of social and economic inequality.

The emerging dominant African social actors here were the nationalists. They were the key players in mobilising the different alliances and coalitions of social groups against colonial rule. They were also the key beneficiaries of the transition from formal colonial rule as they negotiated its modalities and timing with the colonial rulers. This is not to say that the process of transition was an easy transfer of power without struggles and violence in many cases. The transitions



embodied in the independence struggles were in fact heroic and decisive moments in Africa's history (to be replicated in different places at different times over three decades), both in terms of constructing broad platforms with clear goals and the uniting of different groups towards fighting and contributing to the goals of the struggles. But these transitions, given the complexity of the forces mentioned above, contained significant compromises in the ways they were effected. Several scholars have criticised the nationalists for the kind of economies, societies and polities that were created in post-independence Africa. The nationalists have been accused of poor leadership; of ignoring diversity and pluralism; of lacking clear-cut nationalist agendas and of suffering from a tremendous lack of capacity to transform the colonial formations they inherited. Their biggest failure was said to be with regards to the development agenda.

Claude Ake (1996: 1), believed that the '... problem is not so much that development has failed as that it was never on the agenda in the first place'. This position is not shared by some other analysts who recognised that key elements that constituted the nationalist project included national independence, nation building and of course, national development, both as means and as goals of transforming the lives of their peoples for the better.

The educated elites in most cases in Africa led the nationalist movements that initiated the transitions to nationhood and attempted national development. In recent years, African scholars have returned to an assessment of the contributions of these actors. The predominant reactions have been those of condemnation and criticism for the lost opportunities for meaningful development and nation building. They have also been attacked for the political styles and cultures that they nourished (particularly their decline into authoritarianism and monolithic politics), and for failing to transform both the colonial economy and its other institutions.

For Ake (1996:4), the nationalist movement that they formed was a 'coalition of disparate groups and elements' that in spite of its unity against colonial oppression could not hold together because of the tensions and conflicts that the platform contained. These tensions and conflict, the structural configurations of the inherited political economies, the manipulation and misuse of ethnic, racial and religious differences, and the strain towards personal enrichment and interests, effectively obstructed the attainment of any loftier goals of social transformation and beneficial development.

Ake's (1996: 40) judgment was that: 'At the beginning of the independence period, African leaders, with few exceptions, were so absorbed in the struggles for power and survival and so politically isolated by their betrayal of the nationalist revolution that they could not launch a national development project but instead opted for dependent development, letting their metropolitan patrons determine the agenda and find resources to implement it'.

But Thandika Mkandawire has asked us to reconsider our concentration on their failures and appreciate some of their achievements. 'He believes that after independence, African leaders made significant progress in development by investing in education for all, by improving healthcare facilities and infrastructure, and by making a serious drive towards import-substitution. Given this kind of endeavor, he believes that they can not be accused of having sought high office only for personal gain'(Anyang' Nyong'o, 2002: 15).

Without holding brief for the failures of the nationalists, we need to take Mkandawire's points very seriously. We cannot fully understand the strategies and agenda of the nationalists without reminding ourselves of the extensive nature of the exclusion, discrimination and very limited capacities and services of the colonial society and state. Also, we need to remind ourselves that not all those who took over power from the colonial rulers after independence can be termed

'nationalists' in the real sense of that word. Either by inclination, politics or even self-definition, there were African leaders who were not nationalists. Some would be more appropriately described as 'accommodationists', while others were no more than ethnic, racial and religious chauvinists. The nationalists on the other hand, in most cases, were struggling with a corrective and building phase, and in the pursuit of their projects had to resort to legitimising, accumulative and incorporationist strategies. But the unfortunate element of most of their agendas is that they contained the same fundamental problem of confronting the different scales of suffering found in society and imposed hierarchies of emancipation that deliberately put several groups and communities at a disadvantage based on their social positions and identities.

As a collection of 'disparate' actors, I read more than one agenda into the projects of the nationalists, this along with the existent agenda of the different factions of the colonial rule made this period of transition, one of multiple and contradictory social projects. There were of course dominant agendas and projects carried out and effected by more or less dominant groups. Under the period of colonial rule, we can identify the colonialist agenda of colonial modernity and the nationalists' counter agenda of national liberation and political independence.

In the process and period of transition to post-independence, there were also several agendas. There were the dominant nationalist agenda of liberation/independence, nation building and that of development, depending on how it was perceived. And we need to recognise the complexity and differences in the definition and perception of the notion and process of development. This made the agenda of national development a broad, diffuse one which expressed itself in most African countries either as the pursuit of capitalist development as it was in Kenya and Cote d'Ivoire, or the pursuit of different variants and hybrids of socialism as was experimented with in Guinea, Tanzania, Angola and Mozambique. However, there was a unifying element in the pursuit of national development across the board, irrespective of ideologies. This was the importance given to statist strategies, that is, the tremendous significance given to the state for social provisioning, the delivery of services and in many cases, economic management. This was what Mkandawire (1998) has analysed as a variant of 'the developmental state' (Mkandawire, 1998). One more important point that should be stressed about agendas during this period, is that given the different and 'disparate' nature of the social forces involved, there were other minor agendas that were very important to different groups in the different countries. There were, for instance, irredentist and secessionist forces operating during this period. Thus, one cannot effectively adduce the same agenda to the projects of Patrice Lumumba and Moise Tshombe in the period of transition from the Belgian Congo to the independent Congo (Kinshasa). In this case, what the latter represented contradicted what Lumumba stood for.

This brings us to another key project that was an important feature of 20th Century Africa and which found some correspondence to greater or less degree with other key projects. This is what can be called the democratisation agenda or the democratic project. This project is in substance an emancipatory project that through social values, the creation and growth of relevant charters and institutions, and the use of laws and other practices, seeks to promote the significance of the conditions of equality, justice, representation, participation and due process in the ways individuals and groups interact not only with each other, but also with institutions of government and the state. Of course, there are differences on what constitutes the democratic project and how these should be prioritised, but even in its most formal rudimentary state it is a potential foundation of larger emancipatory projects.

Aspects of this project can be found in all the political and at times, economic struggles of

Africans.<sup>1</sup> Other aspects were also embedded in the nationalist struggles at the beginning, and were carried by individuals and groups that were part of the independence movement. The democratisation project has however either been subverted and undermined by various forces and players in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Africa or never allowed to grow and develop so as to expand the full possibilities of many African societies and polities. Those who have subverted the project range from nationalists who either were never democrats or were unable to accommodate diversity and pluralism, to military rulers and power drunk potentates, as well as agents of international institutions and donor organisations whose policies will never survive democratic discussions or encounters.

But the democratisation project is still very much on the agenda today, and it has in recent times been adopted as a 'global agenda', not only by the international civil society movement but also by agents of the international financial institutions, who have appropriated it, sanitised it and re-baptised it under the notion of 'good governance'. This has become a technocratic notion and instrument tagged on to the new international regime of credit and aid, and aimed mainly at constructing some universals of 'accountable and transparent rule and management', without the requisite attention to contexts (Anyang'Nyong, o, 2002:80-83). Because it embodies continuous growth and expansion of learning, the project today accommodates a wider range of emancipatory and social justice issues. In fact even more than before it provides a platform for the realisation of human development as it includes significant elements of social, economic and cultural rights as well as political and civil rights. This is why the idea of democratic development as means and ends of meaningful and relevant social transformation in Africa is an imperative (Sen, 1999: 35-56).

Before concluding the discussion in this section, let us examine whose development it is in the era of globalisation. As can be seen from the literature, the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Africa can be termed an era of crisis and adjustment (Aina, 1993, Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999). The era of crisis started around the early 1970s beginning with the world oil crisis and the decline in the prices of key African commodities (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999:21-22). This was the point at which the new global economic restructuring was said to have commenced (Hosbawm, 1999; Castells, 1998). The period between the beginning of the crisis and the end of the Cold War was a grim social and political era for Africa. For as most African countries were adjusting, several African regimes, supported and encouraged by the Cold War powers, became more repressive and undemocratic. The emphasis in this period was on the economic reforms and adjustment. These however did not produce any significant recovery or growth except for a few isolated cases. Failed and mis-applied economic reforms and declining resources aggravated the process of erosion of state capacities, and the degradation and decay of public institutions, utilities and social services (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999). All of these expanded the scope of suffering and misery experienced by ordinary peoples in most of these countries, with the greatest amount of pain unmitigated by access to justice being the lot of the poor and marginalised.

With the breakdown of state capacities and the erosion of much that is left of post-independence legitimacy, accountability and participation, political violence became a major mode of political expression. This was in the form of riots, wars, rebellions, insurrections, banditry and the unleashing of state-sponsored terror on political opponents. While a lot of the violent expression occurred in the urban areas, much more took place in the rural setting, aggravating ecological and other natural disasters and resulting in famines and related calamities that not only diverted attention from developmental activities, but also provided the much needed copy for negative and

pejorative media attention on the African condition.

During this period, there was not much development, either in the form of meaningful economic growth or the other emancipatory qualities mentioned above. So intense and pervasive was the last decade of crisis and adjustment, that it has been called 'Africa's lost decade' (Aina, 1993). According to Mkandawire and Soludo (1999:93), the economist, Griffin had identified three paths of adjustment, each emphasising a different set of fundamentals, namely adjustment by recovery, adjustment by contraction and finally, adjustment by an investment-driven development process. They pointed out that the emphasis in Africa was on the former two, adjustment by contraction and by recovery.

We now know that the adjustment strategies were not designed by Africans and did not heed the calls of Africans for modification, and also that they had relatively few African beneficiaries. One can state that if in earlier periods, there were combinations of agendas and thus what constituted development could be claimed by some African interests, the period of crisis and adjustment was closer to the period of naked colonial rule, as very few Africans could or would claim ownership of the strategies or agendas of that era. This was why the Bretton Woods Institutions' search for relevant and legitimate internal African constituencies for adjustment proved elusive for a long time.

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Aina, 1997), the adjustment and crisis era ushered in Africa's encounter with contemporary globalisation. Fortunately, this encounter is ongoing, and is being negotiated in the context of a growing and broadening array of available knowledge, the reconfiguration of social and political forces in Africa, and the availability of technologies that not only contribute to domination and global divide, but can also play a role in mobilising emancipatory forces and disseminating useful knowledge. The significance of knowledge in this new era, its availability and its capacity for instant dissemination have all created new conditions that have implications for democratic struggles. We cannot only very quickly identify trends in the production and distribution of suffering and distress as part of social projects; we can make them available for analysis and action. Let us examine the substance and pattern of this distribution.

### **The Distribution of Suffering and Distress**

If there were illusions about the costs of development and transitions, it is perhaps the African nationalist leaders who harbored them in the boundless optimism and courage that the prospects of national independence carried. Outsiders, including the authors of United Nations documents as far back as 1951 knew there had to be pain and suffering:

There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustment. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who can not keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress. (United Nations, 1951; cited in Escobar, 1995:3).

On the other hand, a nationalist like the Nigerian Obafemi Awolowo (1960:314) in his discussion of Nigeria's development was more concerned about the promises of abundance and prosperity. Awolowo stated that: 'Our human and natural resources are great potentialities which, if properly organized will bring prosperity and orderly progress to our nation as well as to humanity'. The

problem with both positions is that they generalised too much. Neither of them pointed out that both the pain and suffering, and the prosperity and bounty, that they talked about were never evenly distributed and that different groups received different and uneven shares of these in the development process. The same observation applies to the neo-liberal theorists of adjustment economics, who recognised and accepted that structural adjustments in Africa in the seventies, eighties and nineties, should and must be painful, but argued that this pain must be borne by the over-subsidised non-disaggregated urban sectors (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999).

More significantly beyond the formal and official conventional data on development, there are indicators that tell us about incomes, productivity, sales of produce and extent of inputs and export sales, and others that benchmark misery and suffering that occur in the every day lives of many ordinary Africans. These include experiences such as the extent of rural and urban indebtedness, infant and female mortality rates, degradation of infrastructures, the extent of waste and destruction of products and produce through disease, poor storage facilities and the vagaries of nature such as drought and floods. There are still many others embedded in human relationships based on structures of inequality and oppression, and the conditions of injustice, wars and other forms of violence. These include wanton killings, mutilations and amputations, forced marriages, abductions, conscriptions and rapes. All of these continue to testify to the weight that ordinary poor Africans bear on the scales of suffering.

As we proceed with our discussions of the distribution of suffering and distress, let us remind ourselves of the fact that work around this area as it relates to the human condition and development is not completely new. We can cite for example the important contribution of Frantz Fanon in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*. Armatya Sen's story of Kader Mia, the young Muslim daily labourer who was killed by extremists because he went looking for work in the wrong neighborhood, is also an illustration of how the expression of personal suffering and distress can give rise to critical and far reaching scientific projects. Sen (1999:8) states:

The experience was devastating for me. It made me reflect, later on, on the terrible burden of narrowly defined identities, including those firmly based on communities and groups...But more immediately, it also pointed to the remarkable fact that economic unfreedom, in the form of extreme poverty, can make a person a helpless prey in the violation of other kinds of freedom. Kader Mia need not have gone to a hostile area in search of a little income in those terrible times had his family been able to survive without it.

Coming closer home, Mamdani's book (2001) on the larger social and political implications and lessons of the Rwanda genocide is an attempt to confront pain, suffering and distress not only in relation to the seemingly more abstract categories of justice and identity, but also in relation to the concrete expression of experiences of citizenship, nativism and colonialism. Of course, Mkandawire's recent paper (2001) on 'The Terrible Toll of Post-Colonial "Rebel Movements" in Africa', was more than an explanation of the violence against peasantry in Africa. It contained both a lamentation and profound anguish at the waste, devastation and distractions that these movements have unleashed mainly on African rural societies.

Given Africa's recent history, we could provide an endless list of materials that are devoted to the narratives of suffering and distress among ordinary peoples. But what is important is the lesson for our analyses and interventions, particularly as they relate to development. This is, that poverty provides a fertile terrain for the flowering of suffering and distress, and that the poor, often denied

power and privilege, and ravaged by disease and want, bear the brunt of its harvests. Without getting into the disputes about who the poor are, I am referring in this discussion to ‘...those peoples who combine low average incomes and assets, with considerable instability of incomes and employment along with insecurity of tenure to land and shelter and ... are extensively deprived of, or barred from access to basic services and infrastructures’ (Aina, 1997:57).

Africa remains one of the poorest regions of the world. According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Report on Assessment of Rural Poverty, Western and Central Africa, 2001, page 14:

SSA is one of the poorest regions in the world and poverty seems to be increasing, at least when measured by the poverty line of USD 1 per day and during the period for which incidence data are available (1987-98). By 1998, all developing regions together accounted for about 1.2 billion poor persons, amounting to 23.4% of the total population in these areas. Since 1990, both the absolute number of poor and their proportion of the total population seem to have declined. In SSA, on the contrary, the total number of poor has risen from 217 million to 302 million persons, and by 1998, the poverty incidence had reached 48.1% of the total population. SSA has the highest poverty incidence among all developing regions. While the incidence of poverty has declined since 1990 in all developing regions taken together, primarily due to progress in Asia, in SSA its incidence has continued to increase. The number of poor in all developing regions decreased during 1987-98 by 0.5% per year, in spite of a total population growth of about 1.5%. In sub-Saharan Africa, a reverse trend can be seen: poverty increased faster (by 3.3% per year) than the population (3.1%).

I have quoted the above passage extensively so as to bring out clearly the extent of the developmental challenges we face in Africa with regards to poverty. Africa’s poor are of course to be found in rural areas where they make up 75 percent of the poor in West and Central Africa (IFAD, 2001:v) and 73 percent in Eastern and Southern Africa (IFAD, 2002:9). Among the poor, we find hierarchies of vulnerability and domination, among groups such as women, the aged, children, and deprived and marginalised ethnic, racial and occupational minorities, on whom the scales of suffering and misery weigh more heavily. Amidst the disasters, problems and turbulence that have been the lot of Africa’s rural areas, namely wars, HIV/AIDS, famines, banditry and raids, floods and droughts, these more vulnerable groups have been at the bottom of the heap, always the first to be hardest hit and the last to receive sustained relief. They lose out and are invisible in the statistical aggregates and their stories are scarcely told. Yet, for any development process to be meaningful, relevant and valid, and to be truly emancipatory, it must address the plight and the conditions of these Africans, who constitute the continent’s majority.

### **Democratic Development: Towards an Emancipatory Agenda**

So far in this paper I have discussed how development in Africa is the outcome of an interaction between structures and choices that agents make in relation to their vested interests, the position of others and themselves, and how priorities are defined, perceived and pursued. I have pointed out the importance of the dominant agendas of significant actors at different periods. These agendas and social projects have often left out or reduced the importance of the concerns and agendas of those who are either less powerful or insufficiently organised and mobilised to be

where decisions are made. This has been the story of development around the continent for the greater part of the last forty years. It has been 'development' alienated from the interests and needs of the majority of Africans.

However from around 1992 to 1994, the continent has entered another phase of democratic struggles and transitions. This phase has very many elements including the 'empty shell' multi-party electoral politics that has not fundamentally changed the way most Africans are governed. We must however, not demean the many small victories of this emerging era. For instance, there is the opportunity to reclaim greater space for human rights and freedom of expression, which we see gradually emerging all over the continent. We must not deny the emergence of the opportunity to challenge impunity and question political infallibility. Neither must we demean the ever-expanding space for the expression of pluralism and diversity even in the contexts of constructing and reconstructing states. Above all, we must not demean the gradual return of emancipatory discourses, no longer indelibly implanted along unchangeable ideological divides defined by the Cold War, but defined rather by struggles with principles of emancipation that derive from our experiences of confronting monolithic and authoritarian politics and different forms of domination, fighting lack of transparency and official corruption and demand-making for development policies that are relevant and begin with our internal problems and our consensus on how they are to be solved.

It is in this regard that the notion of democratic development becomes central. I link democracy with development because in this age and era, they cannot be disconnected if we are to reclaim a development process that serves the ordinary African. Development without democracy has all the potential of being reduced to a process determined by the agendas of powerful groups, both internal and external, with the resources to buy, cajole, ignore and marginalise other less powerful actors. Democracy is perhaps the only safeguard and source of defence through the building or enacting of legal/institutional frameworks that define the rights and obligations of all actors (both individual and collective) based on mutually agreed and accepted principles.

Democracy in this sense goes beyond purely seasonal electoral contests to determine pseudo-representation. It is the building and reclamation of the rule of just law and political cultures of dialogue, debates and negotiations between different groups, individuals and institutions. It is about the reconciliation and resolution of different and divergent interests and conflicts based not on naked force and population size but rather on the fundamentals of why groups have come together. In Africa today, this new democracy of nations struggling with development and other priorities require the renewal of national social contracts and charters. It requires a new participatory constitutionalism beyond those manufactured at independence (Adejumobi, 1998; Ihonvbere, 2000; Oloka-Onyango, 2001).

Democratic development must be a process through which Africa must feed, clothe, house and educate Africans in reasonably good health. African societies must reclaim their wealth-generation and sustaining capacity. They must promote plenty and ensure and organise access and opportunities for all their peoples. They must put in place the basis for the renewal and transformation of institutions, productive systems and technologies. Africans must find incentives within Africa to mobilise and encourage the necessary changes such as new and transformational leadership, the reclamation of a culture of public service and stewardship, the promotion of tolerance for difference and the putting in place incentives and rewards for merit and service. The goals must include the advancement of the individual and collective well being as a minimum element of the new social contract. This is more than growing the per capita income. It includes

the material and other elements of human development in terms of access to basic needs, peace, security, good health and the knowledge and capacities to function in the emerging new world. All of these will however not be given to Africans. They will require organisation, mobilisation and regional and international solidarity in the pursuit of democratic change. It will require bringing back political struggles.

## Notes

1. See the discussions of the different dimensions of the democratisation agendas and projects in Africa in the collection of essays, *Democratisation Processes in Africa: Problems and Prospects*, Eshetu Chole and Jibrin Ibrahim, editors, Dakar, CODESRIA Books, 1995.

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