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## ***“For Many are Called but Few are Chosen”: Globalisation and Popular Disenchantment in Africa***

### **Introduction**

Defined as the compression of time and space or ‘the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa’ (Giddens, 1990:63-78), globalisation is seen as a process of accelerated flows of capital, consumer goods, people, and products of culture and knowledge (especially in the form of electronic audiovisual images) (cf. O’Brien, 1993; Appadurai, 1996; Thompson, 1999; Geschiere & Meyer, 1998; Gray, 1998). While international flows can be traced back to when humankind first attempted the domestication of time and space, it is generally agreed that the rapid advances in communication and information technologies of the last 20 years have had the greatest impact on the process.

It has been argued that due to the emergence of the information super-highway, the way wealth is created has been changed remarkably (Jussawalla, 1988). There has been a shift from real cash to electronic ‘cash’ and electronic payment systems, which has radically transformed the way banking and commerce are conducted (Moore, 1997/98:277-278; Lynch, 1997/98:295-296). In almost all information societies, the information sector, whose function is ‘to satisfy the general demand for information facilities and services’, ‘is growing much faster than the overall economy’ (Moore, 1997/98:272). And experts believe that ‘The long-term success of many commercial organisations will be determined by their capacity to use and manage information to reduce costs, to extend their range of services, to reduce risk and to become more sensitive to customer demands’ (Moore, 1997/98:278).

However, others have pointed out that the rush to create new information and communication technologies is to a large extent driven by the irresistible drive to accumulate and to maintain economic, political and cultural privileges and advantage (cf. Schiller, 1983). With regard to the Internet for example, some maintain that if the business world is promoting it, ‘their motive is to create a sense of need’ for their products. ‘Once this perceived need is cultivated, some organizations then require a membership or annual subscription fee for the information or service that you initially accessed without cost’ (Awake, 1997:8). A tendency which has led others to wonder if the Information

Superhighway can ever truly become as available and affordable as is fashionable to claim, given the fact that information as commodity and power, is often to be paid for and to be controlled (Lee, 1995:2; Hamelink, 1995:16). And if it were indeed to become available and affordable, 'the question of the quality of the information' on the Internet would still be raised, for an easily accessible and relatively cheap Internet could boast of little more than 'information rubbish' or 'scrap opinion' (Becker, 1996:11). Already now 'there is ... an awful lot of junk, trash, and trivia' on the Internet (Hamelink, 1996:19). The debate is, however, open. But Africa is yet to *really* experience such technology, the attractions of which are increasingly highlighted by local communication and development scholars (cf. Masmoudi, 1995; Nkwi, 1995; Uche, 1997; Mukasa, 1998; Ouma-Odera, 1998; Berger, 1998; Braman, 1998; Ras-Work, 1998; Nyamnjoh, 2000). Could the relative lack of this technology explain, in part, the continent's current record of accounting for less than 5% of the volume of international trade? To Moore and most, there is no doubt, for 'technological change is a major contributor to this process of economic development' (Moore, 1997/98:273).

The growth of the information superhighway has revitalised debate on international flows of news, information and cultural products. While some view it as rapidly forwarding the globalisation process, others sympathetic to the predicament of those financially and psychologically incapable of achieving these sophisticated technologies, see their development as fostering media and cultural imperialism (cf. Van Audenhove, 1998; Golding & Harris, 1997). However, it is worth noting that 'Globalisation does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenization or Americanization', as different societies tend to be quite creative in their appropriation or consumption of the materials of modernity (Appadurai, 1996:17; Warnier, 1999; Gray, 1998). That notwithstanding, it is apparent that Third World countries stand to 'bear the brunt of the risk and instability associated with the exploitation of information industry technologies and markets' (Melody, 1987:26). Thus the argument that the new telecommunication technologies have made dependency in, and stereotypical news coverage of, Africa a *fait accompli* (Uche, 1988, 1997; Okigbo, 1995, 1997; Paterson, 1998). Nevertheless, many are those who argue that these revolutionary media technologies are rapidly shrinking the world into Marshall McLuhan's prophesied 'global village'. Jussawalla observes that 'the proliferation of global information systems and the rapid transmission of data flows across national boundaries' have rendered the nation-state meaningless and raised the prospects of the eventual creation of a global 'republic of technology' (Jussawalla, 1988:11-12). A view and optimism shared by America<sup>1</sup> and other leading industrialised countries – the G7. The German government for example, in its position paper on the 'global information society', argues that advances in information and communication technologies have made knowledge mobile world-wide, geographic location and time restrictions to lose

their meaning, and the world to grow closer together (Nord-Sud Aktuell, 1996:835). Wriston argues that with the advent of an information super-highway, human rights or democratic freedoms will not be denied people in remote places. For 'A global village will have global customs' (Wriston, 1994:20). And this will be made possible by the 'McDonaldization' of societies the world over through emphasis on efficiency, calculability, predictability and control (Ritzer, 1996). For 'the information society' (cf. Moore, 1997/98) is synonymous with George Ritzer's 'McDonaldized' society (cf. Ritzer, 1996).

The tendency is to claim that these interactive technologies offer more control over the media by consumers, and to represent media audiences as having a greater opportunity to choose and consume what they want when they want. These assumptions are clearly euphoric and much of the optimism quite unfounded. There is need for careful ethnographic research of how different cultures in different regions of the world actually experience and relate to these new technologies and their ramifications. Hence my call for mitigated euphoria (cf. Nyamnjoh, 2000).

Although its standard-bearers have been the information and culture industries, discussions on and about globalisation have tended to be dominated by its economic dimensions. Much emphasis is placed on the internationalisation and integration of economic activities and its implications for the authority and sovereignty of nation-states, especially as global capitalism means global power for multinational corporations, and calls for a new way of public governance. While some see in globalisation a requiem for the nation-state, others believe that the state will continue to be relevant, but must work in conjunction with non-state actors to facilitate trade and investment. Such private and international agencies include multinational corporations, NGOs and international inter-governmental institutions such as the UN, World Bank, IMF, WTO and also other international standard-setting bodies which are often unofficial, informal and not clearly recognised as such. This challenges the idea of the self-regulating free market economy, for as Thompson argues, [big] business needs public support and regulation as 'an insurance against the full vicissitudes of a turbulent and potentially self-destructive system' of global capitalism. Especially as [big] 'Business does not want to go about its activity totally unprotected'. In other words, the 'free flow' of capital needs an ordered global environment to function properly and sustainably. It needs 'public governance of the world trading and investment system', for 'A pure free market economy is so fragile, volatile and vulnerable that the implications of its operation on a truly global scale could be disastrous' (Thompson, 1999:142). Thus, Thompson sees 'a modified minimal multilateralism based upon the strengthening trilateral relationship between North America, the European Union and Japan' as representing 'the most likely prospect (but not the only one) for the effective governance of the world economic system' (Thompson, 1999:144-150).

These concerns imply that globalisation is not all about 'unregulated flows' or the disappearance of political and social boundaries as enthusiasts of the global village or the global republic of technology seem to imply (cf. Appadurai, 1996; Geschiere & Meyer, 1998; Gray, 1998; Nyamnjoh, 2000). It is a 'deeply and starkly inegalitarian' process (Golding and Harris, 1997:7) that still favours a privileged minority as it compounds the impoverishment of the majority through closures and containment.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly 'We are witnessing a convergence of economic thinking and policy as well as technologies', with the growing power of multinational corporations, and 'their abilities to dictate the terms of competition' through hostile takeovers, mega-mergers, or 'by forcing weaker players out of the game' (Murdock, 1994:4-6; McChesney, 1998; Gray, 1998). Their objective is to control not only global markets, but also global consciousness, by encouraging 'the emergence of a small number of monopoly concerns which command a disproportionate share' of the global market (cf. Thomas & Lee, 1994; Murdock, 1982, 1994; McChesney, 1998; Gray, 1998). As Murdock argues in connection with the media and information market, 'the new media mogul empires' are 'empires of image and of the imagination'. 'They mobilise a proliferating array of communications technologies to deliver a plurality of cultural products across a widening range of geographical territories and social spaces, and are directed from the centre by proprietors who rule their domains with shifting mixtures of autocracy, paternalism and charisma' (Murdock, 1994:3). The tendency is to mistake plurality for diversity, oblivious of the possibility that an appearance of plenty could well conceal a poverty of perspectives (Murdock, 1994:5).

While capital is enabled to 'seek competitive advantage and the most secure and largest returns by roaming the globe for cheap but efficient production locations' (Thompson, 1999:40), labour is denied the same privilege.<sup>3</sup> If capital can search the globe for competitive advantage, why cannot labour? In their editorial to a special issue of *Media Development* on 'Migrants, refugees and the right to communicate', Pradip Thomas and Philip Lee highlight the predicament of migrants and refugees in a world where globalisation seems to generate an obsession with boundaries and belonging. In EU countries where 'the dominant accent and concern is the protection from rather than the protection of refugees and asylum seekers' (Thomas & Lee, 1998:2), no amount of integration appears enough to qualify immigrants for citizenship or to limit the powers of individual states as critical players in this area (cf. Bhabha, 1998). In the words of an immigrant in Germany, 'It doesn't matter if you've read Goethe, wear lederhosen and do a Bavarian dance, they'll still treat you as an immigrant' (cited in Thomas & Lee, 1998:2). In general:

Migrants and refugees, who for one reason or another, attempt to flee from various insecurities economic downturns, impoverishment, growing gaps between the rich and poor, conflicts over national and personal identities, civil strife – are among the primary victims of globalisation. Enforced migrations often affect people who are vulnerable in the first

place. The danger of 'once a refugee, always a refugee' becoming a reality, is born out by the increasingly large numbers of people who live all their lives in refugee camps without any hope of permanent settlement.

Where does one flee to in a world which is closing its borders to refugees and asylum seekers? And equally importantly, what does a person flee to? From a situation characterised by total negation to one where there is the possibility of freedom? More likely from relative insecurity to relative security although in the present context of xenophobic nationalism in Europe and elsewhere, even minimum rights are by no means guaranteed (Thomas & Lee, 1998:2).

The tightening of immigration conditions in the West and other vibrant centres of accumulation, is clear evidence that labour is not given the same opportunity to globalise as is capital. Although it must be added that not all labour gets confined in the same way, with 'the overwhelming black poor' being the most discriminated against by Western politicians keen on ensuring that the advantages gained by their peoples are maintained (Seabrook, 2000:22). Thus, while even mediocre labour from the North usually finds its way to the South at Western salary rates, labour from the South is both devalued and confined by stiff immigration policies in the North. This, and other factors discussed in this paper, make globalisation only marginally beneficial to the South, if at all. Far from breaking down boundaries and structures of inequality as widely claimed, globalisation is yet to prove that it is not simply a new way of perpetuating the same age-old divisions that have polarised societies and the world for centuries. 'It looks as if, in a world characterised by flows, a great deal of energy is devoted to controlling and freezing them: grasping the flux often actually entails a politics of "fixing" – a politics which is, above all, operative in struggles about the construction of identities' (Geschiere & Meyer, 1998:605).

This paper takes a critical look at globalisation from the standpoint of the African experience of the West. It discusses 'modernisation', 'development' and 'globalisation' as different labels for the same basic process or mission. This mission is that of freeing the African of his natural and cultural *Africanness*, and inviting him or her to partake of the 'standardised, routinised, streamlined and global' consumer culture, of which McDonalds, Coca-Cola, CNN and satellite entertainment television are harbingers (Golding, 1994:7). However, granted the level of poverty in Africa, only an elite few do qualify (largely through corruption, embezzlement and abuse of state power and office) to consume first- or second-hand, for global availability is not synonymous with global affordability. The majority of people have to content themselves with what trickles down (in hand-me-down or worn versions) to them in the ghettos and villages (if at all), from relatives and patrons at the centre of power and resources. In the face of such inequities, it is difficult to envisage how ordinary Africans can relate to the global consumer culture in any other terms but the frustration and disenchantment it brings them.<sup>4</sup> Their experience of globalisation is the 'misery and incoherence of life in the suburbs' and

villages; 'the collapse of public transport, state-run educational and public health services; the breakdown of electricity and sewage systems; the serious degradation of ... infrastructure and the sheer abuse of power by self-serving functionaries' (Devisch, 1999a:5). This notwithstanding, the present paper focuses not on cultural resistance, *bricolage* or *métissage* (cf. Appadurai, 1996; Geschiere & Meyer, 1998; Warnier, 1999; Nyamnjoh, 1999a), but on the processes and effects of co-optation or assimilation of the elite few by consumer capitalism, and how these elite few, in turn, use their consuming foreign as an identity, and as a source of prestige, status and power.

In Africa, modernity or development, since contact with Europe, has traditionally been conceived, presented and pursued as something induced from without; a process that favours imitation over originality. Such a concept of modernity to Africans has entailed self-denial, self-abandonment, or self-humiliation, and the adoration of most things Western – packaged and presented as the norm in a variety of ways, both crude and subtle. Salvation, comfort or self-betterment has been seen as something possible only with Westernisation, as African civilisations or cultures are perceived as a blockage to progress to be crusaded against at every level by every means.

Such devaluation of Africans, their institutions and their cultures, has meant the institutionalisation of consumerism and the enshrinement of dependency by a Westernised elite who have seen in consuming Western a source of power and identity. The result of this has been disillusionment at the grassroots, especially among the rural populations, who have been forced to mark time with so-called 'African traditions' for the gratification of the powerful. This is a situation which explains the current stalling democratic transition and diminishes hope that the process could crystallise in a veritable culture of participatory democracy.

In this paper my focus is on modernity, leadership, marginalisation and disillusionment in Africa as they relate to the phenomenon of globalisation. The paper examines the pretensions, phoneyess, humbug and sores that underlie the veneer of African modernity, particularly among the elites and their sad counterparts, the underclasses (both rural and urban). At the end of the paper, one may well ask whether or not there is hope for the future? What ways forward do we have to the reconstruction of the plundered African heritage? What hope for participatory democracy, social justice, and the empowerment of the powerless? The vision is indeed sombre, the sense of despondency profound. But, whatever the imagined future for Africa, I hope this paper provides some insight, provocative or not, into the downtrodden and forgotten bulk of the *darkened* continent – their complex web of despair, frustration, paradox and hope. The paper calls on all who have Africa's interests at heart, to listen to the heartfelt cry of 'The Disillusioned African' (Nyamnjoh, 1995) as an incentive to set about the task of 'redeeming the time' and of building a better future for a continent side-stepped by globalisation.

These themes are articulated in six parts, namely: (i) modernity as cultural superiority; (ii) modernity as consumerism and dependency; (iii) the modern leadership; (iv) the predicament of the rural and urban poor; (v) social classes; and (vi) by way of conclusion, the future of democracy in an Africa trapped by the globalisation of poverty.

### **(i) Modernity as Cultural Superiority**

Western cultures have been forced onto the peoples of Africa as 'the culmination of all human progress' (Ajayi, 1966:606), a model to be followed without equivocation or reservation. Supposedly universalistic and achievement-oriented, Western cultures are expected to penetrate the backward-looking cultures with their values through a uni-linear process of inter-cultural communication (Himmelstrand et al., 1994:3). In other words, there is no question why the rules of existence elaborated in the West, could not be applied in exactly the same way, in other parts of the world with different backgrounds and experiences. By presenting science as a predicament-free exercise, proponents of modernity have been able to argue in favour of unilinearity. They advocate social change in non-Western societies, and consider as progress everything new – from blue jeans and chewing gum to commodified sex and swear words diffused by Hollywood or Western tourism in search of 'the three s's: sun, sea and sex' (cf. Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1997:63-64) – as long as the new is the uncritical reproduction of the 'McDonaldised' and 'Cocacolisised' versions of society perfected in the West and spearheaded by America (cf. Ritzer, 1996; Roach, 1996; Warnier, 1999).

Thus as a paradigm, such a perspective presents development as something exogenously induced (Golding, 1974); a process that requires the sacrifice of creativity and originality. Development to the Africans thus entails self-denial, self-evacuation, or self devaluation, and the glorification of everything Western. Salvation, comfort or self-betterment is seen as something possible only with Westernisation, as every other civilisation or culture is perceived as constrictive and conservative – a crushing opponent of progress (Lerner, 1964:54-5) that must be countered with the assistance of the media and culture industries as 'magic multipliers' of knowledge, information and propaganda (Schramm, 1964:246-7). Africans have thus been invited to devalue themselves, their institutions and their cultures by cultivating an uncritical empathy for Western economic, cultural and political values which are glorified beyond impeachment. They are presented as having little chance of progress as Africans or blacks, and invited to intensify their assumed craving to become like the whites in Europe and North America. The entire paradigm is impatient with alternative systems of thought and practice, and seeks mono-culturalism, by imposing the Western consumer outlook and approach as the one best way of achieving betterment (cf. Laburthe-Tolra & Warnier, 1993:15-52; Warnier, 1999). Modernity as hegemonic 'modes of social life and organisation' of

European origin (cf. Giddens, 1990) thus poses as a giant compressor determined to crush every other civilisation in order to reduce them to the model of the industrialised West. As Seabrook puts it:

... Europe has contributed spectacularly to the global disturbance of regions and peoples, has, since colonial times, been an agent of vast uprootings, has exported its own migratory spirit, has sought to snuff out all alternative ways of answering need, has filled the world with economic migrants, many of them from within its own borders.

The economies of almost every country in the world have been influenced by Western international financial organisations, by transnational companies, by the diktats of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, by 'democratic institutions', in which those whose lives are wrecked by them have no say (Seabrook, 2000:22).

This is a model which mistakes the globalisation of capitalism for development by ignoring the growing polarisation and marginalisation of peoples and societies that result from the process (Amin, 1997a:38-40). The model is quite oblivious of the fact that increasing co-existence and seeming competition at airports and city centres between Western consumer goods and tourist art from the remotest corners of Africa (cf. Davis, 1999) are hardly enough to credit global capitalism with harmonising 'seemingly disparate and incompatible zones of accumulation and production' (Surin, 1995:1191-6). Much remains to be done, even in the domain of African art (despite its impressive export record), to promote the type of meaningful and mutually rewarding encounters between African artisans and their Western customers, that Elizabeth Davis discusses in her paper on the 'Metamorphosis in the culture market of Niger' (Davis, 1999).

Modernity as cultural superiority has often implied, on the part of its theorists, paying a deaf ear to empirical evidence and confusing ideal types with reality; a tendency just as true of its latest label, globalisation, as Thompson points out in his introductory essay to a UNESCO collection on the topic (1999:140). Thus, some Westerners, even scholars, have often given the impression that what they want of Africa and Africans are stereotypes, not meaningful knowledge. When one reads some of the Western literature on slavery and colonialism in Africa, the question usually arises if there was not a sort of conspiracy between ideology and science to justify Western penetration, devaluation and devastation of Africa, the Africans (cf. Chinweizu, 1987), and their once enslaved kin in the diaspora (cf. Hare, 1991; Woodson, 1990; Wilson, 1993; Maduno, 1994). Belief in one's superiority or the inferiority of others is seldom informed by science; yet even though such beliefs are often repugnant to reason and common sense, in the 21st century a good number of Westerners continue to think of Africa in tantalisingly tarzanic and essentialist terms. Similarly, a good number of books on Africa today published by Western scholars would seldom pass the scrutiny of rigorous science (cf. Bryceson, 1999; Young, 1999).

Instead of recognising the fact that 'people are fiercely proud of their heritage, language, customs, religion and traditional ways of life' (Halloran, 1993:4), some Europeans set about suppressing African pride, creativity and self-esteem through physical conquest, coercion and persuasion, as Vernon February's brilliant study of the 'coloured' stereotype in apartheid literature in South Africa demonstrates (February, 1981). There was, even by social scientists, 'the unconditional condemnation of African culture[s]' and 'the unconditional affirmation of the colonisers' world view' (Nnoli, 1980:2). The African as 'a primitive savage', was judged fit to be studied not under Sociology, but under Ethnology and Anthropology as the science of 'other' [meaning lesser] societies (cf. Mafeje, 1998). That ethnological studies of Africa were Eurocentric, can be seen in the fact that when Western scholars referred to the societies they studied as 'nonliterate', 'nonstate', 'simple', 'traditional' or 'primitive', this was done in contrast to, or in comparison with the Western societies which they saw as 'literate', 'centralised', 'complex', 'modern' or 'civilised'. It was more of scholarship by analogy, than seeking to understand African societies in historical perspective (cf. Mamdani, 1996:12-13). Rejecting, a priori, African experiences, cultures, social values and political organisation, offered scholars of modernity the opportunity to analyse African efforts at development from the insensitive position of a supposedly value-free social science informed by Western experiences exclusively.

Thus even though 'multiethnicity is a quality of all societies', the Western bias of the anthropologists led to the imposition of a false dichotomy between the 'tribal' societies of Africa, and their 'ethnic' or 'national' opposites of the developed world (Cohen, 1978:399). Some scholars have argued that contemporary notions of 'tribe' and 'tribalism', like many customs and traditions in Africa today, were an invention of colonialism (cf. Ranger, 1983; Vail, 1989), an 'illusion' (Southall, 1997), a 'false consciousness' (cf. Hadjo'r, 1987:60-65) with little or no indigenous root, fostered in order to divide and rule, both in the colony and postcolony. Those, like anthropologists, who had adopted 'tribal' perspectives, were deluded and thus became, consciously or unconsciously, the agents of oppression or cultural devaluation of Africa (cf. Mafeje, 1998). Although scholarship has since evolved on the issue of ethnicity and tribalism in Africa (cf. Vail, 1989; Berman, 1998), there remains a noted reluctance in certain circles to graduate from a perception of African ethnicity as an atavism, or from the view that Africans, unlike Europeans, are *essentially* tribalistic, doctrines of ethnic and racial cleansing generated in Yugoslavia and by the far-right in France, Germany, Belgium, England, Austria and the rest of Europe notwithstanding (cf. Geschiere & Nyamnjoh, 2000; Seabrook, 2000).

The perpetuation of Western cultures as the standard of measure not only dispossessed Africans of their own cultures, it infantilised and dis-empowered them by forcing them to learn afresh, under the guidance of condescending and overbearing Western overlords, new ways of seeing, doing and being. The

undermining, marginalising and distorting of African cultures were intended to minimise the empowerment that Africans and their communities could draw from these cultures to fight domination (Ngubane, 1996:4-7; Biko, 1996). This, as Franz Fanon has argued, created the myth of the inferior native and a justification for colonialism. The Westerners, by alienating the Africans from their traditions through 'cultural estrangement', reinforced in the Africans self-hatred and a profound sense of inferiority that compelled them 'to lighten their darkness' for white gratification (Fanon, 1967a:169). Skin lightening creams and culture-bleaching products were made available to blacks as if to suggest that 'black cannot be the ideal of beauty' (Hamelink, 1983:2), or that black cultural achievements could not be pace-setters. Today skin-lightening products manufactured mainly in Britain and USA continue to be 'smuggled into Africa in a multi-billion rand underground industry' (Busiswe Mosieman, 1999:16) – a pointer to how whiteness remains internalised as an ideal to which blacks must aspire willy-nilly. By painting white as the ultimate judgement of all aesthetics, good and beauty, the black man and woman are made to understand that they are far from being equal to their white counterparts, and that they can be salvaged only through a pursuit of the liberating cultures of the West. As Fonlon has argued, from the first day of contact:

The whiteman strove, might and main, to despoil the black on his own continent, strove to keep him down lest he should rise and become a rival. And to make this new implacable thralldom more complete, they decided to enslave his soul, to inculcate into his mind, through raillery and contempt the idea that he was inherently despicable and inferior and that all excellence, all nobility, all that is beautiful and sublime was white. And thus they were able to make him detest himself and the works of his hands (Fonlon, 1967:20).

The consequence: today, in every country South of the Sahara, thousands of black men and women strive to develop a lighter complexion with assorted skin-poisoning, cancer-causing, mercury- and hydroquinone-ridden toners and soaps, and have devised hair-styles (including the wearing of imported natural and artificial white-like hair) that bring them nearer to whiteness, the ideal. Thanks also to cultural bleaching facilitated by the modern culture industries and mass media of the West (e.g. films, recorded music, video cassettes, specialised magazines, children's comics and electronic games, radio, TV, the press, and books) blacks have been made to understand that with the white skin and Western cultures goes all sorts of advantages. Whiteness has come to symbolise power, authority, status, and above all, the good life even for the most fragile or the most mediocre of whites.

Dervla Murphy, in her book, *Cameroon with Egbert*, gives us an idea, through the person of a Cameroonian, George Charles Akuro, of how the feeling of inferiority, self-hatred and the yearning for most things Western in order to be seen and rewarded as a progressive, are articulated at an individual level:

'Cameroon is *very bad*', insisted George. 'All these bush people, they don't know how to live – they are backward stupid people! In Hamburg I have everything – big home, big car, deep freeze, fridge, cine-camera, television, stereo-system, swimming-pool for my kids. See! I show you!'

He drew a thick wallet of photographs from his briefcase and the children crowded eagerly around to marvel yet again at his achievements. There was George, leaning nonchalantly on the roof of a Mercedes by the open driving door – and George removing a silver-foil-wrapped dish from a face-level microwave oven – and George posing by an open refrigerator taller than himself and packed with colourful goodies – and so on. There were dozens of photographs, all of a professionally high standard and looking remarkably like advertisements for the objects illustrated. [...]

Watching the children staring with awed incomprehension at these emanations from another world, I remembered those who are working hard and patiently, without publicity or luxury funding, to introduce 'appropriate technologies' to rural Africa. Ease of communication, when it means bright pictures of the enviable unattainable circulating in Cameroonian villages, is not necessarily beneficial (Murphy, 1989:56).

The persistent craving to be Western or to go-West in Africa today attests to such exogenously induced self-hatred and inferiority. Perhaps what Ali Mazrui has referred to as 'Africa's culture of tolerance' or its 'short memory of hate' (Mazrui, 1994:134), can be explained by this Western devaluation of the African cultural identities that has made of the Africans 'people more sinned against than sinning' (Mazrui, 1994:134), people keener to forgive and forget than to exact restitution and rehabilitation. Not even apartheid and its monstrous indignities would push Africans to go beyond 'truth and reconciliation' with those who for decades debased and violated their humanity with little compunction. As president of South Africa's post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Archbishop Desmond Tutu acknowledged this when he wrote: 'We have been humbled and deeply touched by the nobility and generosity of spirit of those who, despite so much pain and anguish, have amazed the world by their willingness to forgive the perpetrators of all these dastardly deeds of darkness' sponsored by apartheid (Tutu, 1996:v).

Justifications for such sins against Africa were usually in the form of assumptions to the effect that African cultures and traditions are incompatible with development (cf. Kabou, 1991). Yet more and more, we are overwhelmed with indications from Asian experiences (e.g. Japan, South Korea and China) that so-called 'traditional cultures' need not necessarily be 'modernised' for there to be economic development (cf. Gray, 1998:55-60). There is 'evidence that a modern economic system is also reconcilable with other than European-North American values and social structures' (Kunczik, 1993:47-48), and that the fruit of scientific discovery need not be confused with its domestication in the culture of its first consumers. Unlike Asia (the Orient) which the West, upon initial contact, credited with some degree of civilisation and therefore opted for cultural interpenetration, Africa (the Dark Continent) was considered virgin ground in matters cultural, with little to boast of but savagery

and babyishness. Thus instead of cultural interpenetration, the West went for wholesale cultural conversion (cf. Brycession, 1999), and if it has succeeded more with the modern elite, this by no means implies only they were targeted.

## (ii) Modernity as Consumerism and Dependency

By defining development in terms of an excruciating craving for Western institutions, cultures and products, Western advocates have lured and/or coerced the Africans, their cultures and creativity to become consumed by the giant compressors of the West. The ultimate effect being, as Soyinka has so aptly observed, that Africans are encouraged 'to develop an incurable dependency syndrome and consume themselves to death'; for the consumerist culture propagated in the name of development can only guarantee productivity at home in the West by vigorously exporting itself to Africa and the rest of the Third World (Soyinka, 1994a:209). And thus capitalism as a way of life cannot leave the Africans free to perform their work at home, nor their duty in the world (Fanon, 1967a:78; Amin, 1997b:41-41). The outcome, Soyinka argues, is that peoples of different cultures, often of poorer societies, 'are inducted into this unequal exchange'; and 'feeding the foreign consumerist machine becomes a way of life for countries whose consumer habits hitherto trailed an umbilical cord from their productive technologies, however, rudimentary, and were indeed rooted in the totality of the nation's culture.' Youths, mothers, values and tastes are all victims, ravaged by the elite few of the consumer club:

... the self-respecting youth dare not be seen without a Walkman. The hybrid shuts out the world and enters another world, so wrapped up in that world that he sometimes steps into the gutter or fails to hear the warning sounds of a speeding vehicle and crosses the road at a fatal instant. Mothers are encouraged to get their children hooked on powdered milk, mashed food substitutes, the so-called baby nutrients. Toiletries and other forms of body enhancement are now legitimized only by their appearance in air-conditioned super-markets; the traditional unguents are deemed uncivilized; the marketplaces where they normally preside are uncultured (Soyinka, 1994a:209-210).

Colonialism succeeded in creating the myth of the Westerner as 'superman' or omniscient by whom the desperate African was to be teleguided in every sphere of life, even to the point of aiding and abetting the very deconstruction of his own humanity – with the negative consequence being the creation of 'a pathological case of xenophilia', by bringing Africans to value things Western 'not for their efficacy but simply because of their foreignness' (Nyang, 1994:434),<sup>5</sup> and to measure development 'more by the capacity to consume imported Western goods than by the capacity to produce local equivalents' (Rowlands, 1995:119). Being human would be measured also by how much of a patchwork of whiteness one had succeeded to render oneself, through consumption of second-hand white hair, skin-bleaching creams, white dress codes, white food and eating habits, and ultimately, the white body.

This consumerism and the power it brings to its disciples at the periphery in relation to their fellow countrymen and women, it must be echoed, are limited to a minority. While global capitalism caters for the needs of investors, advertisers, and the affluent consumers of the world as a whole, this tends to be a substantial portion of the population in the developed West, but only a distinct minority in the underdeveloped South (McChesney, 1998:6). Hence Amin's argument that, unlike in the industrialised West where there is a good chance that modernisation, development or globalisation could accelerate homogenisation of some kind (Amin, 1980:31-2), in underdeveloped and heavily plundered Africa, it is only by marginalising the masses that the power elite are able to afford the 'growing income' that encourages it to adopt Western models of consumption, the extension of which 'guarantees the profitability of the luxury production sector and strengthens the social, cultural, ideological, and political integration of the privileged classes' (Amin, 1980:138). An argument echoed by Sharp (1998) and the Comaroffs (1999) in relation to post apartheid South Africa, where structural inequalities are yet to be resolved in a way that benefits more than just a black elite by a state that has opted to play according to the diktats of global capitalism. As the Comaroffs put it:

There is widespread evidence of an uneasy fusion of enfranchisement and exclusion, hope and hopelessness; of a radically widening chasm between rich and poor; of the effort to realize modern utopias by decidedly postmodern means. Gone is any official-speak of an egalitarian socialist future, of work-for-all, of the welfare state envisioned in the Freedom Charter that, famously, mandated the struggle against the *ancien regime*. Gone, too, are the critiques of the free market and of bourgeois ideology once voiced by the antiapartheid movements, their idealism re-framed by the perceived reality of global economic forces ... (Comaroffs, 1999:19).

Thus, while a small but bustling black elite can today wallow in the conspicuous consumption of prized commodities such as houses, cars, TVs, cellphones and jacuzzis, most ordinary South Africans who are still trapped in shacks, shantytowns, joblessness, poverty and uncertainty, can only marvel at the 'indecent speed and ... little visible exertion' with which the black elite have come by their riches and prosperity. These inequities have given rise to the belief 'that it is only by magical means, by consuming others, that people may enrich themselves in these perplexing time', and consequently, to a resurgence in accusations of witchcraft and zombification, and to the scapegoating of immigrants – *makwerekwere*, whose readiness, like zombies, to provide devalued labour is seen as compounding the disenchantment of the autochthonous populations in the face of rapidly diminishing prosperity in South Africa (Comaroffs, 1999:22-26).

In Zaire (current Democratic Republic of Congo), getting involved in the *dollarised* diamond economy as an alternative to collapsed state structures, seems to create more problems than it solves among villagers who have come to believe that 'to be considered in Zaire, you got to have money!' With some

going even further to assert that 'you need money to be considered in the eyes of God, for God only recognizes the rich.' (De Boeck, 1998:793). Thus driven by desperation to capture and tame the wild, unpredictable and ambivalent diamonds and dollars, the young *bana Lunda* male who are at the heart of this economy, are ready to sacrifice (by means of sorcery and otherwise) their work power and productivity, their youth, strength and beauty, their fertility and sexual prowess, and their friends or family members. Diamonds and dollars 'totally isolate one and invert the normal ties of solidarity and reciprocity into the destructive internal mechanisms of redistribution by sorcery. The longing or hunger for dollars and diamonds is ... like an incurable festering sore which re-opens every time one runs out of money'; which happens pretty often since diamond dollars tend to 'evaporate', to be wasted away on beer, cigarettes and women ('economy of ejaculation') – 'uncontrolled and wild flow of money and commodities' 'that does not correspond to accepted patterns of self-realization' (De Boeck, 1998: 789-799).

For being a very restricted club, global capitalism is attracting its fair share of opportunists and gatecrashers from among the side-stepped, not least in Africa. Today 'the Nigerian-based letter scam' and the Cameroonian 'feymenia' are wreaking havoc all over the business world (from the USA, through Europe, to South East Asia), making as many victims as there are men and women hungry enough for 'a quick buck' to be able to risk a little fortune.<sup>6</sup> Known locally as '4-1-9' (after the Nigerian penal code reference to fraud schemes), the Nigerian letter scam operates from Lagos and other centres of accumulation in Africa (e.g. Johannesburg) and the world. Their strategy, similar to that of the Cameroonian 'feymen' and Liberian fraudsters, consists in luring unsuspecting businessmen (both local and foreign) with fake deals, and then robbing them, as Elliott Sylvester explains:

The scam is dangerous but ingeniously simple, as Van der Westhuizen [police Superintendent of the commercial crime branch in Johannesburg] explained.

A company or individual receives a letter by mail, usually from a fictitious Johannesburg [or any other] security company. 'In the letter, the sender claims to be in possession of large sums of money from a foreign government which overspent on its arms budget. They then ask the victim to come to the country and help move the money to a safe account. But first it has to be cleaned.' It is during the 'cleaning' process that the victims are fleeced.

The fraudsters set up dummy companies and show the businessmen the money, usually sprinkled with a white powder, claiming it is marked and requires a special cleaning fluid. 'They show the victim how to clean the money with a fluid but then tell him they have run out of it and will cost about \$100 000 to buy more,' Van der Westhuizen said.

The 'special fluid' is often just coloured water or, in some cases, a weak cooldrink mixture but, faced with a 30% commission for helping the fraudsters, victims hand over the money in the belief they will make even more. Once money changes hands, the fraudsters disappear.

The financial crimes division of the US Treasury Department has established a special 'Operation 4-1-9' unit to deal with the problem. Its investigators have found that hundreds of millions of dollars are being lost each year (Elliot, 1999:23).

It is naive to imagine that any amount of policing could eliminate these alternative ploys of seeking to make it, within a global capitalist structure obsessed with closures and inequalities. While such scams eventually become a way of life, a business of some sort, one must not lose sight of the fact that the assimilation and exclusion logic of global capitalism is largely to blame for them in the first place.

The majority of Africans, on the other hand, are not as smart as the Nigerian '4-1-9' or the Cameroonian 'feymen', so seldom come close to escaping the misery imposed on them. Thus, only the blanketing misery of the masses blunts Africa's craving to consume Western. For many are those who simply cannot afford what it takes to excel in consumerism, pervasive mass mediated images of desire notwithstanding. Even then, misery can only stop most from consuming the best and first-hand, but not from second rate consumption (in the form of secondhand cars, second handclothes, secondhand underpants, secondhand hair, secondhand shoes and socks, secondhand fridges, secondhand television sets and VCRs, secondhand computers, secondhand technology of all types, secondhand drugs, secondhand beef, secondhand knowledge, etc.). Because of misery, Africa has become dumping ground for obsolete Western technologies and consumer products. Brussels and Utrecht for example, are Europe's leading centres for exporting used cars or what I prefer to call 'reconditioned comfort' to Africa. Africans, unconsciously, have become a solution to many an environmental problem in the West by dying to consume what Westerners are dying to dump. Western waste unfit for Western consumption finds ready markets in desperate Africa, from cigarettes, through a host of outdated consumer items, to toxic chemicals and infected beef. What globalisation is doing is to intensify the divisions between consumer 'citizens' and consumer 'subjects' first between the North and the South, and then within different countries of the North and the South. The overall effect is that nothing is too old or too worthless to be consumed, and that everyone is deluded into thinking that they do not need to enter the consumer market at the same level to qualify as 'bona fide' consumers. Global capitalism creates markets and opportunities for rejects even among the dead and the forgotten, who normally should be fighting it. Slum dwellers may not afford first- or second-rate consumption, but they can scavenge the rubbish heaps of rich residential areas for leftovers and for disposable tins, plastic containers, dumped household effects, and other rejected consumer items which they recycle to keep hope alive. Similarly, villagers wait for urban-based relatives to hand down to them what they have tired of consuming in the cities, battered or intact. Nothing is too old or too used to be used. Globalisation thus provides for the endless recy-

cling of consumer products, and consequently, of the poverty, misery and voicelessness of the majorities of the world, North and South.

The local bourgeoisie or power elite have therefore capitalised upon such a sterile craving to consume foreign, using it as an identity for themselves and a source of power and status (Rowlands, 1995; Warnier, 1993:163-196). By so doing, they foster, sometimes unwittingly, the Machiavellian designs of the giant compressors of global capitalism. Consumerism was so much at the fore that, at independence, what mattered most to the modern elite was political power, not economic power. The economic power was largely retained by the Europeans and expatriates (mainly from Lebanon and India). A situation that remains true also of post apartheid South Africa where the economy, despite the integration of a handful of black elites, is still largely under white control (cf. Sharp, 1998; Comaroffs, 1999). Little wonder therefore, that in most of Africa today the elite exploit and manipulate the rural and urban poor in order to sustain their consumer appetites. Had the African leadership been sensible enough to think seriously of economic power as well, African countries today would certainly not be this dependent upon the unmechanised efforts of the rural poor. And they would also be in a position to carry out their own development efforts, without necessarily posing as beggars of the world. One can imagine Karl Marx writing 'beggars of the world unite', had he been African! The African leadership remain indifferent to the fact that no country can borrow its way to prosperity under the current international financial system, which is simply not integrated enough to guarantee that (Thompson, 1999:148). If this is true of countries in general, it is even truer of African countries where endemic corruption has become a national culture (Hope & Chikulo, 2000; Reno, 1995), and where kleptocracy has been enshrined by the 'big men' of power, and where loans are seldom put to effective use (cf. Russell, 1999:6-126).

The identity and power conferred by consuming foreign explains why despite much rhetoric about a cultural renaissance in many an African country (e.g. *authenticité* of Mobutu (Zaire), *négritude* of Senghor (Senegal), *African communalism* of Nkrumah (Ghana), *Ujamaa and African Socialism* of Nyerere (Tanzania), *Harambee* of Kenyetta (Kenya), *African Renaissance and Ubuntu* of Mbeki (South Africa)), the ruling elites continue to acculturate themselves and to 'progressively take on the look of strangers in their own country due to their daily lifestyle, modeled on that of *homo consumens universalis*' (Amin, 1980:175). With a ruling elite whose weakness and marginality vis-à-vis global capitalism and its institutions of legitimation have been certified, consuming foreign becomes a major way of staking claim to power locally and of further mystifying the disaffected populations with whom they have lost credibility.

### (iii) The Modern Leadership: Friend or Foe of Africa?

By leadership here I refer to African pace-setters and wielders of power in various domains of life, from politics to academics through economics and culture.

Inasmuch as we recognise colonialism as a cause of Africa's present impasse, it would be wrong to sound as if colonialism is all that there is to it. This type of myopia is too dangerous to harbour, because it fails to give sufficient account of the postcolonial malaise brought about by '*les drames internes*'. With a little bit of thought, one immediately sees that, just as historical events always have their remote causes as well as the immediate antecedents, we must think of Africa's present dilemmas as the outcome of a historical process, not the result of a single point in time. In this way, we would avoid the mistakes of the modernisation theorists, yet complete the thinking process of the dependentistas. The causes of Africa's problems are neither simply external, nor exclusively internal, but a combination of both. Africans have been, and still are, both dependent and autonomous agents in relation to the historical forces that have impinged, and are impinging upon them and their continent. While it would be too simplistic to see Africans entirely as zombies totally overwhelmed by external forces, one must also be careful not to credit them with utopic agency, which is certainly not feasible within the current global structures and relations of unequal exchange championed by the giant compressors of the West.

If you can picture a cow down in a valley being milked by a herdsman under instructions from a distant patron, then Africa is best seen as milked by external forces with the active collaboration of internal counterparts, conditioned or not, to act like zombies. Just like in traditional accounts of sorcery, where one cannot become a victim unless one is offered by one's very own relative to be 'eaten', so too Africans cannot be exploited by so-called multinationals and Western states, if they are not, in the first place, sacrificed as victims by their very own 'brothers and sisters' in power. If external forces were entirely to blame, as some would want us to believe, where do we classify the leadership (in the broadest sense of the word), who not only prefer to embezzle and bank abroad in Europe, but who sometimes are mad enough to show off 'their' riches by helping to construct free hostels for European school children, as did Banda of Malawi, while the children in their own miserable and highly-plundered countries are languishing in the ignorance and poverty of the overburdened villages and the ghettos? Or those who shower money on French politicians seeking (re)-election (as do francophone presidents), while civil servants are starved of pay and the poor left to die without medication? Or those who reproduce Basilicas in their native Yamoussoukro or sponsor the construction of Rosicrusian lodges in France with so-called personal fortunes, while their toiling peasants and slum-dwellers hunger and thirst to death in darkness and the illusion of prayer?

The power elite in Africa have been contaminated by the haunting rapacity of high office and/or prominence (cf. Russell, 1999). Almost everywhere on the continent, people seek power in order to empty public coffers into private pockets. They take refuge under the public interest banner to pursue personal goals with capitalist impunity. Thus, it is not unusual to find African leaders doing abroad what they consider not feasible in 'our young fragile nations'. Public ownership and control is good in Africa because of limited resources, but some African leaders can afford money not only to buy personal shares and stocks in foreign companies, but sometimes to own or take over these companies.<sup>7</sup> In this way, Africa is presented as a dense swampy forest with incredible riches, but where the hostile jungle and its primitive aborigines would allow nothing good to be undertaken, and so all avenues must be sought to syphon the riches to the West, where conditions are deemed forever favourable. They give life and meaning to such sayings as Aristotle's '*Semper aliquid novi ex Africa*' ['There is always something new coming from Africa'] (cf. Barret, 1968:xix).

This gives one reason to think that at the level of the continent, the people's greatest enemy is their leadership, with barely a few exceptions, regardless of what domain we scrutinise. In the political domain, most of this leadership would virtually give up their ambitions for power and prominence, if there was nothing for them to embezzle once unfairly elected or catapulted into supremacy by dubious coups. They are driven into excesses of greed by the false idea of their own importance or adequacy, a delusion of superiority, and a bizarre nose for red herrings as strategy for mass repression. How elated some are, childlike, to have villas and mansions in Europe or North America, where they can afford to live better than the middle-class whites who stubbornly claim to be superior to them! How can the average middle-class housewife in the West claim superiority, when every bank holiday she jostles in the giant supermarkets with the wives and girlfriends of African Presidents and Ministers, who have flown over specially to shop at Harrods and to have their grafted hair and whigs retouched at the Ritz? Some 20 years or so ago, it was not uncommon to sight limousines with Kinshasa number plates on the streets of Brussels, specially flown over by the super rich of the Zairean bourgeoisie on holidays in Europe.<sup>8</sup> How many so-called superior whites are in the financial position to buy off designer rights for particular dresses, the way some African leaders have done, in order to stop other women dressing like their wives? How many of their wives or mistresses can boast of a thousand pairs of shoes and more, or rings of ruby, diamond and sapphire? Just how many of them can earn enough money to take a holiday abroad, let alone dart from country to country, sampling toiletries and designer-wear, and fishing for where prices are highest so that the value of what one buys may be read from the price one pays? Just how thrilled some African leaders and their mistresses are with self-delusion to the effect that without them Swiss banks would be out of business! Some prominent African leaders are known to be so madly in love with Europe that they

would fly there to lunch, wine and dine in luxury hotels, or to dry-clean their suits and buy special cigars and vintage wines, then fly back to continue with the arduous but prestigious task of purging the masses of 'ignorance' and making them contribute in the chase after 'civilisation' through 'nation-building' and 'sustainable development' with the determined assistance of Structural Adjustment Programmes pre-packaged by 'our' friends in the West.

Does not this reveal that no matter what they might say to the contrary, the *modern* African elite still acknowledge their internalised or induced inferiority to the white? Otherwise, why would someone with any self-esteem underrate and denigrate what is theirs in matters cultural? What superiority to or equality with someone is there, if you constantly denounce your own values and ways of thinking, doing and being? Would that someone, no matter how well-meaning and modest, not ask themselves, without arrogance perhaps, but with legitimacy, whether you would be so keen on them, their ways and values, if there was anything worth preserving in yours? And would you blame them and their folks for believing in the inherent superiority of their culture and values, when you yourself have exhibited such damaging impatience with what, to them, could well have been a valid alternative to the shortcomings of their own social organisation and outlook? How can you turn around and speak meaningfully against the one-way flow of cultural products that globalisation has exacerbated? And would you be surprised if the side-stepped and dispossessed of your marginal republics found little to believe in your rhetoric about the need for cultural renaissance, rehabilitation, diversity and/or pluralism?

All this is indicative of the superficial understanding the African leadership has of its mission, and of Africa and the world. Most are callous to their subjects' (I hesitate to say 'citizens' since some have never been made to feel they were anything but subjects) and countries' problems because they know next to nothing about the latter. Of the intellectuals amongst them, imagine individuals who received Western education from when they were kids to when they assumed leadership. What they know best is American history, English history, French history, or European history in Africa – Western history in short. They excel in the classics, Greek philosophy and Elizabethan literature, uphold Victorian values, and remember with nostalgia and native emotion the good old days when they could recite all volumes by Shakespeare, chuckle at Chaucer's tongue-in-cheek humour, praise the psychology and genius of Dickens' plume, criticise Racine's sentimentalism, and agree with Corneille's heartlessness or fanatical commitment to 'La Patrie'. They are generally proud to have spent their childhood years learning to dissolve their Africanness, and to fill themselves up afresh, with Europeanness. They only think of their grandparents when acknowledging the foresightedness of the latter to have sent them to the colonial school years ago to be purged of primitive savagery. Apart from that passing reference, which often takes the form of a footnote, they know little

else about their people or 'tribes', and don't really care to, except, of course, when it comes to manipulating these for political ends. As most of them love to say, people must be forward-looking; Africans must part with the past and pair with the present. 'We must beat Westerners at their own game!' That's how diasporic scholars are known to justify their flight abroad at the slightest inconvenience, or their slavish mastery of Western intellectual traditions.

How can a leadership fail to cherish a deeper knowledge of its people, yet hope to succeed? Ask some African leaders to name the ethnic groups that constitute their constituency and country, and they would not be exact on anything. Force them to give a press conference, and they could not tell you where for sure the country is said to be afflicted by drought, famine, floods or quakes. When there is a natural disaster, that is when they send word around for information to be made available about the populations affected, they ask to know the location of the village or 'tribe' concerned, the number of 'elites' from the area, and whether or not the afflicted are party-affiliates, peace-loving and respectful of their sacralised leadership. But ask the very same leaders the same questions about France, Britain or Belgium, and they would bombard your ears with detailed facts, even when taken unawares, thanks largely to a life long history of cultural alienation, thanks to the ubiquity of Western educational institutions and epistemological traditions, and thanks to the aggressive exportation of Western cultural products through the mass media (cf. Gareau, 1987; McChesney, 1998). Ask them to name the major traditional kings (whom they derogate and undermine) in their countries and they would betray an ignorance unpardonable even in foreigners. But ask them to name English, French, Belgian or American kings, queens or presidents from inception, and they could easily score a hundred per cent with nostalgia. One must admit that in these matters, they baffle even the Americans, the French and the English. The misfortune is that the average American, Belgian, French or English person is made to believe that their national cultures and values must be universal, since even savages from as remote a continent as tarzanic Africa appear to share them. Little wonder that they cannot always understand what fuss academics and activists of peripheral countries tend to make about globalisation as a process of one-way flows that must be resisted. Just how can the average Westerner understand arguments to the effect that the global culture some presume to observe today is nothing but 'the transnationalization of a very national voice, the universal triumph of a supremely local and parochial set of images and values' (Golding & Harris, 1997:9), when it is possible to find your McDonalds, Coca-Cola, Fish & Chips, Mars Bar, English or Continental breakfast and five course meal, John Lennon, Elvis Presley, Spice Girls or Madonna tune, Barbie, Batman or Mickey Mouse even in the remotest corners of the Dark Continent? It is largely thanks to facilitation by the African leadership (again in the broadest sense of the word), that such unmitigated one-way flows

are perpetuated, and everyone becomes trapped by the Western consumer culture in one way or another, at one level or the other.

The paradox with the African leadership or 'elite', is that they know what they do not need and need what they do not know. This is as true of the politician as it is of the academic. It is a similar situation to that in economics, where the leadership encourages the production of what they do not consume and consume what they do not produce. Just how they can succeed seems impossible to predict. Hence this popular joke about an African president who went to God and asked in prayer: 'When shall my country be developed?', to whom God replied: 'Not in my lifetime'.

Concerning foreign aid, the mismanagement of which has been criticised so much in the West (cf. Hancock, 1989), and with good reason, given the overwhelming evidence of corruption in Africa (cf. Hope & Chikulo, 2000; Reno, 1995; Russell, 1999): is it not a shame that concerned outsiders have often shown much more commitment to the plight of our forsaken masses than have our own leadership? How do they feel when tons and tons of wheat, maize, milk and rice marked: '*USA Aid to Famine-stricken Victims*'; '*Aide Française aux victimes des catastrophes naturelles*' or '*British Aid to Disaster Victims*' are found in local shops and supermarkets, when those for whom these foodstuffs were intended have died unattended?

It is not a coincidence that this leadership begs and banks only in American dollars, English pounds, German deutschmarks or French francs for aid which never leaves the donor countries, but finds itself into one private account or another in Zurich, California or elsewhere in the West. It is as if whenever an African President visits the West, it is to perform the two B's: Beg and Bank. This is a theme in popular literature and *radio trottoir* well loved by the cynical masses of most towns and cities in Africa, who relish every opportunity to laugh at or ridicule those who have enshrined corruption and crime at their expense (cf. Sekoni, 1997; Mbembe, 1997a; Nyamnjoh, 1999b; Toulabor, 1981; Diamani, 1995). Such literature and informal broadcasts illustrate the fact that ordinary folks 'can see beyond the mask or veil of deception worn by people in power' (Sekoni, 1997:143). As Sekoni puts it in his discussion of politics and urban folklore in Nigeria, such popular accounts are a bitter indictment of leaders who show little trust in the stability of the local economy that they have been elected (or elected themselves) to protect, but who do not hesitate to rush 'the products of their primitive accumulation to other countries, thus giving the impression that the economy of their country is to be plundered rather than promoted' (Sekoni, 1997:143).

There is reason to feel worried that outsiders have appeared to be more committed to the cause of Africans than have their leadership. What philanthropic organisations have brought in through the front door, has often gone out through the back door in the form of cheques addressed to foreign banks. From Cote d'Ivoire to Kenya, through Nigeria and Cameroon, the media are full of

stories on embezzlement and corruption in Africa, not all of which stories are exaggerations. Added evidence is provided by *Transparency International's* yearly reports on corruption, and also by scholarship (cf. Hope & Chikulo, 2000; Reno, 1995; Ellis, 1996; Good, 1994; Bayart et al., 1999). Such sickening disregard for their people, makes it difficult either to contest the conclusion that in Africa 'the only thing which grows is MISERY', or to blame those who now argue against the whole idea of aid. How convincingly can we seriously dismiss books on kleptocracy, corruption, patronage and the criminalisation of the state in Africa, unsubstantiated in their allegations though some may be (cf. Bryceson, 1999; Young, 1999), when our leadership makes no secret of the vices that have championed their sterile love of power, prestige and hollow pretence (cf. Mbembe, 1992; Russell, 1999)?

You perhaps have asked yourselves, why it so happens that almost every African leader that falls out of political fortune ends up in the West or elsewhere abroad? Is it because having facilitated the zombification of their own people by the West, they can't see themselves staying to face the wrath of those whose patience they have stretched to the elastic limit? Does it mean that the only way they believe they can contribute to nation-building, is as politicians? It sounds as though once they realise they cannot contain the mess they occasioned, they flee the country for a peaceful life abroad. What about those who cannot afford a journey even to the local city, but whose hard work helps sustain the powerful? What are these forsaken peasants to do, they who cannot afford the luxury and freedom of being political refugees in countries of their choice?

#### **(iv) The Predicament of the Rural and Urban Poor**

If modernity in Africa has enriched the white man and the local bourgeoisie, it has frustrated the black masses. As Basil Mathews remarked many years ago in his book *The Clash Of Colour*, the white man owes the soil of Africa and the labouring hands of the black 'an inexhaustible catalogue of necessities', ranging from the cup of coffee or cocoa, the box of chocolates and the bunch of bananas on the dinner table, to the timber for office furnishings, the ivory on knife-handles and billiard balls, the rubber on balls and tyres, the leather for shoes, bags and jackets, and much of the gold used as currency. But because the white man has both the yam and the knife, as the reputed Nigerian novelist Chinue Achebe would put it, he refuses calls for indexation and thereby reifies unequal exchange. And so the poor and their progeny toil till death, so that the white man must never know discomfort.

No one would deny that the way to independence in Africa was and has remained rough, even where decolonisation was chiefly a smooth transition of power to a black political elite carefully chosen by the retiring colonists. Where the struggle for independence was violent, tiring and demanding, people were mobilised right from the grassroots to support nationalism with all their might.

Peasants and urbanites were called upon to sacrifice body and soul and win for themselves a place in the future years of democratic and material abundance. At last, their struggles were said to have borne fruit when 'flag independence' was granted. The whites, who had been ready to consider independence only for those willing to sacrifice the very independence, withdrew to the background and were replaced by their shadows, the black skins with white masks (cf Fanon, 1967b). The dance of the puppets was on, as simulation took centre stage.

It soon became apparent that the independence which mattered was economic and not political. Faced with the exacting world capitalist system, the ruling elite of Africa, reluctantly or not, opted to sacrifice their democratic ideals and the welfare of their citizens and subjects, instead of revolting against the international system. The implications of limited independence for the continent were economic dependence and marginality in global capitalism, neo-colonialism, and dominance for Western epistemes and *manières de faire*. Weakened by their status as dependent capitalists, the ruling elite in Africa have had to resort to ethnicity and obsession with belonging; corruption, patronage and kleptocracy; sacralisation and personalisation of power; and bureaucratic authoritarianism, in order to service what has become a sterile craving for power.

Amin captures this well when he argues that the polarisation of power and wealth produced by global capitalism, makes democratic rule at peripheries like Africa virtually impossible, as global capitalism needs autocratic powers to be able to penetrate the peripheries with its inequalities (Amin, 1997a:22). This renders economic life in Africa 'little more than an appendage to the exercise of state functions, which directly and visibly occupies the front of the state'. It also explains why 'civil society is feeble or even non-existent'. However, the power of the state in Africa is only illusory, because the 'true strong state' is 'the state of the developed centre', as economic activities in the continent seem perpetually in 'a process of adjustment to the demands of accumulation at the centre'. To Amin, the reluctance of African states to yield to private enterprise is proof of their 'real weakness' (Amin, 1987:1-13). In other words, the African state 'must be strong enough in relation to its internal forces to assure the constant outflow of economic surplus from across its boundaries' to the West, but in relation to which 'it must be weak enough to be incapable of blocking such flows' (Tussie, 1983:4). This perspective explains both economic underdevelopment and stalling democracy essentially in terms of the assimilation and exclusion logic of global capitalism, according to which only the handful of power and economic elite in Africa stand to benefit from its internalisation and reproduction.

Thus, although popular movements played a key role in the struggle for independence in many a country, the ruling elite have, since then, seldom allowed these movements to germinate as counter-forces with the mission of

curbing repressive tendencies, and/or articulating issues outside of their suffocating grip. The strategy has been for them 'to reorganize the structure of domination while at the same time deflating the movement against [them]', through delegitimation of all struggles autonomous of the state, co-optation, and the imposition of state-centred initiatives and solutions (Mamdani, 1990:47-55). In this way, the international legitimacy of the state has often counted more than its internal legitimation.

It is evident that things have worsened instead of getting better, for the rural and urban poor. Instead of democratic abundance and populous grandeur, the masses have barely been able to eke out a living under scorching dictatorships for most of the time. The elite have created and sustained political institutions not so much to mobilise and conscientise the masses for collective interests, but to curb mass involvement, to control and to strengthen their own omnipotence in national life (cf. Bayart, 1993; Geschiere, 1995:125-163, 1997:97-131; Mamdani, 1990; Beckman, 1992), with the result being widespread passivity and cynicism in the masses in general, in particular the villagers who were led to believe that 'politics is the business of the big people [*l'affaire des Grands*]' of the cities (Geschiere, 1995:126; 1997:70). The worsening state of things has reached a stage when ordinary people asking for nothing more than their daily bread increasingly find themselves threatened or eliminated by famine. And it has become common for people to complain in the following way captured by René Devisch among Kwaangolese slum dwellers in Kinshasa: 'In the days of the Belgian, we could eat three times a day. During the First Republic [1960-1965] one ate but two meals. With the Second we can afford only one. Where will progress end?' (Devisch, 1995:608). 'What has become of all the promises?' people have continued to wonder throughout the continent, with South Africans being the latest to join the ranks (cf. Sharp, 1998; Comaroffs, 1999). More and more, the peasants and slum dwellers have asked one another 'When will this *'ndependa* end?' and have wondered whether it had been a wise idea to chase away the white man, after all. It is less painful to die by the hands of a stranger, than to be killed by someone whom you have always believed a soul brother. Remember Caesar's '*Et tu Brute?*'? The heartfelt cries and calls for help by the disillusioned African masses go unheeded, because the elite leadership that they seek to chase away mediates their relations with global capital.

That is the position of the African poor today, a most pathetic position indeed. They toil or hunger 'under the sun, moon and stars', like Jimmy Cliff's slave-ancestors did in the Americas, in order to sustain their exploiters and urban-based bunches of consumerist (un)civil servants and professional idlers. In most countries, it is still thanks mainly to the food and cash crops of the rural poor that bureaucrats and the ruling elite are able to excel in barren consumerism. They have simply failed to see the need to produce before they spend. Where they are less successful in making the villagers dance to their tunes, or

where the latter have simply said enough is enough, that it is better to die than to toil in vain, widespread famine and malnourishment are the inevitable consequence. Yet, even then, the peasants are doomed, for foreign aid intended to relieve everyone is misappropriated by their urban-centred exploiters.

The only other sector that could claim to produce, and therefore to be tax-payers, is the business sector. But unfortunately, the state and its bureaucrats have swallowed the country's businesses almost everywhere. Little business is in private hands, and the few private operators choose to bank abroad for safety's sake, to avoid the caprices of the unstable political arena wherein they operate, granted that even local embezzlers are untrusting enough to bank abroad. The state-owned businesses are everything short of profit-making enterprises; they are in fact run as 'public private' businesses for the benefit of patrons and clients in power, and more often than not, instead of making money for the state, the state is forced to borrow to keep them going, for what matters at the end of the day is patronage, not prosperity. The state is keener on patronage as a check against popular modes of politics than on the pursuit of economic policies committed to the eradication of misery (cf. Bayart, 1993; Mbembe, 1992; Berman, 1998; Olukoshi, 1998a).

Thus, in real economic terms, the heavy and in most cases the only tax-payer is the highly marginalised, over-exploited rural poor. The civil servants, instead of creating wealth in a similar manner, are like the inflated queen of the termites, comfortably seated in her fattening chamber, waiting to be fed by her toiling and selfless soldiers. It is thanks to the peasant's food and cash crops that these uncivil servants excel in consumerism. Most African countries owe a large part of their foreign exchange to the sole effort of the peasant community.

The tragedy of the African poor today is that, unlike in the past, they are exploited by two forces. If the metaphor is allowed, their blood is sucked by two parasites – the one swimming inside the blood, and the other attached like a tick to their bodies. In the case of the rural poor, the problem is that they produce cotton, groundnuts, cocoa, coffee and tea, the prices of which are not determined by them, but by some remote reality called 'International-Market-Forces'. Handicapped by their supposed ignorance and the inability of their own leadership, they have struggled in vain to book an audience with this all-important 'superman' of a tick.

#### **(v) On Social Classes in Africa**

Given the largely underdeveloped nature of most African economies, which has retarded the crystallisation of class differentiation, and afforded the state a pervasive and repressive presence, it is hard to talk of social classes in terms Marx envisaged for capitalist societies. By the sheer fact of its monopolisation or control of avenues of accumulation and social reproduction, the state succeeds in stifling civil society with strategic offers of power, privilege and wealth to critical members of interest groups, and by encouraging the elite into

thinking that they stand more to gain by investing in ethnoregionalism or the politics of belonging/primary patriotism (cf. Geschiere & Gugler, 1998; Nyamnjoh, 1999a).

With perhaps the exception of South Africa, I therefore think that it is incorrect to attribute to African societies the classic notion of two classes in constant opposition to one another, given the fact that most of Africa has failed to develop 'a trans-ethnic public arena grounded in universalistic norms and the essential relations of social trust in the disinterested competence and probity of millions of unknown and unseen others' (Berman, 1998:339), and given the influence of 'the evil triumvirate of patronage, corruption and tribalism ... in African societies' (Berman, 1998:306). However, if we absolutely must speak of classes, I suggest we see Africa as a pyramid of three *fluid* classes (given widespread networks of patronage and clientelism), where the class at the base is the most exploited. We can identify, firstly, those without the opportunity to steal either from others or from the state: this class is made up of the toiling peasants who live in the rural areas despite themselves, and who are closely attached to their ancestral prescriptions of the good, normal and upright life, again, despite themselves. They are largely confined and contained as rural subjects. When one is in a position of weakness, most of what one does is despite oneself, I suppose.

This is the case, though African elites would like to idealise and romanticise the 'traditional African' in order to perpetuate their suppression of this unfortunate class of the sidestepped. For the simple truth, believe it or not, is that most of those vociferous about preserving African cultures and values, whether on the continent or in the diaspora, are the least endowed with these, and who at best, visit their villages once a year, either to consult the diviner on their prospects for job promotion, to campaign for the re-election of 'sons and daughters of the soil' in high office, or to bury one of their urban dead. My contention is that the 'traditional Africa' allegedly epitomised by the rural poor, is a symbol of tradition despite itself. African peasants have been forced to pose as custodians of a tradition of which few, least of all the leading elite, are proud. The villagers are not interested in preserving tradition any more than their urban counterparts are; they as well are preoccupied with enhancing the chances of attaining their objective interests even as foragers and scavengers for crumbs underneath the dining-tables and refuse-mountains of peripheral consumer capitalism.

Tell me how many times the young men and women of the rural areas have been coerced to remain in their villages, under the pretext that the cities are centres of vice, crime and bad habits? Why should some people be allowed to live in the cities at all, if cities are as bad as constantly painted to the rural poor? The truth is, for their power to have any meaning, the urban-based elites must make the peasants their scapegoats. They give the impression that the peasants have something they ought to be proud of, but their daily activities and behav-

our are such that they undermine the very doctrine of the importance of upholding African traditions, cultures and values. At best, these elites want only what they term 'traditional dances' or 'les danses folkloriques', which they can use for their personal amusement or to entertain their foreign friends and counterparts. Thus one of the rare times one actually hears of 'our cultural heritage' is when Rousseau's 'noble savage' is pulled out of the 'happiness' and 'naturalness' of his village, (like the bull-fighters of ancient Rome) to entertain his urban Lords and Masters either during the national day celebrations, revolution anniversaries, or at the occasion of the visit of a foreign head of state, Director of the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Performances which were reserved for solemn occasions in the past, have today been trivialised and in certain cases commodified for touristic consumption (cf. Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1997:64-65; Geschiere & Meyer, 1998:607; Davis, 1999), partly because the new breed of leaders know next to nothing about the societies they so claim to represent, but also because of the desperate quest by side-stepped rural communities to survive through feeding Western tourism.

Secondly, we can distinguish those who have the opportunity to steal from others, but who find it difficult to steal directly from the state because they are constantly under surveillance by their bosses and their prior claims. It takes a thief to catch a thief! This class consists of the low-ranking civil servants and literate or semi-literate urban dwellers. They are midway between the abject poverty and hardship of the village, and the filthy riches and sumptuous plenty of the self-elected few who form the higher rungs of the urban community. Because of the uncertainty in their stealing opportunities, they are forced to have one foot in the city and one foot in the village. Some of them live buried in the deplorable squalor of menstruating ghettos in divided cities, or in what some men and women of modern learning have termed 'urban villages'. (See René Devisch's detailed studies of 'villagisation' among slum dwellers trapped by 'misery and hardship' in the 'tragic spaces' of Kinshasa, and how they seek to contain their disillusionment with consumer capitalism, aggressive inflation, and crumbling state structures (Devisch, 1995; 1996; 1998; 1999a&b).) Because their financial prospects are often unpredictable – even when they are involved with an apparently lucrative *dollarised* economy like the diamond diggers/dealers among the *bana Lunda* of the Zairean-Angolan border (cf. De Boeck, 1998) – their links with the villages are still strong, and they are forced from time to time to rush home to half-forgotten peasant relatives for food, protective charms, and other types of favours. But on the whole, they are better off, because they live where they choose to live; unlike the villagers, they have not been forbidden the benefits of modernity, no matter how tiny or how devalued their share of these.

Our third and final class is the petty bourgeoisie – a class which includes the group of Africans who rule without legitimacy. It comprises those who have

the high exclusive opportunity to steal from or 'to criminalise' the state (cf. Bayart et al., 1999), and who believe what matters is the fact that one is rich, not how one gets rich (cf. Reno, 1995). They make no secret of their motto: get rich or perish. These are the self-elected watchdogs of the *National Cake*. They are constantly mediating between themselves and the outside world, and never stop preaching to the peasants how dangerous rural exodus is, and how sacred life in the village has always been. This group comprises national political figures along with their provincial and regional representatives, top civil servants (easily identifiable in their thick woollen suits and well-polished Italian shoes, or in their gorgeous gowns, elaborately designed and imported from the Middle East), and pseudo-intellectuals who forge poems, compose songs, and kill the aggressive instinct in their pen or provide dictators with the 'conceptual noises they need' (cf. Soyinka, 1994b) to justify their excesses, with the hope of being appointed director of this or that public institution (which perhaps explains why African governments have the chronic tendency to nationalise – turning everything into a patrimony of some sort, in order better to satisfy the obliging and the yesful). This, in fact, is the class entrusted with the Herculean task of developing Africa. A class wherein, the greater one's influence, the greater one's chances of stealing from the state, and of making empty promises to one's people and the outside world. The current continent-wide endorsement of World Bank policies and IMF-driven Structural Adjustment Programmes (cf. Ellis, 1994:120-121; Mkandawire, 1996; Mkandawire & Olukoshi, 1995) and their poor implementation, speaks to what extent this class has been successful with the task of (under)developing Africa.

## (vi) The Future of Democracy in Africa

If one were to endorse Samir Amin's argument stated above, that there is little prospect for democracy in dependent and peripheral states within the current international capitalist system, then there would not be much to hope for in this regard until the present structures of inequality are redressed. But then, ending the debate at that level, would amount to a summary and uncritical dismissal of certain internal factors that have tended to worsen the predicament of ordinary Africans already disfavoured by the logic of global capitalism. Hence my decision to examine how African states have fared even as boxers with their hands tied behind their backs. What prospects are there in Africa, even for 'liberal democracy' in the 21st century?

Prior to 1990 most Africans lived under political systems where the genuine and popular was circumvented. Democracy remained confined to a few ambiguous statements in constitutions that were fashioned, often capriciously, by civilian dictators or military regimes. This was a cynical world of tyranny, a shadowy world of fear and insecurity designed by those in power for whom power was all that mattered. During this period, the state's contradictions and pathologies, epitomised by the head of state, placed the whole of society under

siege. Executive freedom, secure and at peace with a *folie de grandeur*, required that the rest of society had to be shackled and deprived in the absolute. The peculiar consequence of African dictatorships was society's forfeiture of the freedom to resist through intricate networks of patronage connecting the small and poor to the big men at the centre of power and wealth (Bayart, 1993; Mbembe, 1992; Berman, 1998). This 'competitive alienation' of the masses by tyrants all over the continent was achieved by 'conceptual noises' furnished by pseudo-intellectual apologists (Soyinka, 1994:7-9), the impoverishment and disillusionment of the masses by structural adjustment (cf. Olukoshi, 1998a), the sacralisation of power (cf. Bediako, 1995; De Boeck, 1996; Blake, 1997:255-257), and the neutralisation of shared pain and misery (Nyamnjoh, 1999a).

The Eastern European revolution in 1989 and the euphoria of the South African struggle for liberation encouraged the African masses to believe the time had come to be liberated from dictatorial complacencies, endemic corruption and suffocating mediocrity. They were no longer willing to tolerate autocrats who while promoting obscure notions of national development and stability deterred all forms of opposition. Most had come to know that such stability was fraudulent and development elusive. They wanted democracy – multiparty democracy, some argued – with the hope that this would bring about pluralism and popular democratic participation in practice. Clearly, military regimes and the single-party state had failed to deliver. If thirty years of sacrificed freedoms was not time enough to attain national integration, welfare and human dignity, then monopolyism and militaryism were problems, not solutions.

By the 1990s the feeling grew, even among pessimistic scholars (see overview of literature on democratisation in Africa by Buijtenhuijs and Rijnierse, 1993, and of the democracy debate in Africa by Olukoshi, 1998b), that however entrenched, repression in Africa was something that popular disillusionment, international pressure, and the growing recognition by the masses of the importance of organised resistance, would overcome. Such optimism notwithstanding, it rapidly became obvious that the African people would still have to anticipate the reality of participatory democracy. The present state of current democratisation efforts in Africa (cf. Buijtenhuijs and Rijnierse, 1993; Buijtenhuijs & Thriot, 1995; Olukoshi, 1998b 1998c), strongly suggests that there is goodwill and genuine commitment to collective betterment neither with those in power nor with those seeking to replace them. 'Faced with many grievances and demands from poor social groups, the supply of ideas from political leaders has remained limited' (Monga, 1995:365-366). The general concern of the opposition parties is to replace the gluttons at the table rather than redistribute the 'national cake' (cf. Berman, 1998; Nyamnjoh, 1999c). It is like the war of the gourmands, where the opposition is more concerned with 'the bellies' at the dining-table than the fact of gluttony, as those of them who

have managed to assume power have taken on the same predatory contradictions. 'Often resorting to arm-twisting and increasingly authoritarian ways in order to push their views through, many of these governments have not shown themselves to be different from the discredited politicians whom they replaced' (Olukoshi, 1998a:27). Decriers of malfeasance in high office within the opposition employ mere political gimmickry, as even the most radical of them have seldom gone beyond what Monga has termed 'slogans in line with populist illusions' (Monga, 1995:371). The consequences of these developments have been a profound disillusionment and 'a growing problem of popular de-participation in the political process of most African countries' (Olukoshi, 1998a:28).

In light of this, one may ask what prospects there are for an active civil society and real participatory democracy in Africa? It is true that political liberalisation is well under way in a number of countries, and that in the course of this 'second liberation' struggle for the continent some achievements have been made (cf. Ellis, 1994). But there is no certainty over its future direction or the impact it may have on the underlying political structure. There is doubt about the true extent and likely beneficiaries of political reform, because in the absence of a democratic culture, multiparty democracy is likely to remain confined to competition among political elites to the exclusion of the disaffected masses (Nyong'o, 1988; Buijtenhuijs and Rijnierse, 1993; Good, 1999). Currently, there is widespread popular disillusionment with politics, since multipartyism seems to differ little from monopartyism and military regimes as a vehicle for establishing a truly democratic culture in Africa. In the face of repeated frustrations at elections, opposition parties have either become dupes of the ruling party 'to lure them with the carrot of state patronage', or have 'simply splintered into factions and/or faded into irrelevance' (Olukoshi, 1998a:31-34). Similarly, undemocratic NGOs, have profited by the tendency among Western donor agencies and governments to 'assume that NGOs are by definition democratic simply on account of the fact that they are non-governmental' (Olukoshi, 1998b:38-39).

Observers of African affairs have borne witness that enfranchisement does not necessarily lead to empowerment and universal suffrage does not guarantee access to political decision-making. As a Cameroonian political satirist, Tchop Tchop, points out in a sketch: 'elections are like a football match where one must prepare one's players physically and psychologically. One can consult the Pygmy witchdoctor, corrupt the referee, or motivate [bribe] one's opponents. ... You organise your elections knowing full well that you are going to win them' (Tchop Tchop, 1997).

Political equality has been confined to the right to vote, as autocrats have chosen to ignore the right of most to be elected or to enjoy civil liberties. Although statements have been made to the contrary, ordinary people and alternative social and political organisations continue to face, in practice, enormous difficulties exercising their rights: 'to hold and express opinions contrary to

those of the state, or regimes and leaders; to assemble freely and organise within the framework of the law: to publish contrary opinions about public affairs, to suggest alternative political strategies, and to expect the protection of the state itself from arbitrary arrest and abuse of power' (Goulbourne, 1987:46). The state remains 'an interfering irritant, a source of corruptly obtained advantage or a massive irrelevance for many people' (Barnett, 1997:45), floating with impunity above civil society like a balloon in mid-air (Hyden, 1983:19; 1992). Thus, as Olukoshi (1998a:33) asserts, multipartyism does not seem to have led to good governance even in countries like Zambia where the opposition came to power on the ticket of popular expectations, as such new governments have tended to conduct themselves like the erstwhile single ruling parties which they replaced. In Burkina Faso, an 'upbeat official rhetoric' on political democratisation that has earned praise from Western governments 'masks a more complex – and sobering – reality' of corruption and patronage. In this instance 'the most outspoken critics continue to face threats, harassment and occasional detention', and 'the police have been known to torture and kill suspects' while 'the authorities have pushed through legislation to restrict the right to demonstrate' (Harsch, 1998:626). In South Africa, democracy is seriously threatened by 'misguided loyalties and a culture of silence', not least among academics: 'White academics do not speak out on issues of national concern any more because they are afraid that they will be labelled racist. Black academics do not criticise the government because of misplaced loyalty born out of a comradeship with its roots in the struggle against apartheid – they can't be seen to be criticising their own. These misguided loyalties and a culture of silence is putting South Africa's democracy at risk' (Ramphela, 1999:31). It remains to be seen to what extent a post-apartheid state, amenable to the exclusion and assimilation logic of global capital, will succeed in redressing structural inequalities in ways that are beneficial to more than just a black elite (Sharp, 1998).

In the absence of a vigorous civil society and creative initiatives, African political leaders continue to perceive the state as the sole source of personal enrichment and reward. They are apt to use political power for private ends, guided by a sort of 'mercenary ethos' (Eyoh, 1995) or kleptocratic instincts (Bayart et al., 1999). As such they are reluctant to commit themselves to popular democracy and hence, with few exceptions, they are least likely to adopt genuine democratic instruments or concede power even when defeated at the polls. Only eight heads of state – Kérékou and Soglo of Benin, Kaunda of Zambia, Sassou-Nguesso of Congo, Ratsiraka of Madagascar, Pereira of Cape Verde, Da Costa of São Tomé and De Klerk of South Africa – 'have conceded power more or less gracefully as a result of defeat in democratic elections' (Ellis, 1994:119). Democratic participation in the continent has yet to mean respect for the ballot or a meaningful extension of the franchise 'into areas where ordinary people do not normally participate' (Hamelink, 1995:19). For,

while passive participation might guarantee privileges for individuals and groups, only 'the active inclusion in public politics of those who have in the past lost out, and whose presence continues to be ignored in corrupt and crumbling states' (von Lieres, 1999:143), would render the notion of *democracy* meaningful and popular with the masses. Hence Olukoshi's contention that 'the most crucial factor for the sustenance of democratic reform and governance in Africa' would have to consist of 'the enthronement of a popular sovereignty that touches the daily lives of the populace, gives life and meaning to the notion of citizenship, and goes beyond the constitutionally defined form of rule'. For democracy can only survive in the continent if and when it becomes 'a lived experience that is worth defending' (Olukoshi, 1998b:38). In other words, 'there must be a culture of robust open and public debate, tolerance of different viewpoints and people with the courage of their convictions to express their views, even if these might not be popular' (Ramphele, 1999:31).

Until then, contemporary manifestations of political liberalisation are, in the perception of most ordinary Africans, little more than cosmetic reforms designed by reluctant autocrats to retain legitimacy in the eyes of Western supporters and lending agencies, and to ensure their continued dominance in the face of popular disaffection (cf. Ellis, 1994:119-121). As Peter Wanyande aptly observes, even the emerging civil society is being infiltrated by organisations 'that are undemocratic in orientation', some of which may have been created by ruling parties, cliques, juntas or oligarchies 'to protect the state against its adversaries' by countering the activities of other associations fighting for undiluted democracy (1996:5-7). Thus, at the dawn of the 21st century, we cannot resist revisiting Ayi Kwei Armah's question of 30 years ago, namely: 'how long will Africa be cursed with its leaders?' (Armah, 1969:79).

It is indeed discouraging to note that ten years into the democratic transition, most of Africa's political environment is still characterised by the one-party logic, of which government, the opposition, interest groups and sometimes even the public are culpable. All parties employ a logic which has prevented multipartyism from addressing the issue of how best to bring about genuine political equality that Hamelink (1995:19) argues is only possible with 'the broadest possible participation of all people in processes of public decision-making'.

From all that has been said, it should be evident that there is an urgent need to empower the masses, especially as – lip service to democracy notwithstanding – Africans are still subjected to the sort of post-totalitarian control that Václav Havel described regarding Czechoslovakia prior to the 1989 East European revolution, and that is still true of many an African country today. Borrowing from Havel therefore, we could consider the one-party logic of the power elite in Africa as a system which 'serves people only to the extent necessary to ensure that people will serve it', with those failing to play their predetermined

roles risking indictment as enemies of the system (Havel, 1986:44). Because its diversionary markers touch people at every level of society, the system has succeeded in tainting civil society with hypocrisy and lies (Havel, 1986:44-45).

A need exists, therefore, to provide for public control of power in Africa through public competition for power. Political affairs and social life should be organised and conducted in such a way that allows for *effective* access to decision-making for all and sundry, and for an *equitable* distribution of the fruits of progress among the various social groups (cf. Mbembe, 1997b, 1999). Hamelink argues that there is nothing wrong with the delegation of powers to politicians, experts or market forces as such. What is important, however, is to provide for 'rules, procedures and institutional mechanisms to secure public accountability', as well as 'the possibility of remedial action by those whose rights to participation and equality are violated' (Hamelink, 1995:19). For 'there can be no rights without the option of redress in case of their violations'; and the option must be both accessible and affordable (Hamelink, 1995:24). As Amin puts it, for any meaningful revolution (whether agrarian or technological) to take place in Africa, there must be a new type of power in which the masses are no longer passive spectators in decision-making, but organised social forces with a contribution to make (Amin, 1997b:43). Only by returning power to the people in this way, could Africans hope to stop 'living within a lie', and start 'living within the truth' (Havel, 1986:36-122).

According to Ellis, 'the fact that African politicians are unable to articulate any original or critical view on economic policy', given how committed to World Bank policies they virtually all are, means that 'there is little to choose in ideological terms between rival parties'. This not only implies that political parties tend 'to compete for the same social constituencies as their rivals' but also that they 'find it hard to identify and represent any social or economic interest group which has been previously under-represented, unless, of course, such a group is ethnically defined.' This would explain 'the tendency for rival parties to recruit ethnic constituencies, just as the barons of the old ruling parties tended to do' (Ellis, 1994:120-121). It also raises the question of the relevance of *the party* as a mode of political organisation in Africa.

If political parties in Africa tend to appeal to ethnic loyalties rather than seek to establish a shared ideological consensus, and if their partisans have consistently tended to vote along regional and ethnic lines, it is perhaps time we looked beyond political parties as *the way* of organising politics and government in Africa. The recognition that there is nothing inherently authoritarian about monopolyism and nothing inherently democratic about multipartyism (Neocosmos, 1998; Wiredu, 1997), coupled with the fact that most of Africa has failed to develop a culture of commonwealth and public interest that transcends ethnicity and is 'grounded in universalistic norms and the essential relations of social trust in the disinterested competence and probity of millions of unknown and unseen others' (Berman, 1998:339), ought to push African social

scientists to explore other models of political organisation informed by African cultural, political and historical experiences on the one hand, and the reality of its economic dependence and lightweightness on the other. For this quest to be creative and fruitful, African intellectuals and political classes must desist from a view of 'African ethnicity as an atavism' (cf. Eyoh, 1995:50; Berman, 1998:306), and envision a democracy that guarantees not only individual rights and freedoms, but also the interests of communal and cultural solidarities (Eyoh, 1995:50). They must provide for a creative 'mix between the individual legacy of liberalism and collectivist legacy of ethnicity' (von Lieres, 1999:143), as well as for the containing reality of Africa being at the fringes of global capitalism (cf. Amin, 1987; 1997a&b). Wiredu's suggestion that Africans revisit the idea of 'consensual democracy' as a possible solution to stalling 'majoritarian democracy', deserves to be taken seriously. Referring to consensual democracy in the traditional Ashanti system, Wiredu argues that this was 'a democracy because government was by the consent, and subject to the control, of the people as expressed through their representatives'. Thus while majoritarian democracy might be based on consent without consensus, the Ashanti system ensured that 'consent was negotiated on the principle of consensus' (Wiredu, 1997:308-311). Guided in part by this idea of consensual democracy, it is time to investigate possible alternatives such as a confederation of regional or ethnic associations (elite or otherwise) staking claim to national resources without dissemblance or equivocation for the benefit of their regions or ethnic groups (cf. Nyamnjoh & Rowlands, 1998). This is more likely to yield positive results than the current practice whereby politicians and intellectuals 'take comfort in ancestral traditions at the same time that they stubbornly refuse to concede to the *formal* representation of the interests of cultural solidarities' (Eyoh, 1995:50).

Social scientists must seek a better understanding of and inspiration from popular responses to state delinquency and the elitism of consumer capitalism. The growing number of studies and critical scholarship on pentecostalism (Meyer, 1995, 1998a&b; van Dijk, 1992, 1993, 1997; van Dijk & Pels, 1996), healing charismatic churches (Devisch, 1995; 1996; 1998; 1999a&b), witchcraft and zombification (cf. Geschiere, 1997, 1998; Eyoh, 1998; De Boeck, 1998; Comaroffs, 1999; Ciekawy & Geschiere, 1998), are signposts in the direction where contemporary African studies ought to go towards understanding the creative agency of ordinary Africans in the face of repeated contradictions and frustrations with global capitalism and its seesaw of flows and closures, assimilation and exclusion, seduction and rejection (cf. Appadurai, 1996; Geschiere & Meyer, 1998). More of such studies are likely to inform the collective imagination on how to seek redemption from victimhood.

Yet only a certain quality of leadership and citizenry can return power to the people in the way suggested above. Quality leadership is scarce in Africa where, as Akin Mabogunje of Ogun State University (Nigeria) remarks,<sup>9</sup> there

has been a most striking paucity of attention devoted to the socialisation of leadership. But, as he warns, 'Africa cannot afford to continue with ill-prepared and unassisted leaders ... if they are to meet the challenges that will face them'. African societies must, he argues, like their Western counterparts, invest tremendous resources in 'inculcating, nurturing and promoting the right leadership qualities' among their members, so that the continent's future leaders comprehend fully their responsibilities, duties and obligations. They cannot afford to be 'lackadaisical and indifferent to the type of qualities evinced by those who seek to lead' them, if they are to avoid 'the agonies of purposelessness, deprivation and insecurity'. Africans, he maintains, need leaders who are 'knowledgeable, dedicated to some ideals, visionary, selfless in commitment to the aspirations of the populace, astute, and critical of cant, rigorously honest and tolerant of alternative opinions'. They need leaders armed with moral, spiritual, intellectual and physical integrity. For, 'popular democracy requires responsible leaders and enlightened followers' (Ndulo, 1996:12). Responsible leadership entails recognising the correlation between democratic practices and socio-economic development, rather than the widespread tendency of wrongly 'asserting that political stability and order – not democracy – are the preconditions for economic growth and prosperity' (Nyong'o, 1987:20). Only such leadership can guarantee a new social contract for individual African countries; one that focuses on the social welfare of the people, reinforces political and cultural pluralism, emphasises democratic accountability, guarantees the protection of human and peoples' rights, and ensures representation for competing interests in the political process (cf. Olukoshi, 1998a:34-35).

We, as academics – both on the continent and elsewhere, black and white – with Africa's future at heart, must help destroy once and for all the myth of the 'noble savage', and earn respect for the peasants and slumdweller (the urban villagers) not as custodians of 'traditional dances' and 'recreational savagery', but as the genuine pillars of the African economy, without whom the ruling minority would starve to death. We must help the peasants and urban villagers make political and economic capital out of their sweat, toil and patience, and out of the ignorance and lazy habits of their privileged overlords. Only by joining forces with sympathisers the world over, and through the 'social shaping' and appropriation of new communication and information technologies (cf. Lyon, 1986), can Africans fight off the globalisation of poverty, by making a strong case for the effective globalisation of opportunities and the riches of their universe. Such unity and creative domestication of new technologies hold the key to the end for globalisation as a process where '*many are called but few are chosen*'.

## Notes

1. President Clinton, in his last State of the Union address, devoted a lot of time to globalisation as an information technology-driven process that would mark the 21st century and revolutionise human societies.
2. According to *The Financial Times* (cited in Seabrook, 2000:22), 'At the start of the 19th century the ratio of real incomes per head between the world's richest and poorest countries was three to one. By 1900 it was 10 to one. By 2000 it had risen to 60 to one'.
3. Although some have argued that multinational corporations in the South pay better wages than does the state or local businesses (cf. *The Economist*, January 29th – February 4th, 2000), the tendency remains to take advantage of cheap labour; to the point that these days, it is possible to buy a 'pair of Reeboks, the left shoe of which was made in the Philippines and the right in South Korea' (cf. O'Brien, 1993:67), probably to prevent local workers stealing from the stock to supplement low wages.
4. Globalisation might imply that 'The noses of the poor are always pressed against the television screens of the rich', but it does not diminish the fact that 'At the touch of a button they can be made to disappear', unless, of course, they actually start knocking at the doors of one's borders (cf. Seabrook, 2000:22).
5. This is so prevalent that a patient in Cameroon once asked her doctor to be administered 'an imported anaesthesia' in place of the 'local anaesthesia' that the doctor suggested (Warnier, 1993:164).
6. See *Mail & Guardian* (November 26 to December 2, 1999, p.11) & *Saturday Star* (October 23, 1999, p.2), for reports on the 'Nigerian 4-1-9'; and see *Libération* (14 and 15 November 1998, p.18), for a report on the leading 'Cameroonian feyman', Donatien Koagne.
7. Interviewed once on TV in the West about Zaire's foreign debt, late President Mobutu, one of the world's richest men at the time, is noted to have replied that the problem wasn't whether or not he could lend his country money, but rather, what guarantees there were that Zaire would repay the loan.
8. See De Boeck (1998), for more on such ostentatious spending and its impact among young Zaireans involved with the *dollarised* diamond economy.
9. See 'The Africa Leadership Forum' in: *The Guardian* (Nigerian), Monday, July 29, 1991, p.33.

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