

Is There an African Curse?

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ABSTRACT

Africa is a puzzle to economists. Why is it so unsuccessful in partaking of development? In short, is there an African curse? This paper argues the answer is 'no'.

Africa's dismal economic performance is neither due to colonization nor to a different effect of the usual variables impacting on growth. It presents a rare combination of exogenous handicaps: poor soils, infectious diseases, small economies, landlockedness, declining rainfall, hasty independence, high dependency ratios, terms of trade losses. Dysfunctional governance is however the main factor, due to an exceptionally harmful post-independence history. This generated not only growth traps but a pervasive lack of trust too, including of Africans in themselves, a sort of ethical trap. Still, there are flames of hope and more Africans want a deeper change. They might prevail if democracy gives them a voice and a chance.

INTRODUCTION

‘Wars, drought, famine, pestilence, locusts, cattle plague. Why so many calamities, in succession? Why?’ wondered already in the late nineteenth century François Coillard,¹ a French Protestant missionary in Buloziland, the floodplain of Zambezi in modern Western Zambia.

It does not require cynicism to remark that the general picture and the daunting puzzle have not changed very much. However, in between, over slightly more than a century, Africa experienced almost total colonization. It ended in the 1950s and the early 1960s giving birth to freshly independent new states, of which 48 are currently in sub-Saharan Africa, (*hereafter referred to as Africa if not otherwise mentioned*).

Colonization brought about an historically unprecedented explosion of the African population from 90 million in 1870 to 621 million in 1990² as well as, notwithstanding that challenge, the single bright period of African economic history so far in terms both of income per capita (cf. Exhibit 1) until the mid 1970s and of human development such as life expectancy and literacy.

Nevertheless, even during that period, Africa had been lagging behind the “Rise of the West”. And presently, while more than 70% of Africans have no personal memories of colonization, demographic pressures are still huge by any standard and it is the poorest region of the world. Africa hosts 11.2% of the world population but represents only 2.5% of the world’s GDP. More alarmingly, the trend is worsening.

From the mid-1970s onwards Africa seems to be going economically in reverse in absolute terms. Incomes per capita are now lower than at the end of the 1960s at the beginning of the post-independence period. Not only is this starting to erode the breakthroughs in health and educational attainments, but Africa is also hosting 40% of

¹ Cited by John Illife (1996) from Coillard’s book ‘On The Threshold of Central Africa’. Antoine Coillard advised sincerely King Lewanika, with whom he was on friendly terms, to accept the British protectorate although what the Lozis got first was only a treaty with the Royal Chartered British South Africa Company of Cecil Rhodes.

² This statistic stands for the continent as a whole (Maddison, 2001). For this period no reliable estimate is available for sub-Saharan Africa.

the world's armed conflicts with about one-third of its states are involved in them.³ Together, these conflicts where ethnicity reportedly is a major factor, added to apparently more frequent natural disasters and droughts plus AIDS and emerging (or re-emerging) infectious diseases, take a huge, sinister toll in deaths, refugees, mutilations, deprivations and victimization, just as when Coillard was writing.

Some interrogations arise naturally or even maliciously. Is Africa reconnecting with its somber past, its former determinisms and its old demons? Is tribalism, and even cannibalism,⁴ back after a short interlude of peace and prosperity under European rule? Some scholars have even explicitly referred to 'return to the heart of darkness' as a plausible scenario for most of Africa after pondering the ongoing processes in Sierra Leone and Liberia (Bayart, 1999).

There seems indeed to be something wrong with this region. Why is Africa so much at pains to partake of development and globalization?

Africa appears to have always been on 'the dark side of the force': enslavers, colonizers, globalizers. Jared Diamond (1997) in his famous 'Guns, Germs and Steel' makes us dream of 'Rhino-mounted Bantu shock troops (that) could have overthrown the Roman Empire', had biogeographical endowments (in domesticable native plant and animal species) been different. But 'it never happened'.

In the research about the fits and starts of economic power, Africa is quite a puzzle in itself, not only to economists and academics, but to diplomats and aid practitioners too. Diamond (1997) argues however that in the distant past Africa had the advantages of an 'enormous early start'. Africa was not only the homeland of human evolution but of three of the nine first independent centers of cultivated food production in the world: the Sahel zone, tropical Western Africa and Ethiopia (there were none in Europe). Despite less productive endowments in plants and few domesticable animal species, John Illife (1996) conjectures too that until 'climatic change created desert

³ Source: Project Ploughshares for year 2000

⁴ This is not pure fiction. Some 'systematic' cases on civilian victims, implicating members of the MLC, a rebel militia, have been reported in 2002 by human rights organizations and the UN force in Ituri province in Eastern Congo (RDC).

conditions in the Sahara during the third millennium BC, Africa held an equal place within the Old World’.

This conveys the general question: Is there an African curse? Is there an African destiny due to an idiosyncratic geography or culture which precludes Africa from experiencing development, peace, good governance and democracy? In another respect, a more inspiring and energizing view, though literally in the long term only, can be derived from this extract of a speech reportedly made by William Pitt (Prime Minister of Britain)⁵ in 1792:

‘It has been alleged that Africa labors under a natural incapacity for civilization... Allow of this principle as applied to Africa, and I should be glad to know why it might not also have applied to ancient and civilized Britain. Why might not some Roman Senator have predicted with equal boldness – “There is a people never destined to be free, a people depressed by the hand of nature below the level of the human species, and created to form a supply of slaves for the rest of the world?”. Sir, we were once as obscure among the nations of the earth, as debased in our morals, as savage in our manners, as degraded in our understandings as these unhappy Africans are at present.’

The comparison between Britain and Africa implies several temporal perspectives. Perhaps a Roman senator taking interest in such a remote country might have (wrongly but not illogically) predicted Britons ‘ever to be slaves’ at best, but he certainly would have foretold an irretrievable disaster in the ‘improbable’ case of the cessation of Roman presence. That indeed took place at the beginning of the fifth century A.D. Due to the departure of the Roman legions, state government collapsed with a catastrophic impact on the economy probably gradually reduced to subsistence level. Nevertheless in 1792, when W. Pitt was delivering that speech, Britain was already the second richest country in the world (by GDP per capita⁶) and on the eve of the first

⁵ From his preface to the 1990 World Classics edition of ‘*Heart of Darkness*’, where Professor Cedric Watts refers to an address given by Stanley in 1892 in which the latter quoted approvingly this extract of a speech made by William Pitt (Prime Minister of Britain).

⁶ (Maddison, 2001 (appendix B)) Netherlands was still first by that standard in the late eighteenth century.

genuine Industrial Revolution. It brought the country to near hegemony, in every dimension, in the nineteenth century.

Between these extreme views of the Roman senator weighing the impact of the end of his colonization and of William Pitt pondering over the eventual success of a former Roman colony, this paper tries to make some inroads into several questions pertaining to Africa.

It establishes that notwithstanding its huge diversity, Africa's dismal performance and dysfunctional governance bear testimony to a pervasive development disorder,⁷ in economic, social, cultural and political terms. Reviewing the various possible reasons for that, the main point will be that nearly everything that can play a role is wrong or worse in Africa, but that there is nothing such as a distinctive African curse. Obstacles loom large but there is no geographical or cultural destiny.

DOES AFRICA EXIST?

These remarks and questions obviously presuppose that Africa is a grouping of sufficient coherence to conduct analyses and pass judgments. For studies on Europe or Latin America, nobody needs to be reminded, as a waiver of responsibility, that they are diverse, with different languages, standards of living, ethnic groupings, religions, cultures, with distinct climates, soils of various fertility and so on, and that nevertheless there may be some value in conducting investigations at such a large geographical scale. Sub-Saharan Africa is no exception to this rule. Its 48 states are like a statistical sample of a wider reality or 'population'. There are outliers such as South Africa, its white tribe and its enormous share of Africa's GDP (40%), or Nigeria which alone comprises nearly 20% of the Africans. But there is use for parameters describing central tendencies notwithstanding the underlying diversity.

Examples abound indeed of the latter. Altogether 1500 languages are spoken in Africa (i.e. one quarter of the world's languages) and human genetic diversity is at its highest: 'No other continent approaches that' (Diamond, 1997). Before colonization

⁷ 'Pervasive development disorder' happens to be also used in psychiatry to refer to some form of autism. At no degree is there hereby an implied metaphor between Africa's problems and autism.

Africa displayed a widely heterogeneous range of 'political systems', including decentralized acephalous ones (the Nuer, the Igbo), 'state-level' polities (Ethiopia, the caliphate of Sokoto in Northern Nigeria, the Asante kingdom in present Ghana), autonomous pioneering villages (*kafus*) with a 'big man' in the western savanna as well as chiefdoms of various scopes and degrees of central power. African art is fragmented and there is no common universalist religion. There are probably several thousands of ethnic groups at even a large level of aggregation. 'Africanization', had it not already a very special meaning, could be a kind of superlative to Balkanization.

Sub-Saharan Africa may however be considered as a whole. 'It is a reality of long time span (*longue durée*) in the sense French historian Fernand Braudel (1987) gave to civilizations', asserts J.F. Bayart (1989). There is geographical proximity and historical, relative but growing, community of destiny. Some of the most cited dominant characteristics, as Africa stood when colonization began, are: an oral culture, the deep layer of the lineage system, a customary tenure of land, an extensive and itinerant agriculture, the importance of cattle as the chief form of (non-human) wealth and of pastoral values wherever cattle could survive (non tse-tse zones). The long process of 'colonization' of most of present Central and Southern Africa by the Bantu-speaking peoples over centuries is also a 'thread tying' much of the African history (J Illife, 1996). And first of all 'Africa exists in the eyes of Africans' as argues J.F. Bayart (1989).

For sub-Saharan Africa (formerly 'Black Africa'), the 'grouping' problem stems from its 'image' as constructed at the time of colonization by missionaries and administrators with the crucial assistance of their locally recruited intermediaries. Much enriched in field descriptions but hardly changed in its wider impact on society by the first Africanists, it is charged with having conveyed the same kind of romanticized but debilitating vision of an immobile immature 'native' Africa as Orientalism is suspected of having given of the Arab world. Consequently it is suspected of having been instrumental in legitimizing and extending colonization. So there is still a high sensitivity to tentative generalizations if not made by an African.

Suspensions may be recycled with the episodic news coverage granted to Africa by the mainstream media. Africa is not the focus of spontaneous day-to-day attention; this is not too surprising since, without the Republic of South Africa, this region 'weighs' hardly 1.5% of the world GDP. The exceptions to this lack of attention are genuine excesses in violence or in distress, which hardly helps to improve its reputation or the quest for sophistication and nuances.

AFRICA'S DISMAL PERFORMANCE

Though sub-Saharan Africa's average income per capita in 2000 stood at \$480 at current exchange rates, which is slightly higher than South Asia (\$440) the poorest of all other regions, it definitely has the doubtful privilege of filling the bottom place (Table 1).

Economic Backwardness

First it is customary to exclude South Africa which, with only 6.5% of the population, stands for 40% of the region's GDP. The South African specificity dominates such statistics.⁸ Without South Africa, the average personal income amounts to \$320, the lowest of all regions. Second, when adjusted in purchasing power parity terms, which controls for the higher prices in Africa than in other 'developing' regions, and even allowing for South Africa to be included, per capita income averages \$1,690, one-third less than in South Asia. But Africa's predicament goes deeper than income. It includes as well deprivation of basic capabilities such as access to safe water, sanitation, primary health, and education. Income inequality (Table 1) is as high as Latin America and with such disheartening average incomes, it is not surprising that Africa is the region with the largest share of people living below \$1 a day.⁹

⁸ South Africa's income per capita is at around \$3,000 just at the threshold of the 'upper middle income countries', an average, but still a poor mix, between an African economy and an affluent one in a highly unequal society (Gini coefficient at about 60 %)

⁹ Although rightly much criticized for being too crude, this 'one dollar a day' threshold for assessing global progress is much more sophisticated than it seems. Briefly it is the median of the lowest and most typical and reliable national poverty lines after adjusting for purchasing power parity. And one dollar a day means exactly \$1.08 at PPP adjusted 1993 prices ('equivalent' to the first definition at \$1 at PPP adjusted 1985 prices).

Table 1 Selected comparative indicators for world regions ¹⁰

Indicator	Sub-Saharan Africa	South Asia	East Asia	Latin America
Income				
People with less than PPP \$1 per day (million)	300	490	46	77
Proportion of \$1 a day poor in population (%)	46	36	3	15
Income (GNI) per capita in current \$ ¹¹	320	440	850	3720
PPP-adjusted income (GDP) per capita (\$)	1690	2404	4290	7234
Human Development				
Human Development Index (0 to 1)	0.471	0.570	0.726	0.767
Life expectancy at birth	49	63	69	70
Education enrollment ratio (%)	42	53	71	53
Adult AIDS prevalence (%) (2002)	8.8	0.6	0.1	0.6
Inequality Gini index (%) (1995) ¹² (100 to 0)	51	32	38	49
Demography				
Population (million)	659	1 354	1 805	516
Population growth 2000-2015 (%)	2.4	1.5	0.8	1.3
Dependency ratio ¹³ (%)	89.1	66.2	50.6	58.7
Urban population (%)	33.9	29.4	37.7	75.4
Institutions				
Policy/Institutional Assessment (1998) (1 to 6)	3.0	3.6	3.2	3.7
Political Rights/Civil Liberties (1999) (7 to 1) ¹⁴	3.6	2.8	3.3	3.4
Corruption Perception Index (1998) (1 to 10)	3.6	2.8	3.3	3.4
Infrastructure and Investment				
Phone mainlines per 1000 people (1997)	16	18	50	110
% of primary commodities in exports (goods)	57	40	13	51
Savings to GDP (%) (1997) ¹¹	16.6	20	37.5	24
Capital flight/Private Wealth (1990) (%) ¹¹	39	3	6	10
Private capital stock per worker (1990) (\$) ¹¹	1069	2425	9711	17424
External financial flows				
Net foreign direct investment in % of GDP	2.1	0.5	2.8	3.9
Debt service to exports (goods+services) (%)	15.3	10.5	10.8	38.7
Official Development Aid as % of GDP	6.2	0.6	0.3	0.2

There are some exceptions to this general pattern of abysmally low income per capita but more in the number of countries than in the proportion of the population. South

¹⁰ Sources: World Development Indicators 2002 (World Bank), Human Development Report 2002 (UNDP), World Bank (2000). The year is 2000 if not otherwise mentioned.

¹¹ For sub-Saharan Africa, this figure does not include South Africa.

¹² Estimated comparable Gini coefficient for Africa in terms of income and not of consumption.

¹³ Dependency ratio is the number of dependents relative to the working age population.

¹⁴ For the policy/institutional and the corruption assessments, higher numbers reflect better scores whereas for the political rights and civil liberties the reverse is true (lowest number is worst score).

Africa (\$3,020 of GNI per capita in 2000 dollars) has been mentioned. A few other countries among the 48 states of sub-Saharan Africa are in the 'middle-income'¹⁵ category of economies. A first group of states is made of three islands: Seychelles (\$7,310) with a high tourist income for a small population, the more well-known Mauritius (\$3,800) in the Indian Ocean, and Cape Verde (\$1,330) in the Atlantic.

The second group is at the southern tip of the continent, in the immediate vicinity and orbit of South Africa: Botswana (\$3,300), Namibia (\$2,050) and Swaziland (\$1,290). The third group is limited to two oil-exporting countries, Gabon¹⁶ (\$3,180) and Equatorial Guinea (\$1,170) on the west equatorial coast. Finally comes Djibouti (\$840) on the Red Sea coast with the financial impact of a strong French military presence. These 10 states combine to form only 7.9% of the population but nearly half (47.9%) of the GDP of sub-Saharan Africa. So 92.1% of the African population, i.e. 607 million people in 2000, lives in economies well around the 'central tendency' of low income (\$270 for them). These 38 countries have a combined GDP of about \$163 bn (2000), very close to the economic size of Denmark (population of 5.3 million) or Hong-Kong (population of 6.8 million). The average GDP of this kind of country is \$4 bn, something like a city of 120,000 people in an affluent country. The average population of such countries is only 16 million people.

Africa has not always been the poorest region. In the 1950s and the 1960s African countries enjoyed a level of development superior to East and South Asia (Figure 1), where average income per capita was twice lower. Africa did grow fast enough to keep its advantage till the beginning of the 1970s. Since then (up to 1997) East Asia experienced an extraordinarily rapid growth whereas Africa went into reverse. East Asia's average GDP per capita is now 75% higher, a remarkable reversal of fortune and a denial to all the economists who thought Asia was doomed to stagnation and were betting

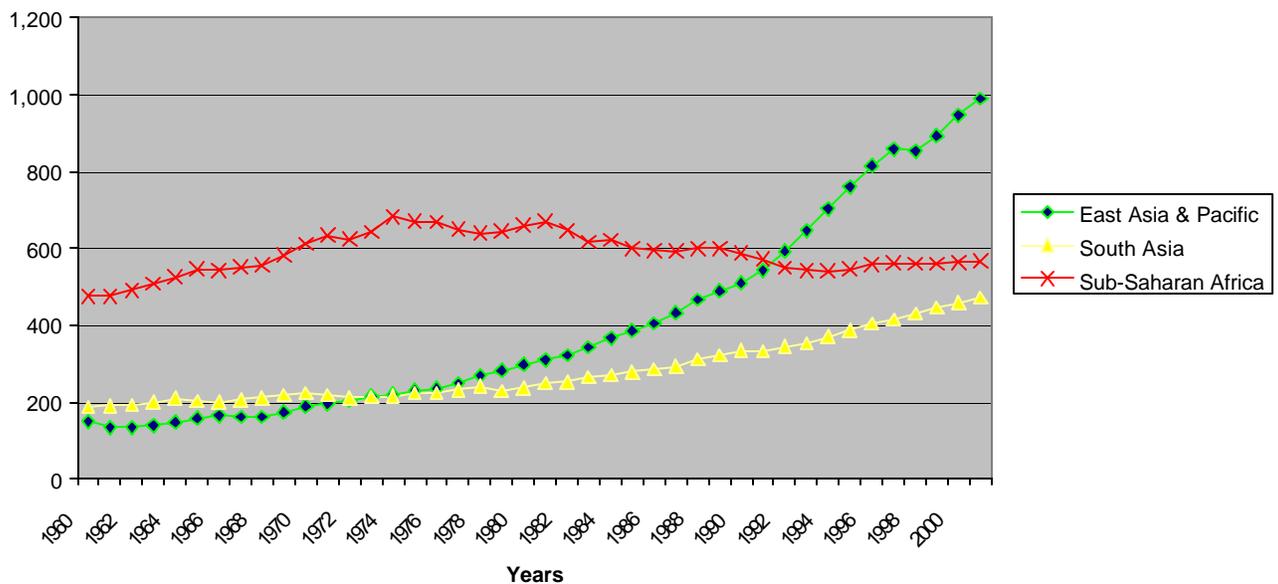
¹⁵ The World Bank divides economies according to their GDP or GNI per capita. Low income is for \$755 or less; middle income is dissociated between lower middle income from \$756 to \$2,995 and upper middle income from \$2,996 to \$9,266.

¹⁶ Being in the middle income category is no guarantee of genuine development. Botswana and Mauritius are examples of sustained high growth and rising human development. But Gabon, for example, whose oil reserves and production are now declining, has low human development indexes in health and education relatively to its level of income, very close to those of other African countries.

on Africa's future. South Asia itself initiated a sustained growth in the 1980s and has now overtaken Africa (South Africa¹⁷ excluded).

Putting aside the dynamism of Asian economies, the absolute decline of Africa is baffling. Income per capita has declined almost 1% yearly since the mid 1970s; it is hardly comforting that the rate of retrogression decelerated in the 1990s to 0.3%. In 2000, about 94% of Africans lived in states (42 of 48) where income per capita was inferior to some peak in the past, usually before 1980. The picture is barely less gloomy when using PPP-adjusted income per capita. Only nine countries were at their highest in 2000 and the 'receding' states, by that criterion, included 86% of the Africans.

Figure 1
GDP per capita in constant 1995 \$
Source: World Development Indicators 2002



¹⁷ Figure 1 series for Africa does include South Africa which explains why South Asia appears to be still behind.

Hence it is hardly surprising that Africa is not only the region with the highest proportion of extreme poverty (one-dollar-a-day) but also the only one where the absolute number of poor people is rising. This trend in income and growth is also witnessed in trade. Africa's share of the world's exports is currently at 1.3%, only one-third of its level in 1970. The World Bank (2000) estimated that the erosion of this share of world trade (at current prices) represents a 'staggering annual income loss of \$68 bn or 21% of regional GDP'. Worsened terms of trade were another source of loss for many of these countries too. The cumulative losses between 1970 and 1997 represent almost 120% of their GDP for the non-oil exporting countries, a 'massive drain of resources'.

Human Underdevelopment

With most economies battling a retreat in terms of income per capita, the social gains of post-independence are being eroded. Life expectancy at birth, which stood at 40 years in 1960, culminated at 50 in the early 1990s and was back at 46 in 2001. This is of course compounded by the AIDS epidemic. Africa is the worst affected region with 29.4 million adults and children living with HIV/AIDS, 70% of the world's cases and an adult prevalence rate of 8.8%. In four southern African countries, HIV seroprevalence is more than 30%: Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Health services feel the triple pressure of contracted budgets, rapidly increasing demands and attrition of staff through illness. The minimum cost for antiretroviral drugs of \$300 per year per patient, is the typical level of income per capita in Africa, placing them out of reach of both the average patient and the health system.

The worst of the epidemic will be felt in the next decade and beyond. AIDS is decimating the active workforce¹⁸ since it is linked, as documented, to sexual activity and monetary potency. For still quite some time, this will worsen already extremely high dependency ratios (Table 1). The social fabric of many societies will also have to handle the cohorts of AIDS orphans: 11 million currently without at least one parent. For some of them, what comes next is the even more formidable impact and the 'mass

¹⁸ A visit in 1999 by the author of a just privatized sugar refinery in Southern Malawi failed to show any concern by the new managers about overstaffing. The natural rate of attrition due to AIDS deaths between the initial assessment for tendering and the real date of acquisition had nearly solved the problem.

psychological problems'¹⁹ of the homeless 'street kids,'²⁰ who 'congregate at traffic lights (...) begging, selling, sniffing glue and pilfering'¹⁹ in many African capitals. An estimate of 100,000 homeless children is advanced for Zambia, a country of 10 million people where adult seroprevalence reaches 21%. The loss of staff due to AIDS also considerably affects the education system. A study by Markus Haacker (2002) for the IMF has shown that for the nine southern African countries, the proportion of the prospective teachers who need to be trained to replace AIDS victims will rise from the already high average level of 45% in 2000 to 67% in 2010, even after allowing for the decline of pupils due to AIDS.

But AIDS is not the only source of decline in health and education scores. Malaria death rates seem to have been rising since the mid 1970s although this is due in part to the growing resistance of the parasite to common drugs. Child immunization rates against leading diseases have also been falling and are now below 50%. Primary school enrollment has dropped since the 1980s in many countries although the trend was temporarily reversed in the 1990s in a few of them.

The pressure due to the school age population growth is a major factor, but the enormous post-independence schooling achievements took place in a more demanding context. The new challenge is that growth has stopped and budgets have shrunk. However some members of the new generation of heads of state who came to power in the 1980s and 1990s either by virtue of the first multiparty elections (Muluzi in Malawi) or by force (Museveni in Uganda) recognized the deep aspiration and the need for schooling. They promised free universal primary education and abolished fees against the advice of multilateral institutions, and enrollment rates soared for a time. But the downward tendency continues for most African states, notwithstanding the substantial differentiation of school and health systems across countries in their type of organization, often borrowed from the colonizer. Twelve African countries, most of them in southern Africa,

¹⁹ 'Forty million orphans' *The Economist*, 30 November 2002.

²⁰ Not all street kids are AIDS orphans and fortunately not all AIDS orphans do become homeless but there is a strong linkage in the increase of both phenomena.

have regressed in their Human Development Index in recent years (Zimbabwe of course, but Zambia too for instance).

Especially when South Africa is excluded, Africa also lags behind the rest of the world in almost all dimensions of infrastructure development (World Bank, 2000). The indicator (Table 1) of the number of telephone mainlines can be considered as standing for all types of infrastructure; it is often used as a proxy in some regressions. There is a critical shortage of infrastructure in quantity but also in quality and reliability. Only one in five households had access to electricity in 1998 but typically power shortages are countless and surges are frequent and detrimental as much to home appliances, if any, as to company equipment. Most firms have to rely on fuel-powered generators.

The World Bank (2000) also made a telling comparison when reminding that in 1997 all of sub-Saharan Africa, excluding South Africa, had fewer paved roads than Poland. 'Paved' does not at all mean regularly resurfaced; maintenance is often neglected. That global availability of infrastructure may be declining even in the absence of war is illustrated by the implosion of Malagasy's national road network from 55,000 kms in 1960 to 33,000 kms in 2000 (World Bank, 2002).

This dismal portrait of the 'central tendency' of Africa would not be complete without mentioning the economic instability and conflicts that plague the continent. At times, some countries such as Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire did sustain substantial growth for long periods and were claimed to be miracles in the 1960s and the 1970s, which now retrospectively looks grotesque. As Freeman and Lindauer (1999) put it, the problem is not only that 'most countries have been unable to sustain long periods of rapid growth' but that even 'front-runners seem to stumble and fall back'. There have not been many real success stories or miracles except for Botswana and Mauritius, the latter hardly being 'African' were it not for its membership in the African Union. But there have been much more stagnation and decline after some initial slow, rarely vigorous, growth in the 1960s. This is the 'typical pattern as reflected in the average' (Ndulu and O'Connell, 1999).

Disasters, usually war-induced or war-generating, have also occurred much too often or are still occurring: Angola, Biafra, Burundi, Congo-Brazzaville which has

slipped from the group of the middle income countries, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Guinea-Bissao, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra-Leone, Somalia, southern Sudan, former Zaire at independence and now ...Some countries are recovering from past violence with a new exemplary determination by local standards, such as Mozambique, but have decades to catch up (and in Mozambique an estimated 20 million landmines to clear). Even as old conflicts end (Angola) or reach a window of peacemaking under the pressure of a united Security Council (RDC), new crises break out (Côte d'Ivoire, Darfur).

In 2000, it was estimated that one African in five was living in a country severely disrupted by war or civil conflict and sixteen sub-Saharan African countries were defined by the Ploughshares Project as host to armed conflicts, meaning one-third of African states were embroiled in wars. A comparison between world regions has shown that the number of deaths due to civil conflict per year was of 30.3 out of 100,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa versus 10.1 in East Asia, 9.4 in the Middle East and North Africa, 7.4 in South Asia and 3.2 in Latin America. It is simply not true, or basic wishful thinking, to assert²¹ that, in Africa, 'for every Somalia where a state has fallen apart, there is a Botswana...'.

HISTORY: TRAUMATIC BUT NOT IMMISERATING

The debate about Africa's underperformance has regularly referred to various historical factors such as slavery and colonization to emphasize a legacy of handicaps at independence. The 'dependency' and 'immiserating' theories according to which the slave-triangular trade and colonization have on one hand played a crucial role in the initial capital accumulation, which permitted the Industrial Revolution and Western expansion, and on the other hand impoverished Africa, are not supported by recent research.

²¹ 'Time for a dash of Afro-optimism' by Malloch Brown, the UNDP's administrator, in *Business Day* (30 May 2000), the economic newspaper of South Africa. Botswana is taken here by M. Brown as a model for Africa, even though it has the highest AIDS rate in the world.

The Infamous Slave Trade

Based on quantitative economic history, analyses of levels and trends in production, trade and prices have shown that the triangular trade was certainly highly profitable but its quantitative effects were ‘negligible’ (Mokyr, 1993) and ‘trivially small’ (A. Lewis, 1978).

‘In the absence of West Indian slavery, Britain would have had to drink bitter tea but it would have had an industrial revolution at a marginally slower pace’ (Mokyr, 1993; editor’s introduction). Thomas and McCloskey (1981) found that the triangular trade did not cause growth and that the contribution of the West Indies, of which slavery was a precondition, was providing for Britain a non-viable return of 2%, much lower than the rate of British government bonds at that time (3.5%). It was a negative investment but it endured because ‘benefits accrued to a small group ... and the costs were widely diffused’.

The same scholars formulate an iconoclastic contention about the ‘fabled’ profits drawn from the slave trade. Their reasoning is that ‘at each stage, competition by eager buyers’ ensured that the buyers could only earn normal profits. So any abnormal profit could logically only benefit the ‘original source’. And since ‘Europeans possessed no means, either economic or military, to compel African leaders to sell slaves’ (Thornton, 1998), this points to the African enslavers, ‘kings, rich men or prime merchants,’²² who traded other Africans as a consequence of war or raids perpetrated for that very purpose. ‘The economic profits of the trade were wasted in Africa, not funneled into industry’. Illife (1996) also rejects the ‘bauble’ myth: ‘The Europeans sold to Africans much the same kind of goods as they sold to American colonists’: cloth, alcohol, tobacco, metal goods, firearms, gunpowder.

There was no clear-cut effect of this foreign trade either on overwhelmingly agricultural economies²³ with no sign of development over three centuries, or on the

²² John Illife (1996 citing an anonymous knowledgeable French merchant (page 133).

²³ A notable economic and positive impact came as a serendipitous byproduct of the slave trade with the penetration of cassava and maize, two crops with substantially higher caloric yields than indigenous plants such as sorghum and millet. They spread over the continent without any ‘extension services’ provided by a government or a donor agency.

political organization where some 'states' disintegrated and others arose with other factors at play too as with the expansion of Islam. The major quantitative impact of this shameful period, even if it is not easily quantifiable, was demographic. Illife (1996) cites one 'guesstimate' modeled by the historian P. Manning (1990) according to whom the population of sub-Saharan Africa would have been 100 million in 1850 instead of only 50 million, after controlling for the deported slaves, the casualties and the births that would have taken place in the counter-factual situation (if there had been no slave trade). The general assessment is that the African slave trade prevented demographic growth for two centuries and helped accentuate the continent's already evident economic backwardness. The letter the king of Dahomey wrote to the king of England in 1726 suggesting that Europeans should establish plantations in his kingdom instead of buying slaves never received a response.

Illife also suggests that even more important effects might well have been social and psychological, which stemmed from the sustained experience of major suffering and reinforced defense strategies, codes, and systems (kinship, polygyny e.g.) that enabled Africans to endure terrible pain and cruelty.

Colonization and Identities

The colonization and the partition of Africa (except for Ethiopia which defeated the Italians) was rendered possible by the introduction of quinine and repeating rifles which gave Europeans the opportunity to mount successful military operations in the hinterland. There is much disagreement on this period too and any broad panafrikan view of colonial rule because its 'nature and impact varied dramatically from place to place' (Illife). The ruthless exploitation of Leopold's Congo and the extortionary regime of concessions in the neighboring French Congo, for instance, contrasted with the development of native peasant production of cash crops (cocoa, groundnuts) in western tropical Africa and the occupation of some of the best lands²⁴ in Rhodesia or Kenya by white settlers. Even within the same sphere of colonization, there were wide

²⁴ In short there was eviction in Rhodesia subsequently to military defeat and in Kenya the lands appeared to be unoccupied and uncultivated but that was just a temporary cycle in the local economy.

discrepancies as illustrated by the relatively ‘high’ level of secondary education in Kenya (Alliance High School) and the de facto apartheid²⁵ in the Rhodesias.

Colonization happened through violence but not everywhere. Many ‘treaties’ were signed with local kings and chiefs, with undoubtedly ‘asymmetrical information’ on their meaning. Resistance lasted or erupted in places till World War I (Baoulé in Côte d’Ivoire, Maji-Maji in Tanganyika, Chilembwe’s uprising in Malawi); elsewhere it put an end to secular internal strife.

Moreover colonization put an end to slavery too. If the prohibition of the Atlantic slave trade had already been enforced by the British and French navies much before colonization, the latter to a large extent also terminated the domestic practice of slavery itself over the continent and annihilated the Arab slaving networks on the eastern coast, which were of much older ancestry (at least since the ninth century) than the Atlantic ones.

Apart from the settler colonies of Rhodesia, what is striking is the very small number of administrators and military who exercised colonial rule.²⁶ To that extent, Illife (1996) does not see a major difference between the alleged direct rule of the French and the indirect rule of the British. It changed the level of interface between indigenous society and foreign rule but in the end ‘direct rule was in practice rule by the Africans’.

And if this rule could prevail, though, historically, for a brief period, it was not only through fear of military coercion or superstition of the ‘Whites’ magic.²⁷ Life-styles and ultimately values imposed or proposed by colonization and its administrative, economic, military and missionary elements displayed genuine ‘attractiveness’ (Bayart, 2000). ‘Catechists, schoolteachers, nurses, clerks, soldiers...were all the worker-bees of the colonial hive as they were to be of the nationalist movement’ (ibidem).

²⁵ One famous struggle of pre-independence Zambia by Kenneth Kaunda was the boycott of butcheries. Black people although collectively monetarily more important as customers were not allowed to enter the main store and had to be helped through a back window-counter.

²⁶ In 1908 there were 7,309 French citizens altogether in ‘Western French Africa’, i.e. an area of more than 10 million people (J. de la Guérivière, 2001).

²⁷ *Bekee wu agbara* in Igbo: a white man is a spirit (supernatural being, not necessarily good).

Responses to the ‘big bang’ of colonization were quite different across societies and even in the same society or colony. There was often a rural trend of resilience with the wish, through appeasement and deception, to minimize the encroachments and intrusion (hut tax, forced labor). The urban trend was very different. The congruence of Christianity, education, wage employment and urbanization, as limited as they were, opened ways of individual liberation and emancipation from the elders’ authority and competing layers of stratification. Innumerable local associations with the most diverse purposes (e.g. welfare, dance, football)²⁸ accompanying or bringing about social change were created.

Colonization was a challenge to identities that could be alternatively oppositional, repressed, enhanced, invented or blended. Missionaries wanted to reduce and regroup the numerous dialects in structured and ‘writable’ languages in which they could record local tales or traditions and so find a better ground for evangelization. European rulers wanted to delineate their administrative units along local peoples’ main characteristics, which could only be ‘tribal’, according to the dominant ideas of the time. There was a need and a will for a Weberian-style bureaucracy to simplify and classify the natives’ reality. But the sincere desire to learn and understand was also present as a motivation. Very influential were the intermediaries (clerks, interpreters, catechists), the first intellectuals the administrators had usually to rely upon for translation .

As Illife (1996) remarks, ‘pre-colonial Africans had possessed several social identities’ just like any person in a complex social order. They might belong to lineages, clans, villages, towns, chiefdoms, language groups, states ... the relevant identity depending on the situation’. But there could be several languages spoken in a chiefdom. And people speaking the same language could belong to several chiefdoms. At the village level there could be several clans in the same location but each clan had members in several villages and the elders of a clan had no ‘jurisdiction’ on the members of the other clans. So the typical scheme of one-territory-one-tribe-one-chief did not fit everywhere with the existing social order, to say the least. This is where the extreme thesis of the

²⁸ The ‘real’ one for a continental European, called soccer in the US.

‘invention of tradition’ comes from. The ethnic groups and consequently the tribalism of contemporary Africa were supposedly created by the colonizer with the instrumental but unfaithful support of the ‘intermediaries’.

There is some truth to that. But the very artificial chieftaincies disappeared or were abolished after independence without a murmur. Typically exogenous creations did not endure. Many authorities that were recognized or empowered by European administration were also preexisting and might sometimes be very close, in practice or in their pretensions, to their allegedly new function, such as the Litunga²⁹ of the Lozis and the Chitimukulu of the Bembas (in Zambia).

Illife suggests a more balanced and comprehensive view: ‘colonial rule often accentuated one existing identity or occasionally created one’. He insists also on the role of wage employment, of work migration in distant places (mines in South Africa e.g.) and of urbanization (Lagos for the Igbos) in the formation of ‘modern tribes’.

The consciousness of belonging to larger entities was often born among migrant workers feeling the need to match with other people having affinities of language, kinship, and regional origin, with ‘home-boys’ for solidarity purposes and even rivalry ones in order to compete with groups enjoying a more asserted identity. Associations on such bases, created by ‘advanced’ people, then reached back home to nurture the newly discovered and felt identity. Apart from the institution of chieftaincy itself, which could well be eventually discarded as artificial, this arising need of identity vis-à-vis other competing groups in towns and distant worksites could even match, or merge, with the linguistic-tribal regrouping set up by the colonizer.

So most of the contemporary framework of ethnicity was formed then and built with a mix of ancient and new materials from a past partially fictionalized as well from new, intensively felt, experiences and not in the same proportions for each ethnic grouping. And the most important point is to ascertain whether people believe in these

²⁹ The Litunga and the Chitimukulu were highly considered by the British government. The former was the only native the Governor was officially permitted to shake hands with. Mc Millan and Shapiro (1999) mention this in their book, *Zion in Africa*, devoted to the story of the Jews in Zambia because immigrant Jews from Central Europe were rendered suspect to the British by their astonishing habit of shaking hands with Africans.

groupings, identify to some degree with them, and consequently whether it is, for better or worse, operational in understanding their behavior. And so it is.

This illustrates the complex impact of colonialism in many regards. As Illife again argues: 'New did not simply replace old, but blended with it, sometimes revitalized it and produced novel and distinctively African syntheses'.

Colonization and Economic Development

Colonization was certainly a traumatic and asymmetric, or in other terms a violent and unequal experience, but it also generated significant and substantial changes, adhesions, opportunities and hopes which logically and ultimately would bring about its own demise. But it was not an immiserating relationship either. Railways, lorries and road building cut transportation costs in huge proportions, reshaping trade circuits and enabling exploitation of mineral resources and colonization of new areas for export crops or food production. It was at that time that most African countries acquired most of their current economic profile, in terms of cash crops, peasant production versus large estates, and natural resources.

Continental Africa's GDP per capita income rose about 3.5-fold from 1820 to 1980 and the average yearly rate of growth increased over time: 0.12% for 1820-1870, 0.64% for 1870-1913 and 1.02% between 1913 and 1950 (Maddison, 2001). This first inroad in personal income is all the more remarkable since Africa underwent a major demographic growth from an estimated 90 million in 1870 to 228 million in 1950. European medicine's successes against epidemic diseases and even infertility, disappearance of widespread famines, and better hygiene induced a substantial decline of mortality rates. Population was growing at a yearly rate of 1% during the 1913-1950 period.

In 2003, forty and fifty years after independence, what is the 'handicapping legacy hypothesis' worth as an explanation for Africa's slow growth performance and even collapse after the mid 1970s in strict economic and technical terms? The reasonable logical conclusion is 'not much', if there was ever any validity in it. As Harrison phrases

(Harrison and Huntington, 2000): ‘For many, including some Africans, the statute of limitations on colonialism as an explanation for underdevelopment lapsed long ago’.

It is not difficult to find Africans, including illustrious ones, who share that view. Kofi Annan at an OAU summit in Togo in July 2000 publicly held African leaders responsible for most of the continent’s problems: ‘This is not something others have done to us. It is something we have done to ourselves ... We have mismanaged our affairs for decades, and we are suffering the accumulated effects’. Achille Mbembe (2002), the author of *On Post Colony* (2000, 2001) also bemoans the ‘still pervasive discourse of victimization and resentment’ and the tendency ‘to blame everything on the past’. Many aid practitioners, development economists and diplomats, in charge of development or African affairs, seem to believe that this view now reflects a large consensus among Africans, because their counterparts in the government, in the civil society organizations and the opposition, generally pretend to agree to it. And declarations are all the more easy to issue if the charge is against a defunct regime.

But it is suggested in this paper that the Western conspiracy theory is still ‘pervasive’, as stated by Mbembe, among the African intellectuals ‘over there’, in Africa. Those who are not in the process of claiming financial support from a Western embassy or an aid agency, express it at every occasion, and they are numerous. It even belongs to the core of the undisputable local ‘common sense’ about the reasons why ‘things have fallen apart’³⁰ and are like they are.

An editorial of *The Post* (20 February 2003), the only oppositional newspaper in Zambia, which contributed so much to the formation of whatever genuine democracy there is now and in preventing former President Chiluba from amending the Constitution in 2001 to get a third term, is typical of this widespread mindset. Criticizing the new ‘indirect rule’ by the Bretton Woods institutions and a senior environment specialist of the World Bank, the argument heats up: ‘But X and his masters even pretend to ignore that slavery, colonialism and the brutal exploitation and plunder to which our countries were subjected for centuries are the causes of underdevelopment and poverty. ... They

³⁰ This obviously refers to the novel ‘Things fall apart’ by Chinua Achebe, a leading writer from Nigeria (born in 1930).

speaking of our flaws as if it were not themselves who impregnated our pure and noble ancestral peoples with the vices of the colonizers or the exploiters’.

Allowing for a not globally ‘immiserating’ legacy of colonialism to no degree implies that colonization was anything close to what it pretended to be, the selfless enterprise of enlightening the dark continent with the torch of progress. As was the case of the West Indies for Britain, African colonies were probably never a good investment at an aggregate level for any European nation.³¹ Initially, many of the occupations and treaties were even imposed ex-post on reluctant central governments by local agents, adventurers, businessmen and commanding officers, especially the French in western and central Africa and the British in southern Africa. It was even said that the colonial empires were built in ‘a fit of absent mindedness’.

The scramble for Africa then became a strategic game, literally and quite like in the games theory: each player’s decisions and moves being motivated more by the need to prevent the others from taking too many possessions than by the conviction of their intrinsic usefulness. But the colonial enterprise did provide a few people and companies with adventure, glory and profit, offering positions of power and influence they could hardly have dreamt of at home. Except after post-World War II, that is in the last years of colonization, much of public investment and infrastructure was created for strategic or commercial purposes that reflected the interests of the metropolitan country and/or of its nationals.

The fact that populations benefited, sometimes substantially, from colonization through higher personal income and better health was more a fortunate if intrinsic byproduct of colonization than the result of a deliberate policy because many of them had to be involved in the new form of production. And there were many regional variations such as the remote ‘labor reservoirs’ for the mines in southern Africa where agricultural production declined and decayed. Colonization did not live up to its alleged motives.

Another subsidiary but important question can be raised about the conditions of decolonization and the preparedness of African elites to take over. There is ground here

³¹ For France this thesis is argued by J. Marseille (1984).

for a real handicap. There were variations, as already mentioned, in the degree of secondary and even more tertiary education, between French and British colonies, between Western Africa and the Rhodesias ('no elites, no problems'). But in almost all countries the number of university graduates at independence could be counted on less than four hands and often just two. In Belgian and Portuguese colonies, education opportunities were even more restricted. This was a major handicap indeed.

Decolonization also happened, with exceptions, in a globally more rapid way than initially anticipated by either the colonized and the colonizer. There were frequently, during what revealed to be the late years of colonization, some multi-party elections for local autonomous authorities under the monitoring of colonial governorates. In French colonies some Africans had for a few years even been members of the National Assembly and ministers of the metropolitan government where they acquired a wide experience of the French political class, if not of democracy (e.g. Houphouët Boigny).

To a large extent, it may be argued that it is the realization, due to the intellectual progressist climate of post-World War Europe, that French and British governments were likely to face the obligation of taking more and more seriously their promises and responsibility for promoting equality and development, including financially, that prompted an accelerated transfer of responsibilities. At the same time, to a rapidly growing and 'catching-up' Europe, colonies appeared as an archaic burden on modern industry and business. This fitted well with the desires of the nationalist movements eager to take control of their destiny, although there were odd exceptions as in Gabon, where Prime Minister Leon M'ba (reportedly but plausibly) vainly attempted to convince Général de Gaulle to let his country become a French overseas *département*. But even that already hastened bad scenario was not always respected. Portugal was not part of it and fought independentist guerillas in Guinea-Bissao, Angola and Mozambique till 1974, which turned into civil wars after independence for the last two. Other developments saw the war in Belgian Congo (and the UN intervention) and the self-declared Southern Rhodesia White Independent Government.

NO AFRICAN ECONOMIC DUMMY BUT HANDICAPS

In the past numerous studies in the cross-country regression literature on growth have failed to account for Africa's chronic underperformance. A qualitative African dummy³² variable was then found to be statistically significant and adding substantially to the explanatory power of the regressions. Africa was seemingly responding differently (meaning worse) than other regions, an econometric version of the African curse. Some research was devoted to account for this African dummy and/or invalidate it by using new variables. Easterly and Levine (1997) introduced ethnolinguistic diversity, at its highest in Africa, to which they found a substantial influence. However the African dummy was still significant. In 1998, they eliminated it after allowing for a 'neighboring spillover effect', although Hoeffler (2002) describes this 'neighborhood variable' as very similar to a regional dummy except for the name. Sachs and Warner (1997) as well as Bloom and Sachs (1998) added a geographical (tropical) dummy which removes the need for an African one (or a Latin American one, for another very problematic region).

But Anke Hoeffler (2002) seems to have dealt a major blow on impeccable technical grounds to these writings explaining or circumventing the African dummy. To begin with, she claims there never was any African dummy at all. She finds irretrievable estimation problems with the previously used methods. Biases due to possible and plausible unobserved country-specific effects and to a small number of time periods suggest using a recently developed and so-called 'system generalized method of moments' (SYS-GMM) estimator as the best adapted. Running a regression over 85 countries over 30 years she does find the African dummy highly significant when using the incorrect usual estimation techniques, but it is insignificant with the SYS-GMM method. 'There is no systematic unobserved difference between African and non-African countries', she concludes. Econometrics dismisses any distinct African responsiveness to economic variables. The problem is to identify which variables among those recognized

³² A 'dummy variable' is assigned either the value of one (e.g. a country being African) or zero (converse case). It is often abbreviated into just 'dummy' for self-evident reasons. For a review by the author of the recent literature on cross-country regressions on growth and relevant references, see Zoël (2003)

as important for economic performance, have worse scores in Africa than elsewhere, and why.

Total Factor Productivity and Demography

Growth accounting may provide some first clues. Regional comparisons of average growth since 1960 do highlight a negative total factor productivity (TFP) growth for Africa as the major difference with the two poorest regions at that time in the determinants of growth. Though true, this misses the collapse of Africa's performance which took place in the mid 1970s (Table 2). Africa did not grow faster than any other region but its record during 1960-1973 is 'indistinguishable from the geographically very different circumstances of South Asia' (Collier and Gunning, 1999b), the next most capital-scarce region, be it the overall rate of productivity growth (1.8% for South Asia and 1.9% for Africa) or the decomposition between factors and TFP.

Table 2: Sources of growth: Africa and Asia compared

(average yearly rates of variation in %)

Growth of Output 1960-1994 (Crafts, 2002)				
1960-1994	Capital	Labor	TFP	GDP
East Asia	3.5	1.6	1.7	6.8
South-Asia	1.8	1.2	1.2	4.2
Africa	1.7	1.7	-0.5	2.9
Growth of Productivity per Worker (Collier and Gunning, 1999a)				
	Capital per worker	Education per worker	TFP per worker	Output per worker
1960-1973				
South Asia	1.4	0.3	0.1	1.8
Africa	1.3	0.2	0.3	1.9
1973 -1994				
South Asia	0.9	0.3	1.3	2.6
Africa	0.4	0.2	-1.3	-0.6

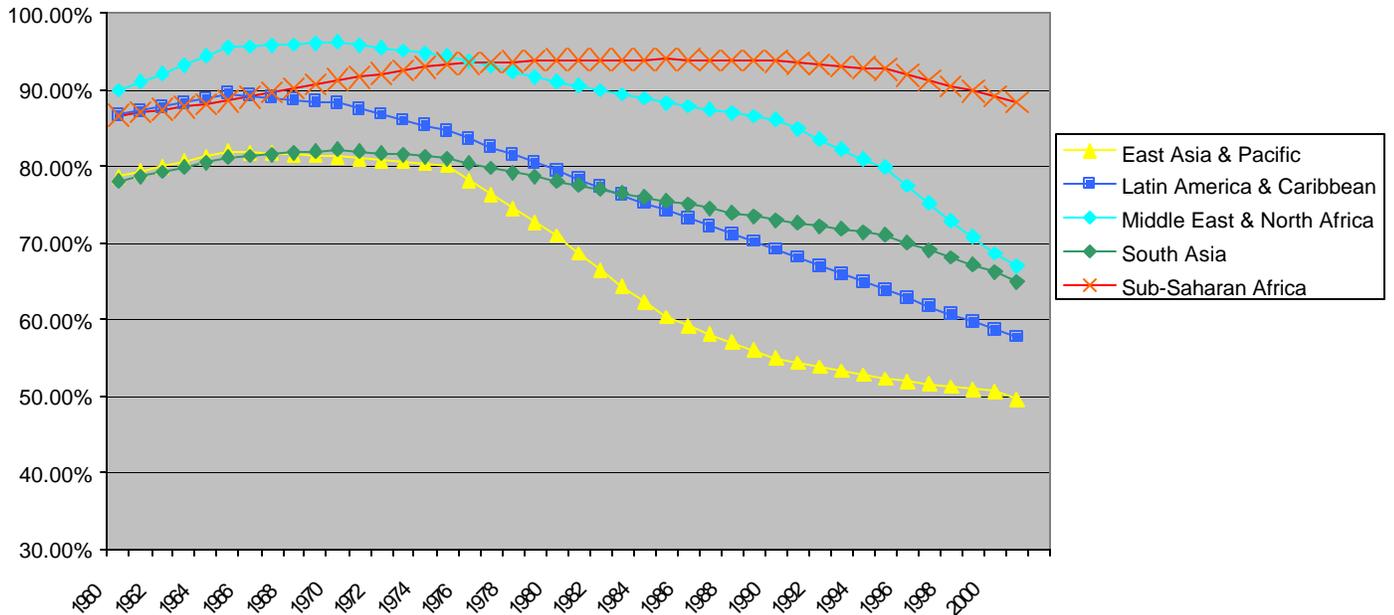
The contrast is staggering after 1973 with a 3.2% gap of productivity growth between South Asia (+2.6%) and Africa (-0.6%). The latter's productivity per worker reversed its previous trend around 1973; the main factor is the collapse of TFP, the

slower accumulation of physical capital being a distant second. TFP points towards technological and organizational progress, towards ‘social capability’. Moreover technology is held as always progressing; therefore a negative TFP variation can only refer to the worsening of ‘soft factors’ such as policies and institutions, the ‘social capability’. In any case, as Dollar and Easterly (1999) summarize, ‘whatever TFP growth contains, the main story behind Africa’s failure (...) is not factor accumulation’.

Regarding the role of the labor force, Ndulu and O’Connell (1999) notice that ‘real incomes per person have been diverging even more rapidly at 3% per year’ than productivity per worker because Africa, alone among the regions of the world, has experienced over the last few decades a high and rising dependency ratio; that is, the number of dependents (aged less than 15 or more than 64 years old) relatively to the labor force (Figure 2). The reason is that between 1960 and 1994, Africa’s population grew at an average annual rate of 2.76% from 223.6 million to 563.9 million, ‘an historically unprecedented increase among major regions of the world over comparable periods of time’ (Bloom and Sachs, 1998). The combination of falling mortality and hardly slowed fertility rates has delayed till now any ‘demographic transition’ and deprived Africa of the correlated window of opportunity in terms of savings and investment for instance, which benefited so much East Asia.

Africa stands with a huge dependency ratio at 88%, as compared to 67% in the Middle East and 49% in East Asia. This is a huge impediment to growth with massive pressures on the educational system, large flows of young people willing to enter the labor market with a shrinking formal sector, and restricted capacity for the savings of adults. Moreover the impact of AIDS, besides its hideous consequences, has the capacity to postpone again the decline of dependency ratios by taking a disproportionate toll within the labor force.

Figure 2
Regional Dependency ratios (%)
Source: WDI 2002 (World Bank)



Sustained high dependency ratios could certainly be expected to account for lower growth performance than elsewhere but since they have been high since the 1950s and have even peaked by now, they are not obvious candidates for explaining the collapse of growth in the mid 1970s. As for savings and investment, ‘there is a consensus among regional specialists that capital accumulation is not a primary constraint on African growth’ remark Hatton and Williamson (2000) in a study emphasizing the predictable enormous surge of demand for emigration from Africa. At least this has been so till

now.³³ It can sound provocative since the shares of savings (Table 1) and investments in GDP have been systematically lower than in other regions and declined after the 1970s. For investments, the gap is large since statistics have to be adjusted to take into account the higher unit cost of investments when made in Africa. At comparable international prices, Africa invested 9.75% of GDP from 1960 to 1994, the ratio for other developing countries being 13.78% (Hoeffler, 2002). This is often interpreted as an illustration of underinvestment and of the necessity of more savings and more aid to bridge the gap.

But recent research by Collier and Gunning (1999a), Dollar and Easterly (1999), and Devarajan, Easterly and Pack (2001) tells a different and more complicated story. Public investment ratios happen to be grossly comparable across regions and the lower total investment in Africa is due only to a much smaller private component of investment. Globally it appears that the rate of return on capital in Africa is one-third lower than in other regions, which reflects the fact that most public investment (what is classified as such, including projects financed by aid) has been unproductive and therefore too high.

Regarding private investment, including foreign direct investment (FDI), it was inhibited by policy-induced increased risks and lowered returns. The same dysfunctional policies and institutions caused both public investment to be unproductive and private investment to be withheld. That explains why FDI surveys show rates of return seemingly higher in Africa than in other regions: they incorporate much higher risk premiums and distorted transactions costs. Private investment being low, the private stock of capital per worker has declined and is much lower than even in South Asia (2.3 times less in 1990 as shown in Table 1). The astonishingly high level of capital flight of African wealth owners, 39% as compared to 10% in Latin America or 6% in East Asia (Table 1), 'may

³³ As expected the World Bank maintains that in the future there would be need for a much higher investment rate, including in the public sector (considering the deficit in infrastructure and utilities), to support a poverty-reducing growth.. The counter-argument is that in the past much of investment did not produce any social return. Proof is given by Easterly (2002) for Zambia. If all aid to investment had been genuine investment and if such investment had yielded a reasonable average multiplying effect of 3.5, then Zambia income per capita would have reached by now more \$20,000.

have been a rational response to the lack of investment opportunities at home' (Devarajan, Easterly and Pack, 2001).

Since negative TFP refers to 'soft factors' and demography being as much a constraint to growth as a result of a lack of growth in the past, another frequent approach for identifying exogenous, hard, handicaps accounting for Africa's decline is to emphasize disadvantageous geographic characteristics and their specific impacts on agriculture, health, economic isolation and unwise specialization in primary commodities. And in a distant perspective, it may be added that biogeography has been held as the ultimate cause of the inferiority status of African polities when they were 'engulfed' by more efficient ones (Diamond, 1997). Low-yield native crops prevented population growth and emergence of literacy, causing political segmentation and economic backwardness. To some extent slavery and colonization could even be deemed as part of a 'geographical' legacy.

Small Arbitrary States

The debate about the small size of African economies and the choice of the frontiers by the colonizers is just at the crossroads of history and geography. Sub-Saharan Africa has a population about half of India's but it is divided into 48 independent states covering an area 7.4-fold larger. Only seven countries have more than 20 million inhabitants. Since almost all states have very low incomes per capita, a typical African economy is 'radically smaller' than in other regions (Collier and Gunning, 1999b). This small financial size often combined with a large area can have several drawbacks.

There are fixed costs that may be hard to sustain or cover from supporting a national state institutions, especially democratic ones, due to the high outlays of organizing elections, or for instance to setting up national stock markets with too few listed companies and transactions. The size of the internal market may not be sufficient for making investment profitable, and establishing and maintaining an appropriate infrastructure may not be affordable. These are serious impediments to growth which can keep a country in a low-level equilibrium, but integrating markets with those of neighbors within regional organizations and foreign aid can mitigate these obstacles.

Another more general criticism has been made against the arbitrariness of the borders as inherited at independence, derived first from those agreed to the famous Berlin conference in 1884-1885 and second from the delimitation of administrative units by the colonizers within their own zone of influence. The scope for border adjustments was officially banned at the OAU conference in 1964. Only Eritrea has gotten independence since then, and only with the uncoerced consent of Ethiopia. But unfortunate Biafra could not secede from Nigeria.

The arbitrariness and exogeneity of the present borders cannot be contested but their impact is exaggerated. In which part of the world are the borders not arbitrary and scientifically or ethnologically carved? Had the borders been closer to the primeval ethnic markers of identity, that could have meant several hundreds, or thousands, of states and this should have happened a long time ago to make sense, that is before urbanization and the subsequent cohabitation of ethnic groups. This cohabitation even helped in bringing about the emergence of modern ethnic 'identities', not only often distinct from historical ones but much more encompassing.

It has often been noticed that Africans are 'locally minded' people, due to the strength of these local identities and concerns, which drives Ndulu and O'Connell (1999) to conclude that 'it was the existence of national borders, rather than their placement' which gave rise to problems. If the first four decades of post-independence have accomplished something and if many 'fathers of independence' (Kenneth Kaunda, Kamuzu Banda, Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere for instance) can claim to have some positive legacy, it is in the formation of national consciousnesses. They have not superseded, much less replaced, the other identities. They may not be prospering but they have taken some real flesh. Even Mobutu with its economically disastrous 'Zairianization' policy may have enhanced national unity in what is now the *République Démocratique du Congo* (RDC). Five years of civil war, interrupted trading circuits and foreign predatory invasion by Rwanda and Uganda have not destroyed the feeling of national unity, even among the rebel militias allied to Rwanda and Uganda.

Another proof that national identity is generally alive with active roots is its frequent manipulation by politicians. There are many cases with the aim of restricting rights of franchise or candidacy with ludicrous claims of nationality for several generations up to the times African states did not exist and were not even dreamt of. But the explicit legalistic trickery is not the full story. This often degenerates in inflammatory calls to ‘authenticity’ based on a sort of national ethnicity. Côte d’Ivoire is an example where this trend was fully displayed in 2003.

Climate and Poor Soils

Geography per se is often advanced as a key reason for the low productivity of African agriculture. Africa may be rich in minerals but it is poor in soils. ‘Phosphorus deficiency, low organic content, low water infiltration and retention capacity on much of African soil’ (World Bank, 2003) are a very constraining factor. Yields are substantially inferior to those achieved elsewhere. ‘Cocoa and palm oil yields are typically only half those recorded in Asia (Collier and Gunning, 1999a). Another deep concern stems from the climate. The rainfall in the tropical savannas seems to have been declining since the 60s with wide erratic moves and recurrent droughts around this downward trend. And this deficit happens in regions which are no longer underpopulated as in previous centuries. Overgrazing, deforestation, and insufficient fallow periods ensure that soils are further degraded and eroded. Although there is no proof this rainfall trend is a climate change, since there have been many reversals in the past, Africa would be highly vulnerable to the change generated by global warming. It would reduce soil moisture and runoff, and much of the continent is already ‘dry subhumid’ to ‘arid’ (World Bank, 2003).

Besides the availability of areas still not used by agriculture in some countries, the consensus is that ‘Africa has scope for its own agricultural revolution’ (Collier and Gunning, 1999b) and must become more intensive in high density zones. The technical challenge of finding drought-resistant varieties and developing a soil fertility replenishment approach in the global cycle of inputs, range of cultivated products and land rotation is proved to be within reach, even without resorting to genetically modified organisms, as attested by high returns on new varieties in research stations. Past attempts

in maize confirmed, if necessary at all, that new varieties must suit the constraints and customs of smallholders (not add to peak manual labor demand for cropping, practice of intercropping...) and meet the customers' tastes. Better channels of 'social learning' about innovations by households through kin groups and churches, which evidently perform better than the official extension services, can be explored.

The major challenge however is in the underprovision of this research. The twin thrust of private firms now dominating agricultural bioscience research and extending their exclusive property rights on agricultural knowledge (including processes) does not leave many options if some research must be conducted for varieties suitable to poor African soils and channeled to poor people. The private sector has no interest in developing research for a non-solvent market and, even if for other reasons such varieties were to become available, most African smallholders would still be unable to afford the (typical) yearly purchase of new seeds.

This can only be addressed by an international effort combining reinforcement of the budgets of existing tropical agricultural centers and the enhancement of their institutional mechanisms, such as for example the Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research or the International Center for Research in Agroforestry, in view of granting free access to their resources (genetics, knowledge, processes).

Regarding agriculture, crucial to a continent where two-thirds of the population are still rural, there is another consensus; namely that the undercapitalization and lack of competitiveness of African agriculture, and first of all the decline of productivity over four decades, are due to poor policies and institutional failures. There were some variations across countries, between more or less market-friendly governments, and depending on whether rulers had private interests in farming or not. The striking common features of African agricultural policies and their devastating impact have been much documented (Berg Report of the World Bank) and analyzed (Bates, 1981, 1983b). Heavy discrimination and taxation was exercised by biased state intervention against farmers and the whole farming sector, and could affect in extreme cases every possible market: export crops, domestic food markets, inputs such as fertilizers, seeds and equipments.

Most frequently used were the marketing boards (parastatals) with monopsony power which were created or used (since many existed during colonial times) to introduce a growing and sometimes huge wedge between the export price and the price paid to the farmer. The latter could be only 10 or 20% of the export price in periods of high commodity prices. The profit drawn by the parastatal from such large margins was used afterwards, in the best cases, to complement the revenue basis of the State. Widespread overvaluation of national currencies added extra losses.

African farmers proved to be 'responsive to mispricing' (Collier and Gunning, 1999a) with reductions in export volumes, smuggling and expansion of subsistence farming as much as they were in the other way, in the early 1990s, when some governments removed taxation on exports, introduced market-exchange rates and liberalized imports of fertilizers. In Uganda coffee production surged and farm incomes improved rapidly.

Tropical Health Handicaps

There are similarities between health and agriculture, relative to the impact of geographical disadvantageous conditions. The handicap seems real, with the hostile conditions created by the presence of so many infectious or parasitical deadly or severely invalidating diseases for human beings (and livestock too): malaria, trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness), onchocerciasis (river blindness), the Ebola fever (95% fatal) to quote just a few niceties.

Bloom and Sachs (1998) pinpoint the crucial factor of temperature as the condition for the incubation of falciparum, the parasite responsible for malaria and transmitted by mosquitoes (female anopheles at night). They highlight the impact on productivity and the obstacle to tourism and foreign investment (expatriate presence).

As for agriculture, the abysmally low incomes of the prospective customers do not make research on malaria or any other tropical-specific disease a priority for pharmaceutical firms. If AIDS had been for some reason restricted geographically in Africa, no anti-retroviral treatments would ever have been developed. WHO estimates

that only 10% of the health research worldwide goes for diseases that afflict 90% of the world's people (World Bank, 2001).

This geographically induced handicap could also be mitigated by an international effort in publicly financed research or by guaranteeing future markets by pledges of the international community to implement vaccination or treatment programs. Jeffrey Sachs has been in many occasions a vibrant advocate of this kind of international action, very much supported too by the World Development Reports expressing the views of the World Bank's staff

Landlockedness

Landlockedness has also been often advanced as a geography-induced growth-retarding factor. This is more disputed. One of the most comprehensive arguments comes from Bloom and Sachs (1998). They cite the distance from the major world markets in the Northern hemisphere, the Sahara desert, very few natural ports, absence of navigable rivers leading into the interior, highest proportion of landlocked states and so forth.

The number of landlocked states is obviously not a pure geographical constraint but also a political one. The very existence of frontiers is certainly a cause of delays and costs due to different languages and standards such as rail line gauges, but there are remedies to that through cooperation, integration, and unification. Being landlocked, as Paul Collier remarks (1999b), referring to Switzerland, 'is not necessarily a handicap'. It depends on the neighbors.

The number of ports has not yet been a primary constraint on development, but their handling capacity and quality of service certainly is. Many studies confirm that transportation costs, to and within the region, are expensive and higher than necessary or elsewhere. But they often point to restrictive agreements on airfreight or maritime transport, on bureaucratic procedures and bribes, and neglect of existing infrastructure as the major factor. But even if a wide reduction of transportation costs can be gained from

better institutional environment and more appropriate policies,³⁴ there is in all probability a geographic component to the higher costs in Africa.

Natural Resources and the African Exception: Botswana

Last under the umbrella of geography comes the thesis of the ‘natural resource curse’. The outline is that Africa cannot develop because it has specialized in a comparative advantage which happens to be a growth disadvantage. It is recognized that having sudden inflows due to natural resources may have negative effects and that it may weaken institutions. But as it happens the key is in the institutional arrangements and the policies. So it is not ultimately a valid argument for any ‘curse’ although most of African countries do fit the profile of exporters of primary commodities and are underperforming: 57% of Africa’s exports are indeed still primary commodities (Table 1), more than Latin America, South or East Asia.

Botswana proves there is no curse per se. It is very much dependent on the mining of diamonds (88% of exports and 36% of GDP). It is landlocked and its society is highly unequal with that. It is less homogeneous than generally assumed³⁵ and there was hardly any investment or educational effort from the British colonizers. But it has been the only case of high sustained growth of income per capita on mainland Africa³⁶ since the 1960s. ‘There is much more to this success story than the diamonds’ as Rodrik argues (1999).

One common theme of the literature explaining this ‘African success’, including a paper by Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson (2002) is to insist on the superior quality of governance and the sound macroeconomic policies which made possible a good use of the high rents provided by diamonds. Not everyone agrees on why this was possible in Botswana and not elsewhere in Africa. Rodrik mentions the rural origin of the leadership and the ‘agency of restraint’ role played by membership in the Southern

³⁴ For landlocked Malawi, it is estimated a renovated efficient rail line to the Mozambican port of Nacala could save 3% of GDP. The line, closed during the Mozambique wars, has now been privatized.

³⁵ Officially there are 90% Tswanas but this misses the fact that 22 % of them do not feel so. Actually more than 30% of the population is neither ethnically nor linguistically Tswana and there are more than 20 ethnic groups.

³⁶ Mauritius is an island and not very ‘African’.

African Customs Union (absence of an independent trade policy) and alludes to the de-facto ‘pegging’ of the currency to the rand (formally till 1976) and the underlying global ‘anchor factor’ of being in close orbit around South Africa. Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson identified several possible domestic factors: the inclusive precolonial institutions placing constraints on elites, the rule of law and institutions of private property, and the critical role played by the first presidents, Khama and Masire, in making decisions that shaped the future and in maintaining the standards of integrity³⁷ of a public administration (a path-dependent story). It may be added that De Beers, the company extracting the diamonds in Botswana and the leading firm in the sector, has always tried to stabilize the market prices with its huge stocks, and this may have reduced the volatility usually associated with primary commodities.

So the logical conclusion is that whatever caused the success of Botswana proves that there is no natural resource determinism. It has to be mentioned that Collier (2002) is very doubtful that the current specialization of Africa in a narrow range of primary products is due to ‘the destiny of resource endowments’. According to his insight it reflects more the selective resilience of sectoral activities to the dysfunctional institutional environment (more precisely: the intensiveness in transactions of the sectoral costs structure determines their capacity to absorb bribes, insecurity and volatility).

Terms of Trade Losses

What is not disputed in principle, even if assessments differ, is that African terms of trade have deteriorated significantly from the early 1980s till now and that this is an exogenous factor not dependent on African policies, politics or institutions. The impact has varied across countries depending on their export mix. Global estimates of the relative degradation of Africa’s terms of trade vary from 6% to 36% according to studies (Collier and Gunning, 1999a) with a possible drop of 0.7% of the yearly African growth rate relative to other developing countries (ibidem). As cited before, the World Bank

³⁷ Botswana’s index of corruption scores better than for any other African country and even more than for several European ones. Out of 102 countries in 2002, it was ranked 24th by Transparency International.

(2000) estimated that the cumulative losses between 1970 and 1997 represent almost 120% of GDP for the non-oil exporting countries, South Africa being excluded.

Whether this is a secular long run term is disputed and unclear. For Deaton (1999), if he does see the decline since the 1980s, his global appreciation is skeptical of any trend. At most he can assert that 'real commodity prices show a distinct lack of a positive upward trend'. In an IMF staff paper Cashin and McDermott (2002) find a downward trend of about 1% per year in real commodity prices over the last 140 years, though they recognize that there is 'low signal-to-noise ratio' in the data. The absence of overwhelming evidence of any trend leads some authors, when building economic scenarios for Africa, to advance that this 'streak of bad luck [since the 1980s] in world markets is unlikely to persist over the next decades' and introduce a supplementary growth of 0.7% in the future (Hatton and Williamson, 2001).

DYSFUNCTIONAL GOVERNANCE

Some growth-retarding factors have been identified, though with various degrees of intensity: lack of preparation for independence and hasty decolonization, high-dependency ratios, small size of the economies, poor soils, breeding ground for diseases, geographic isolation. But since these are structural and permanent factors they can hardly explain the collapse of growth after the mid 1970s. Some authors assert that these handicaps should now be much more than compensated by the 'backwardness advantage'³⁸ drawn from the low level of income in Africa, the lowest of all regions.

The new trend of a declining rainfall since the 60s is certainly a plausible candidate for those countries affected as early as that period, in the Sahel zone for instance, but less globally for sub-Saharan Africa. The decline in terms of trade is obviously inescapable and must be taken into account. But its magnitude cannot account

³⁸ In short, the lower initial income is, the lower the stock of capital must be too, hence marginal product of extra capital is higher and growth is faster. This fits with the 'conditional convergence' hypothesis of Solow models on growth. They posit a transition period during which an economy converges towards a steady-state path along which it travels afterwards at the rate of technological progress. The steady-state paths differ for countries but there is convergence of each economy towards its steady state path; and it is all the more rapid as initial income is low. This is called the 'conditional convergence': convergence appears only after controlling for the other factors.

for the plummeting rate of growth of total factor productivity, which fell from a positive weak yearly rate of 0.3% (Table 2) to a negative rate at (minus) 1.3%.

This means the efficiency, organizational and/or technological, with which productive factors are combined in Africa declined at an average yearly rate of 1.3% from 1973 afterwards, at a time current world technological progress was probably accelerating. Much of the literature on African economies puts the blame on a failure in policies and institutions, the only remaining possible explanatory determinants of growth, that is to say, on 'African governance'. It is not enough to ascertain that scorings of policies and institutions are worse for Africa than for other regions (Table 1). The question is not to find a low level of quality for policies and institutions in Africa but to prove its downward evolution over time.

A Tiny Elite for an Hegemonic State

There must have been as a 'central tendency' in our sample, a degradation of the quality of African governance, some time after independence and before the mid 1970s, to explain the slowing down and decline of the continent. Only a prior negative variation of governance can account for a subsequent reduction in growth rates. And that is exactly what happened.

The overall period since the 1960s is usually divided into three phases though the labeling may vary. The following is adapted from Ndulu and O'Connell (1999):

- ?? 1960s till the mid 1970s: increasing authoritarian rule (civilian or military) usually with statist economic policies;
- ?? mid 1970s till the early 1990s: crisis management under authoritarian rule;
- ?? from the 1990s onwards: political and economic liberalization.

Not all countries fit that general scheme. Two states, Botswana and Mauritius, have succeeded in achieving sustained growth, implementing growth-friendly macro-policies and building relatively effective governance institutions based on democracy and the rule of law. South Africa, with its past growth impaired by the apartheid and foreign hostility to it, is also a special case with the advent of an ethnically inclusive government of national unity in 1994. It provides a hopefully inspiring example for the continent.

At the other end of the spectrum of extreme cases are the countries who suffered protracted or recurrent civil wars such as Angola, Burundi, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Guinea-Bissao, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra-Leone, and Sudan, or where the state has completely failed and disappeared as Somalia.

The central tendency reflected in the three phases highlights the importance of the rapid thrust after independence towards authoritarian rule, with obliteration of both political and economic freedoms, in the deterioration of the growth environment. The typical median pattern has been much described. The ‘tiny educated elite’ (Collier and Gunning, 1999a) heading the nationalist parties takes over at independence, and three main traits destined to endure and to magnify are already there:

- ?? The separation, perceived and real, from the mass of the illiterate or poorly educated population, especially the rural one, and the consequent basis for a divergence of interests;
- ?? The very small number of people to be reckoned with. Everybody is on a personal relationship level with everybody within this circle of a few hundred and later only thousands of persons;
- ?? The urban roots of their access to power. ‘Almost all nationalist parties found their first and greatest support ³⁹ in towns, swollen during the 1950s by young immigrants from rural primary schools’ (Illife, 1996).

The democratic, politically pluralist and economically liberal constitutions inherited or precipitously put in place at independence came to be perceived as obstacles to the policy changes they desired to push forwards. The comment of Ndulu and O’Connell (1999) on economic matters, that if ‘African first-generation leaders often appeared to differ dramatically in their public pronouncements’, ‘these differences hid powerful commonalities in the policy environment they desired’, is quite valid in the political and constitutional fields as well.

³⁹ Illife (1996) adds: ‘Nationalism only partially aroused many of Africa’s deepest political forces. Responses to it depended on local circumstances’.

The choices they made were much inspired and shaped by the development ethos of the time and their own prejudices. It is difficult now to assess how different the intellectual climate was at that period. Many economists and others were impressed by the growth statistics of the Soviet Union and the successes of imports-substitution industrialization in Latin America. The technical superiority of forced accumulation by a developmental state with bureaucratic-type controls was often acknowledged; the trade-off between freedom and oppression was the only restraining argument. There was no 'single model of success' and the possible victorious system looked then undecided. These attitudes were quite pronounced in the anti-colonialist and nationalist leaderships.

Another factor was the elites considered 'tribalism' a plausible potential danger to the national interests and to the necessary strengthening of national identity if allowed to interact with competitive politics. As Samora Machel put it: 'For the sake of the nation, the tribe must die'. This perception, frequent among leaders, was supported by the reliance of colonial rulers on ethnic divisions to strengthen their power, the local concerns of Africans, prompt to perceive so-called national issues in terms of local interests, and by the ethnic traits of the first conflicts (Congo, Biafra, Chad, Sudan e.g.).

As former colonized people who had witnessed the mysterious capacity of a few people to rule vast areas, the new elite probably came to overestimate the effective power of law and government on things and beings and perhaps even to overrelish its pomp. They had also seen some colonial governments using exports taxes, collected through marketing boards, to finance infrastructure projects in the 1950s thanks to high commodity prices at that time. More broadly, as Sachs (Harrison & Huntington, 2000) expresses it, 'Colonial rule was not a very good school for modern capitalism'.

Finally most of these new leaders were suspicious of the private sector as being controlled by ethnic minorities or former colonizer's nationals, and in any case as a possible source of support for an alternative power base.

All these reasons conspired towards a strategy of building a hegemonic and constructivist state in charge of controlling society and developing the country. In their perspective and in that context, the elites were 'neither irrational nor merely greedy'

(Illife, 1996). The basic framework of African governance from the late 1960s to the early 1990s derives from there:

- ?? Obliteration of democracy with the erasure or muting of checks and balances between branches of power; the abolition of competitive multiparty politics; the same trend within the ruling single party itself; the burgeoning of the state's security apparatus for managing internal dissent;
- ?? A vastly expanded administration and public sector offering massive employment with the view to assume new job-intensive missions (e.g. education) but also to ensure loyalty and service from the recruited;
- ?? High taxation of commodity exports and international trade to finance the developmental state, through wide margins for agricultural marketing boards, exchange rate overvaluation and protection of public industry;
- ?? Economic and financial repression with multiplication of controls, regulations, prohibitions and nationalizations.⁴⁰ Most banks (nationalized or set up by the state) were used as off-budget channels for government.

Retrospectively, the efficiency of such a framework can only be assessed as a recipe for disaster even with the best of men in charge to run it at the top. It is doomed to fail according to the broad precepts on development. While 'bureaucratic accumulation' (Ndulu and O'Connell, 1999) is a direct result, productive capital accumulation and high growth are not. Neither the successful developmental states of East Asia nor conversely Vietnam and China bear any resemblance at all with this framework. They are a mix of intervention and freedom with a clear trend, an 'arrow of time' towards more freedoms. But to some extent this very framework has provided in Africa the basis of a political equilibrium with a multi-layer patron-client relationship between the ruling elite on one hand and those who derive their incomes from the civil service and the public sector on the other (Bates, 1981, 1983a and 1983b).

⁴⁰ Even in a few cases up to the level of small shops; saving one's life could be the best hope as in 1975 in Uganda for the Indian minority.

More generally, as often documented (*ibidem* and World Bank, 1981), the urban bias, induced by the heavy taxation of agriculture and the overvaluation of the currency favoring imports and limiting food prices, reflected the concern arising from the proximity of volatile townsmen as compared to distant and less threatening farmers. By 1988 there were only five countries in sub-Saharan Africa that had multi-party systems (Ndulu and O’Connell, 1999): Botswana, Gambia, Mauritius, Senegal and Zimbabwe.

The Neopatrimonial State: Corruption, Predation and Underprovision

However unworkable and inept as it now appears economically, this was only the ‘framework’, and one which did not prove it incompatible with growth until, on average, the mid 1970s. But besides the thrust of the new declining trend of commodity prices (with erratic moves, and except for oil), the very fabric of African society was being undermined from within by a stronger, more substantial force—the rise of oppression, predation and corruption—with a much more detrimental impact on growth. The hindsight of experience with the support of Montesquieu’s or Lord Acton’s wisdom⁴¹ or of models of growth traps, predatory states and corruption, is that it was inevitable, the question of the agents being Africans or not having no sway on the result. As an anonymous citation has it: ‘Absolute power is absolutely delightful’.

Ndulu and O’Connell (1999) emphasize this very small elite, with highly personal reciprocal relationships, was to some extent more captive of its ideas for its initial decisions than of its interest base, which later grew in size and strength as a result of these choices. It hardly matters. The ruling elites gradually ‘unconstrained’ themselves from any genuine popular political mandate, from legal, moral and financial principles, as well as from domestic or foreign⁴² checks and balances, except for the personalistic discipline episodically enforced by the top leader, the internal rivalries, and factional

⁴¹ “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” is from Lord Acton (1834-1902) and Montesquieu (1689-1755) remarked too: “Constant experiences show us that every person invested with power is apt to abuse it, and to carry its authority as far as it will go. Is it not strange, though true, to say that virtue itself has need of limits” (...) “To prevent this abuse, it is necessary from the very nature of things that power be a check to power”.

⁴² Former British colonies got rid of the institution of governor general which could have been helpful were it not for its colonial stain. Some former French colonies did however choose to maintain a collective monetary arrangement with France which acted as an agency of restraint on inflation and note-printing temptations as an easy way for financing deficits.

shifts of influence. And of course the logical move was to dispense not only with political representativeness or accountability but also with the inconvenience of the reports and investigations of a free press and the vagaries of an independent judiciary.

Arbitrariness of the laws, if any, and of ad-hoc decisions at the top, discretionary power of officials in implementing them, employment and salary ‘as a way to buy obedience and gratitude’ (Mbembe, 2001) produced what was called the neopatrimonial⁴³ state with personalized patterns of authority and obligation as the underlying coherence of the seemingly modern administrative structures. African ‘local mindedness’ and strong kinship links provided much fuel to this extension of personalistic features (though they were not the engine). Illife (1996) gives one of the numerous descriptions of these ‘governments of men and not of laws’: ‘Each elite member headed a personal clientage, usually on tribal or regional lines, which imposed burdensome obligations but linked him to a locality and supported his claim to be its spokesman and protector’.

Corruption, whose large classic definition in development economics is ‘exercise of public power for private gains’ (World Bank, 2002), is another consequence of this relaxation of impersonal rules and constraints and the erosion of effective social or financial sanctions for deviation. Even the practice of allocating jobs as a political exchange is in itself a form of corruption.

Just to give an extremely small glimpse of the variety of levels and channels involved, hereafter are a few examples⁴⁴ from the most trivial and petty corruption to better heeled channels of grand predation: customs administration’s ‘benevolence incentives’, police-staffed road barriers,⁴⁵ ‘sexually transmitted marks’ at school and university, overinvoicing of procurement from small orders to investment contracts, new regulation by a minister imposing very specific coloring and signalization standards for

⁴³ See for instance Médard (1991).

⁴⁴ These examples the author witnessed personally have been ‘denationalized’ to avoid any diplomatic impropriety.

⁴⁵ Surveys of transportation costs from Côte d’Ivoire to Bénin have shown that bribes to customs, police and other officials represent 75 % of the total. In Bénin, a trip over 753 kms encountered 25 roadblocks, and bribes added up to 87 % of the cost of the trip. (World Bank, 2001)

taxi and buses with components whose exclusivity is held by a company owned by the minister's spouse, external public debt servicing to actually private accounts, irrecoverable loans to the bank's own directors, wide margins of fictitious trading companies for selling mineral resources of state companies, private shareholding of banks set up with the foreign mining or oil company for the main purpose of lodging during eight to ten months each year the substantial taxes and distributing the interests as dividends.

The most ironic case for the undermining of institutions is perhaps when embezzlement is perpetrated for genuine public interest purposes (as it occurs very frequently) because the president, the minister, the politician... needs cash he can directly apportion himself even if it is well meant, e.g. for rehabilitating some fire department's premises in a distant town or paying hospital fees for needy people.... He does not trust the ministry or service in charge for doing it, and in any case nobody would then feel indebted to him personally.

Of course, they themselves sometimes get swindled with this eyes-to-eyes methodology of public expenditure commitment, even by unexpected crooks, as when a Catholic bishop disappears after receiving from the head of state the full amount he had just requested for reconstructing his provincial diocesan church.

This neopatrimonial state, focusing on political control and personal patronage, generating petty corruption and grand predation all through various instruments of political, economic and financial repression, produced another highly negative consequence: the underprovision of the public goods the state and public sector had an official mandate to deliver; that is 'sins of omission' in addition to the previous 'sins of commission' (Collier and Gunning, 1999a). The formal mandate of the institution is neglected since at best it is not a priority for anyone whose opinion carries weight and at worst because it restricts the opportunities for patronage and corruption.

Subsequent mismanagement of social services, investment projects, nationalized banks and public utilities handicapped households and firms. As Collier and Gunning (1999a) say, Africa 'experienced the paradox of poor public services despite

relatively high public expenditure', with inefficient health and educational services, unpredictable courts 'independent from the laws', personal insecurity because of a poorly qualified and equipped police, inadequate infrastructure, unreliable electricity supply, unobtainable telephone mainlines, and massive distortion of capital allocation with underinvestment in utilities and new mineral reserves but massive portfolios of nonperforming loans.

This is the general picture, the stylized expression of African post-independence governance, a framework of bureaucratic accumulation, overtaxation and repression of political and economic freedoms⁴⁶ plus the imploding pressure of neopatrimonial corruption and predation: a rare combination of massive agency, appropriation and coordination problems likely creating low level equilibria traps.

Corruption and predation, as suggested by theory, are not only another transactions cost or a cause for a higher risk premium. Above a certain threshold of frequency and impunity, they introduce a fundamental externality in society where opportunistic individual choices become rational, though collectively self-defeating: a kind of prisoner's dilemma or in this case an ethical trap, where everybody has an objective interest in acting as if the others were not going to honor their obligations and in joining them in that behavior.

Consequently, trust is abysmally low in African societies. For instance, in many countries the idea of independent electoral commissions is pushed forwards in order to monitor free and fair elections. Nominations of the members of the commission cannot obviously be left to one side only and the Chief Justice is rarely trusted. Typically, when it is suggested that the main political parties should collectively agree on the names of eminent citizens, academics, retired justices or else, beyond any suspicion of partisanship, it is quite despairing to see, in countries of several million people, that they cannot agree on a single name.

Such a society does not motivate the rare people who manage to 'collect' capital (by whatever means), to invest it in their own country or even their continent. The

⁴⁶ Between 1969 and 1976, Nyerere compulsorily 'villagised' nearly half of the rural population sometimes at bayonet-point. (Illife, 1996).

huge, heterogeneous and often vibrant informal sector (street vendors, women traders, home-based outworkers or own-account workers) is another testimony to the inadequateness of the African institutional environment, where even De Soto (1989) would be surprised by the cumbersome regulations. But the informal sector also proves the adaptiveness of African society. It provides around 78% of non-agricultural employment in Africa (Charmes, 1998) and, like a sponge, absorbs most of the new entrants to the labor force each year. Without the informal sector it would not be possible for so many people to manage⁴⁷ to make a living when states collapse and economies decline.

Variations in Space and Time around the Central Tendency

But across countries there were variations and derailments around the typical scheme (the one-party neopatrimonial state hijacked by a tiny elite). The degree of interventionism in the markets and property rights depended upon the ideological stance of the leaders, on their international positioning, or on the elite having personal interests in a sector or another (agriculture) and episodically on the paranoia of ‘conspiracies’. Gabon and Kenya, for instance, were always much more market friendly than Zambia or Tanzania with their ideological banners flirting with socialism with an African touch, the Ujamaa of Julius Nyerere or the Socialist Humanism of Kenneth Kaunda.

A number of military coups from the mid 1960s onwards caused derailments to the civilian one-party stylized model, but often turned into aggravated cases of statist governance. Some of these regimes proved long-lasting, as in Togo, while others initiated subsequent coups, countercoups with interspersed ‘civilian’ rule (Nigeria). By 1988, ‘half of Africa’s states had military or quasi-military governments’ (World Bank, 2000). Ndulu and O’Connell (1999) established a link between initial conditions and the variations in political systems. They found the five multi-party system states existing in 1988 ‘started

⁴⁷ The informality restricts choices to activities needing a low absolute capital. Informality saves not only on the regulatory burden (labor laws, taxes) but on the supplementary harassment and predation that formality may entail. Foreign-owned companies are for instance ‘controlled’ very often by tax inspectors who make little effort to enlarge the tax basis by searching for non-declaring firms or non-registered activities (too much effort for ‘too many small fish’ and potential danger in case of ‘too big a fish’).

richer at independence and expanded their advantage over time'. In the middle the one-party systems and the countries bearing military regimes in 1988 started as the poorest ones with the worst performances. They view this as a confirmation of the Lipset hypothesis for the first generation of post-independence African political regimes, which posits a minimum level of development as a prerequisite for democracy.

It took time for corruption and predation to undermine the state and spread their infection over society and the underprovision of public services was for some time mitigated by higher state income. Corruption did not start from zero at independence, though. There were undoubtedly advantages associated with key positions in the colonial administration 'below and in the shadow of the Whites' rule' (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, 1997) that were not left unattended. As proved by some scandals, a few administrators also happened to collude with talented intermediaries for their best self-interest. At least, impunity was not the rule.

Till the early 1970s many one-party countries probably still had only sparse petty corruption except in the inescapable places (customs and police) and a limited grand corruption centralized or centrally monitored. Civil servants' pay was quite high by local standards. Not all countries saw as early as Côte d'Ivoire the ostentatious display, at least in the home country, of the 'platinum life'. Monogrammed shoes were not to be seen much inside Zambia until Kaunda was forced to relinquish power in a multiparty election.

But what Illife (1996) calls the 'contraction of the state' under the assault of economic decline and the subsequent structural adjustment programs accelerated these two trends. The neopatrimonial state did not prove to have good 'institutions of conflict management' in the sense Rodrik (1998) gives to the capacity to handle external shocks. Inside the public sector, wages tended to decline substantially in real terms as well as non-wage expenditure, the operational budgets so critical to education and health (stationery, medicines etc). The middle classes' standard of living was hurt deeply and this prompted a much more common resort to corruption, a spreading of 'decentralized

corruption', which is much more detrimental to growth as demonstrated by Murphy, Shleifer and Vishny (1993).

The second impact was a collapse of institutional administrative capacity in many countries, especially in the social services with declining rates of enrollments and persistent shortages of drugs, and frequently enough 'sovereignty' services as well, such as the security forces. Low operational capacity and widespread corruption have led some authors to radical, but not easily rejected diagnoses. Jean-François Bayart and Béatrice Hibou (Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou, 1997) respectively assert that 'capacity to implement any form of policy has evaporated in many countries and administrations' and that 'more than the inadequacy of the law, the problem is first and foremost that people systematically flout any law'.

The Third Wave and the Neap Tide ⁴⁸ of Liberalizations

One may wonder why these judgments persist or even get worse whereas most of Africa embarked in the early 1990s on the liberalization of its political and economic institutions. The Third Wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991) did sweep over sub-Saharan Africa due to both internal rising pressures and to the fall of the Berlin Wall or even, maybe more strikingly for Africans and their masters, the end of the Ceaucescus, the Romanian communist tyrants. Benin, Mali, Zambia were among the first to revert to democracy, and Nelson Mandela was also released in 1990. Many Francophone countries held 'sovereign national conferences' to design new democratic institutions. A few years later nearly all countries had held 'multiparty elections'.

But this presentation is a little incomplete if not misleading. Many incumbents succeeded in getting reelected with at best some tweaking of the elections but also with heavy-handed methods such as in Togo. Democracy is not yet firmly embedded in Africa. It may recede as in Zimbabwe and threaten to implode into full-fledged civil war as in Côte d'Ivoire.⁴⁹ And it may come belatedly as with the recent transition in Kenya. In Zambia the first post-democratization transition occurred with the failure of President

⁴⁸ For non sea experts: a neap tide is in a lunar month the low range tide which occurs at the first and third quarters of the moon.

⁴⁹ Were it not for the UN and French interposition forces.

Chiluba to amend the Constitution to run for a third mandate. The widely based popular move against his efforts was a hopeful signal of attachment to democracy. The subsequent presidential election, held in high suspicion by EU observers, is less eloquent. It emphasizes the inadequacy of a first-past-the-post single ballot for presidential elections with a disputed winner getting only 28.7% of the votes.

The signs are at best ambiguous. The ‘African Renaissance’ rapidly fizzled out. The UNDP’s Human Development Report (2002) indicates a ‘slight drop in measured democracy in sub-Saharan Africa (...) reflecting the fact that the third wave of democratization seems to have stalled’; and 77% of the population of Africa is considered to live in states with multiparty elections. But as Zambia makes clear, it’s not only the holding of elections that is important, the electoral system matters. It needs not be the same for the presidential and the parliamentary polls. A mix of proportional representation for inclusiveness and reinforced majority system for decisiveness or bicameral legislatures (in which one is for regional or ethnic groups), is frequently proposed by political scientists or development economists and worthy of consideration.

But elections, even free and fair, which they are rarely, do not create per se a well-functioning democracy. Democracies demand transparency and accountability procedures, effective checks and balances such as an independent non-corrupt judiciary, a free press of quality, and a vibrant civil society. They require democratic principles and values that are internalized, not just memorized. It is a culture and a practice, not just a script to conform to dominant ideas and please donors. Many of the now leading politicians were established members of the former elite which led the countries to their present state of crisis and institutional decay. It is difficult to trust them. J.F. Bayart (Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou, 1997) blames the failure of the democratic transition on the capture of the process by groups already in control.

Achille Mbembe (2000 and 2002) also recognizes that pressure for liberal politics and sound economics has made it more difficult for the ‘post-colonial potentate’ to maintain his traditional client state and has forced him to adapt, with an unfortunate effect: ‘instead of curbing the corruption of local elites, the brutality of the international

system has increased their greed and carelessness.’⁵⁰ Ndulu and O’Connell (1999) are more optimistic. They think that the current wave of democratization is different from the aborted episode at the time of independence and that it ‘holds out the prospect of a more fundamental creation of a participatory state’. The question is still very much open. But if the trend is up to Africans to clarify, the fact is there are many elections but still little democracy. We can hope that, over time, democratic values and behaviors will take hold, but autocratic and arbitrary practices and reflexes are still alive under the soft language. For instance there is always some unreality in drafting otherwise useful sophisticated legal stipulations ensuring the independence of some institution, a central bank or an anti-corruption commission in a country where it is still quite ‘conceivable’, with fresh expertise readily available in a very special security service, that a ‘deviant person’ should be the victim of ‘a car crash with an unidentified truck’ on a deserted road or be ‘killed during an armed robbery at home’ where no effort was made to search for or steal any valuables.

This may help explain why, despite significant moves in increasing openness to international trade and investment and considerable improvement in macroeconomic policies, the economic facet of the liberalization wave of the 1990s, institutional quality indexes have not on average widely progressed. On the basis of the Sachs-Warner index of openness, the number of African countries with open trade regimes has risen from 7 in the 1980s to 18 in 2000 out of the 25 countries with data (IMF, 2000) and for the first time most of countries had inflation rates in the single digits in 2002 (IMF, 2003). But the perception is still of a generally inhospitable climate for private investment. Outside the mining sector and a few countries with already high institutional quality scores such as Mauritius or Botswana, or having significantly increased them, as Mozambique and Uganda, foreign direct investment remains low and risk assessments high (IMF, 2003).

⁵⁰ There are signs of such ‘reengineered’ predation. One is for instance the highly centralized negotiations for the major privatizations with a focus on the maximization of the private ‘by-payments’ in view of the imminent termination of existing embezzlement facilities. Another example of creative adaptiveness is the ‘fixing’ by a finance minister of the tendering process of a contract with competing foreign private firms (like the Swiss firm SGS) for pre-shipment inspections and independent valuation of imports, whose very purpose is to counteract corruption in the customs administration.

Poor infrastructure, low enforceability of contracts, red tape and corruption, personal insecurity, and uncertain commitment to reforms still loom large in the African landscape.

One proof of the present stalemate is the frequent failure of what the IMF and the World Bank call the ‘second-generation reforms’ to reach their objectives. They are meant to achieve ‘institution building’—to entrench gains and policy changes drawn from sound macroeconomics and democratic politics—and are therefore more ‘intrusive’. A typical reform may be to deliver ‘a lighter but better paid and better qualified civil service’, a not too disputed rhetoric. But what hurts is the locking of the payroll chain process with human resources management: the view that all wages should go only to people who are alive, under retirement age and have been duly nominated to a defined position in a recognized unit of the public administration and provide effective work, or at least presence, is not a feasible objective in most sub-Saharan African countries. And ten years of multiparty elections did not have any impact. Too much resistance by vested interests will ensure, under the most diverse pretenses, the derailment of this crucial component or just the ‘unlocking’ of the software’s security checks.

A similar example is the vision of treasuries keeping track of all budgetary commitments, of the domestic debt, of payment arrears related to expenditure or servicing of domestic debt, the dream of every IMF mission and novice finance minister. The highest degree of fiscal restraint ever obtained, though rarely till now, seems to have been the ‘cash-basis budget’, the limitation of the payments during a fiscal year. This discipline is of no avail if there are ways and means of committing and contracting, by line ministers or the office of the president, sometimes on plain letterhead paper, with payments presumed to happen ‘later’. Eventually audits have to be organized under external pressure to take stock of accumulated arrears and unreported debt. The latest generation of these public finance projects is often named the ‘integrated financial management systems’. They are always adopted with enthusiasm, but the haziness of public finance is obviously not a problem of software, equipment or training.

Certainly Africa is diverse, but apart from the top exceptions, such as South Africa, Mauritius and Botswana, the ‘typical’ description of state crisis and institutional decay, with most of the reforms having difficulty in taking roots is just the median case. At the bottom end of the sample are the countries plagued by ineptitude (Zimbabwe), civil wars (many) or their legacy (Somalia). Sub-Saharan Africa can certainly be characterized as suffering from pervasive development disorder.

The Dubious Role of Ethnicity in the Decline of African Governance

There has been no need so far to make use of any African distinctiveness or specificity in accounting for the decline of African governance. Ethnicity and kinship helped probably. They gave flesh to the fabric of personal and patronage relationships of the neopatrimonial state and provided inexhaustible fuel to the conflicts when started, a fuel largely used by political or war entrepreneurs to supply their power machines. But the view taken here is that, as a rule, they initiated neither the neopatrimonial state nor even principally the conflicts, as argued by Bates (1999) and Collier (2000).

Ethnicity emerged as a factor in cross-country analyses when, analyzing ‘Africa’s Growth Tragedy’, Easterly and Levine (1997) found a robust correlation between ethnic diversity with low physical infrastructure, poor education levels, financial repression and low growth. They cite supportive empirical evidence e.g. some studies documenting the links between the change of the ‘regional bases’ of the respective coalitions of Kenyatta and Moi with the variations of their road-building investment shares (in power and not). The outline is that ethnic diversity ‘encourages the adoption of growth-retarding policies’ and handicaps consensus on ‘growth-promoting public goods’. Though ethnic diversity is no longer statistically significant when they control for public policies performance, they show that its indirect effects through policies account for one-third of the performance gap between East Asia and Africa from 1960 to 1990.

Surprisingly the measurement of ethnic diversity is not perceived as difficult.⁵¹ The most commonly used instrument is ethno-linguistic diversity defined as ‘the

⁵¹ With the qualification that the ‘foundational’ problems are left aside. For instance ‘since’ the repertory of ethnic and language groupings has been, at least regarding former colonies, ‘constructed’, and some assert ‘invented’ by external European-biased observers at the time of colonization, is it meaningful?

probability that two randomly selected individuals from a country are from different ethnolinguistic groups'. This is easily drawn from a database initially created, oddly enough, by Soviet anthropologists. But some academics such as Paul Collier (1998) and Robert Bates (1999) insist that the impact of ethnic diversity is not straightforward and is dependent on the context. It can generate bad governance or violence only under certain conditions. Collier's cross-country research indicates that interaction between democracy and ethnic diversity is crucial for assessing the impact on growth performance. A fully democratic system reduces the maximum negative impact of ethnicity on growth rate to (minus) 0.4% per year instead of (minus) 3% without democracy. This is indeed a huge difference but a loss of 0.4% in yearly growth is still not insignificant as an effect.

Collier also studied the influence on the risk of civil war in the models he developed with Hoeffler (Collier and Hoeffler, 2000, 201 and 2002). The relationship appears even more complex: the risk of civil war grows first with ethnic diversity, then peaks⁵² with 'moderately diverse societies' and declines afterwards as diversity reaches its maximum. 'A highly ethnically diverse society is even less at risk for civil war than a homogenous one'.

This fits to some extent with the findings of Bates (1999), who showed that political violence grows and peaks when there is 'polarization'; that is, when the size of the largest group is in the vicinity of 50%, meaning a danger of hegemony or exclusion, or any subjective but 'expert' sign of the existence of a 'minority at risk' (MAR)⁵³ in a maximum-tension situation. What seems to be the key is not diversity in itself but polarization, real or perceived.⁵⁴ So, case-studies fail to account for the role of ethnic fractionalization but numerous political economy models draw the same conclusions too: Alesina, Baqir and Easterly (1999) (for US cities but transposable) among others, and the 'common pool' or 'tragedy of the commons' (Hardin, 1968) literature.

⁵² Technically it means that risk of civil war is regressed with a quadratic function of ethnic diversity.

⁵³ Cf. Gurr (1993) and the 'MAR project' (<http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/home.htm>).

⁵⁴ In that line of thought, Marta Reynal-Querol (2002) uses statistical polarization indexes having the property of attaining their maximum when two groups are of the same size. She finds religious polarization and 'animist' propensity more significant than ethno-linguistic diversity on risk of ethnic conflicts. It would perhaps be interesting to use such indexes in economic regressions.

Nobody disputes the importance of ethnicity in practice; understanding its role is another matter. As exposed before, ethnic fractionalization must interact with some perceived or real risk of exclusion. And conflicts in Africa are very much explained by the low levels of incomes and the exploitation of lootable natural resources, not by its highest rate of ethnolinguistic diversity. Ethnic hatred or mistrust is typically mobilized by politicians to advance their leadership. As Brenda Shaffer, program director of the Caspian studies at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government put it in the *Harvard Gazette* (30 January 2003) for another region: 'Culture comes into play after the fight. We don't fight because we hate. We hate because we fight'.

In almost all conflicts, ethnic division plays a prominent role, but as documented by Bates (1999) this is the tree hiding the forest of high ethnic division without any conflict at all. Except for some nationalist leaders at independence, many African intellectuals did not and do not see why ethnicity should not be compatible with the needs of a state. It all depends on the pluralism of the institutions. After all, Africans were used to having several nonconflicting identities in the past.

Unconstrained elites endowed with such freedom-repressing views of the state's role in society would have failed and sinned everywhere. Nevertheless, there is still the possibility that something more than their erroneous views on development pushed, either consciously or not, these elites to unconstrain themselves and to so easily find a socio-political equilibrium with such deleterious impact on institutional quality. Is there something in the African culture, whatever that means, which is incompatible with the associated principles of growth-enhancing institutions?

NO SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL AFRICAN DUMMY EITHER

There is no such thing as an organized debate about African culture, the contents that expression could refer to, or its possible interactions with the opportunities or prerequisites for growth and development. The World Bank used to organize conferences and invest on the subject in the early 1990s, but African culture as such is no longer on the agenda, maybe due to political incorrectness in view of the multiculturalism

that is now dominant in the international institutions. And it is not likely to arise from the present research on social capital which rarely has a ‘macro-cognitive’ perspective.⁵⁵

Although such views are rare, it is possible to distinguish, ‘ideal-typically’, at least three poles, or summits of a triangle, around which opinions and arguments position themselves.

One pole, an extreme or pure form of Afrocentrism, would emphasize the need to achieve effective decolonization, referring both to the liberation from the ‘indirect rule’ of the Bretton Woods institutions and their market fundamentalism and to the rehabilitation of the resources of traditional cultural values, that have been too much neglected or underestimated; in other words the ‘decolonization of the mind’. From this new basis, without Western tutelage or pressure, it could be possible to reconstruct an ‘African modernity’ in the political and economic fields.

Logically there could be many outcomes to such an approach, from dangerous plans of social reengineering based on deceptive if well-intentioned visions of Africanness, relabeled and resurrected clones of Nyerere’s *Ujamaa*, to the self-discovery of customized forms of democratic governance through still to be discovered new forms of living and producing in a decent society. But up until now, the no-party democracy of Museveni, the experiment of ethnical federalism in Ethiopia under the single EPRDF’s rule,⁵⁶ or the parody of elections in Rwanda, do not seem very inspiring or conclusive.

A second pole would be the one-way approach to modernity and the inherent conflicts with the ‘traditional society’ and beliefs which must ‘pass away’ according to the classic argument of David Lerner (1958). In that line of thought, modernity in Africa

⁵⁵ Institutionalists tend to restrict the use of social capital to ‘micro’- and ‘meso-level’ institutions, such as interpersonal networks and related trust and values. The social capital literature would rather use ‘institutions’ in a conventional way for the social and political formal environment such as government, court system — i.e. at the ‘macro-level’. Besides the micro/meso/macro degrees of range of social capital, Grootelaert and Van Bastelaer (2001) mention a most interesting distinction between the ‘structural’ and ‘cognitive’ forms of social capital. Structural refers to ‘objective and externally observable social structures and the rules and procedures they embody’ (e.g. a sports club, its constitution and traditions), while cognitive points to ‘more subjective and intangible elements such as generally accepted attitudes and norms of behavior, shared values, reciprocity, and trust’. In that sense, ‘macro-cognitive’ social capital may stand for ‘culture’ as referred to in this paper. For some related references and a discussion on social capital see Zoël (2003).

⁵⁶ The Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front.

meets the same kind of problems as when trying to impose the invariable, precise, and nonnegotiable time and body-language disciplines of work organization in plants to European peasantry in the nineteenth century. There are problems that may slow or stall the process, but there is nothing specific. ‘Cultural adjustment’⁵⁷ is the only way.

A third extreme position could be defined as cultural determinism. The outline is that African culture is dominated by norms of behavior and valuation beliefs that are in fundamental conflict to the institutional determinants of growth and development; cultural adjustment is just impossible. There are variants depending on whether this is due to some intrinsic contents such as ‘animism’, or an allegedly static, eternally impervious African culture, or to a specific path-dependent self-reinforcing history where some traits have been accentuated beyond any hope of backtrack.

The Rent-Seekers of Extraversion

There is much irony in the fact the latter line of thought can be associated by African intellectuals to Bayart’s approach. The early works of Jean-François Bayart, possibly the most famous French (academic) expert on Africa, such as *L’Etat en Afrique* (*The State in Africa*) (1989), took great pains to prove that African societies were societies like others with an historicity, with continuities and ruptures, commonalities and singularities and a political life.

He certainly gave a locally embedded flavor when he characterized the status of politics in post-independence Africa before the democratization wave of the 1990s, as the ‘politics of the belly’ from a Cameroonian expression, ‘*la politique du ventre*’. Belly conveys three crucial meanings which are intertwined in the African neopatrimonial predatory state: procreation for lineage, family and sex; corpulence for the absorption of

⁵⁷ Daniel Etounga-Manguelle from Cameroon (1990, and in Harrison & Huntington, 2000) advocates a ‘cultural adjustment’ He takes the gloves off and goes straight to his point: ‘We must go to the heart of our morals and customs in order to eradicate the layer of mud that prevents our societies from moving into modernism’. For the sake of justice, it must be added that this extreme view is very uncommon among African authors. Western and Third World scholars may happen moreover to wage controversies on reverse sides. Anthropologist Richard Shweder (Harrison & Huntington, 2000) audaciously suggests that his voice, ‘after years of fieldwork in rural Africa or Asia is more ‘indigenous’ than ‘a Western-educated MBA’ from Africa.

the kind of food⁵⁸ that can make a ‘big man’ with wealth and power; and the ‘incorporation’ of supportive forces from the invisible world through the symbolic ‘manducation’⁵⁹ of witchcraft (and formerly the not too symbolic cannibalism: ‘the eating of the other’). Bayart at that time (1989) was arguing Africa was at a crossroads between further social decay and a new trajectory with intensification of economic activity and more Weberian institutions.

Eight years later, he diagnosed the ‘criminalization of the state’ in most African countries as a logical inevitable ‘maturation stage of a social capital built up for several decades’ (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, 1997; hereafter BEH). The frequent hijacking of democracy by the elites in the 1990s confirms for him their previous hijacking of the independence in the 1960s. As Mbembe, he sees globalization, structural adjustment, and the discourse of democracy, as having forced the leap from the previous stage, the politics of the belly, towards genuine criminal activities. He documents the implication of African politicians and states in illegal international networks from narcotics to money laundering through embargoed armaments sales, trading of diamonds and counterfeit money. This is, he argues, a ‘major political shift (...) taking place at a massive scale’. The type of conflicts in Sierra-Leone, Liberia, Sudan and DRC and their underlying motivations foreshadow for him the next stage, the return of Africa to the ‘Heart of Darkness’, a ‘very strong possibility’ for a region that has passed the crossroads.

There are indeed harsh, not easily forgotten or forgiven assertions from BEH, such as those ascribing a ‘marked affinity with the spirit of criminality’ to some behavioral and mental models to be found in the social capital of Africa. Severe as they may be, correct or not, these statements do not ascertain any African specificity or determinism. ‘Africa has no monopoly on this sort of social capital’ is also a recurrent theme in BEH. The pain is there but not the point.

⁵⁸ In Francophone Central Africa (Gabon, Cameroon), there is a modern proverb according to which ‘*La chèvre broute là où elle est attachée*’: The goat grazes wherever it is tied. It means wherever you are, whatever you can seize is yours.

⁵⁹ Manducation is a sophisticated word for the act of chewing or eating, appropriate to the hidden meanings of magic or witchcraft.

The most thoughtful contribution of Bayart's writings is probably in his view of what he calls Africa's 'history of extraversion', where African rulers constantly figure out a strategy to create and capture rents from the relationship with the external environment by exploiting resources of their own or their neighbors' societies. Briefly, the historical outline is as follows. At a time when the relationship was not yet unequal with the Europeans, the Atlantic slave trade was in the hands of local rulers raiding their own hinterland and their African brothers. Colonization, very unequal, did involve many intermediaries and chiefs, traditional or not, who participated and benefited as the exclusive interface between the thin colonial presence and the population. This monopoly position on information and communication channels offered much leeway for deception of both ultimate parties on each other's attitudes and requests (collecting taxes, mobilizing manpower) and for seizure of rents. At independence, small groups took over the role of the colonial lord, unbridled from the restraints of metropolitan law, with a focus on international trade in mineral resources or cash crops.

Then the pressure for structural adjustment and democratization forces some reengineering in view of the new opportunities offered by the foreign partners' obsessions ('handling' the privatizations' proceeds) or the globalization process (the various international networks of criminalization).

In that sense, Africa may be 'marginalized' as is clear in its declining world's share in the official statistics, but extraversion, the relationship with the external world has always been (since the sixteenth century) essential, not marginal, to the evolution of African societies. It does take part in globalization, though in a very negative way. This is corroborated by the high proportion of external flows (trade, aid and debt) to the African economies' sizes and the high capital flight (39%). The politics of the belly and the criminalization of the state are just, in that theory, stages and variants of the same strategy of managing extraversion and dependency over four centuries.

This is not determinism per se but more like some threshold, cumulative or overdose effect after too many missed opportunities and bad choices over a long historical period. And Bayart's analysis only recognizes some traits in African culture

through which these strategies of seeking the extraversion's rents could operate, whether they supported them or were used by them, just as they could have been identified in other cultures.

What are these traits that according to Bayart or others, African or not, which clash with development as we know it? There is no agreed list, even no agreement on the existence of such a conflict or on what is African culture, if there is indeed such a thing. So only a few but recurrent themes in the literature which does posit a problem there will be approached.

Individualism, Communalism or Both?

The first striking example of intellectual confusion is provided by the question of individualism and communalism. Daniel Etounga Manguelle (1990), the advocate of 'cultural adjustment', sees the domination of society and 'the negation of the individual' by the community in Africa as a handicap for the individual differentiation requested by Western-type development, i.e. capitalism. 'African thought rejects any view of an individual as an autonomous and responsible being', he states, emphasizing that an African is only permitted to 'bloom' if 'rooted' in his family, lineage, clan, tribe.

Oddly enough, Bayart argues in all his works that it is an 'almost frenetic, or utmost individualism of their members that characterizes African societies'; the tight collective traditional constraints on it are just a testimony to its strength. Many founding myths of African ethnic groups are full, he asserts rightly, of 'heroes who emerge from the wild bush, take control of a kingdom, by virtue of their personal powers, of their own performance in war, hunting, magic or love'. He points out that these myths and folk tales, shaping the mindset of African children even today, carry not only with them the use of force and violence in daring and risk-taking behaviors, but also the use of hunting techniques where dissimulation, deception, surprise and trickery are essential and the resort to magic powers to appease and gain the alliance of secret and invisible forces pervasive. This unbridled individualism endowed with cynical deceitfulness and occult powers is described as the basis of all the extraversion strategies, from the enslavement of

neighboring societies to the neopatrimonial predatory state and possibly eventually to the criminalization of the home states.

It is difficult to choose between two such sweeping and radical views. And it is perhaps not necessary. Being a 'big man', *un grand quelqu'un*, means being both ferociously individualistic in order to acquire preeminence and eliminate rivals, and munificently generous to one's kinship, ethnic grouping and indebted clients. Each assertion conveys something that does have some explanatory power.

Management case studies of African firms, especially of subsidiaries of Western companies, or just experience of a prolonged stay in Africa, show how much Africans can be 'exploited', in a Western view, by their extended family, relatives of relations and relations of relatives, with often, but not always, an ethnic commonality across them.

They owe them time first, including at the office. Waiting lounges of African officials, ministers and presidents swarm with relatives and regional/ethnic relations with no doubt about their right of precedence upon any timetable, in what they are sometimes fortunately deceived. They have obligations⁶⁰ of assistance, of redistribution according to their lineage, monetary, social or imaginary status towards the lessers. *Noblesse oblige* (nobility binds) as the French nobility used to say but did not always practice. The pressure on those who have an income is all the more intense when in the formal sector.

The difference between comparable African executives in one private sector Western-owned bank and in a state-owned bank is not that the former are better educated, more cleverly selected or perform better than the latter, but that the executives in the Western bank will be subject to rules, procedures, controls imposed by powerful external headquarters and that they may even cite these as a way to resist the pressure put on them by family. If they allow themselves to be 'exploited' by their kin or pals they have little chance of recouping themselves. Such strong and extensive obligations on an individual can only kill a nascent African company or drive a civil servant to 'transcend' the rules.

⁶⁰ A survey of 58 firms in Ghana showed sales on credit were not made to kin because the potential creditors worried they would not be able to compel relatives to pay. (World Bank, 2002)

This is often considered as a consequence of the spatial leap of scale from local-minded ethnically homogeneous communities to ethnically diverse wider 'modern' states. At this level, growth requires effective formal institutions, such as firms and a civil service. Loyalty to family, lineage and tribe, if not reinterpreted in this larger context, or just effectively restrained, can only destroy institutions and mute development.

But African societies are not havens of solidarity for all that. These obligations can be used in a reverse way, as for instance in order to obtain cheap domestic obedient labor (or, worse, sexual 'material') under the guise of helping young boys or girls from rural relatives to find a job in town or be 'educated'. Furthermore, not everybody now accepts this kind of obligation especially when they are multigeneration urban people in large towns. As another form of perverse solidarity, the traditional practices of inheritance have become a source of extreme hardship for widows. They are dispossessed of everything they or their husbands owned, including lodging, by the latter's relatives: this is known as 'property grabbing'. The widows no longer even have, unless they are young and attractive, the dubious privilege of getting a roof, a function, and a living in the deceased brother's hut as his additional wife. The tradition, shedding whatever deep sense it had in ancestral rural life, has evolved to mere rapacity. Fortunately African NGOs have taken up the fight and are trying to make women aware of their rights, to sway the traditional chiefs and the government in their favor and convince men of writing wills and of letting their wishes be known.

So much for the domination of the community on the individual. On the other hand, the repertoires of individualism, deceitfulness, and witchcraft are indeed quite common, especially in the African way of politics as claimed by Bayart and many others. Several founding fathers of independence were common men of low 'extraction' and obscure origins (but not Houphouët Boigny in Côte d'Ivoire, a high traditional chief at a tender age, or Khama in Botswana, a descendant from the last King). And all were ferociously individualistic with all that conveys of obligations and display of wealth (Western made), just as their successors and challengers are now.

African politicians do not yet, as a rule, feel the need to prove or produce the image that they share the concerns of ordinary people or are just part of them. On the contrary, it seems it is necessary to establish as publicly as possible they have escaped from the condition of the commoners whose support and votes they are seeking. That may change, but there is no trend. Even the display of individualism is a prerequisite.

For many centuries, due to the very sparse population and the availability of free unoccupied land, there has always been an 'exit option' (Hirschmann, 1978) for people not at ease with their community. That's often the origin of these handsome hunter heroes founding new 'tribes' elsewhere or creating kingdoms by unifying the tribes of the area where they settle. Education during colonization, urbanization then and now, formal sector occupations are the new exit options for 'individual differentiation'. There are still many constraints but 'domination of society over the individual' is not widely respected or appreciated.

The Escapism Syndrome

Escapism, avoidance of open conflict, creative dissimulation, obstinate mutism or plain lies (when found at fault), deliberate misleading words to defuse tensions, have invariably been part of the descriptions left by most enslavers or colonizers and sometimes by aid agencies as well (in not very publicized reports). Bayart (1989) mentions specifically the syndrome of the *Ndiyo Bwana*⁶¹ response as typical of the strategy to manage dependency, the denial of any divergence and therefore debate, the temporary deflection of tensions but without any authentic commitment towards the *Muzungu*, be they the colonial masters or the Bretton Woods institutions. 'Foreign occupations always inspire practices of deception and trickery' adds Bayart. Attempts to mislead the foreign master, his representatives and indeed his successors, became a normal form of conduct. Rulers themselves take a leading role in deliberately misleading the foreign partners with whom they negotiate'.

⁶¹ Swahili words meaning 'Yes, Sir', or '*Oui, patron*' in French, expressions of day-to-day life for a *Muzungu* (White in most Southern Africa) or a *Mutangani* (Blanc in Coastal Gabon).

The Economist (19 August 1995)⁶² described very much the same thing in other words: ‘Over the past few years Kenya has performed a curious mating ritual with its aid donors. The steps are: one, Kenya receives its early pledges of foreign aid. Two, the government begins to misbehave, backtracking on economic reform... Three, a new meeting of aid donor countries looms with exasperated foreign governments preparing for their sharp rebukes. Four, Kenya pulls a placatory rabbit out of the hat. Five, donors are mollified and the aid is pledged. The whole dance starts again’. All this is quite true, as this paper’s author has witnessed many times.

Though Illife (1996) never alludes to this repertoire of trickery but to endurance, fortitude and courage, to ‘codes of honor’, he does assert that suffering, a ‘central part of African experience’, must have led the Africans to create their own ‘ideological defenses’, which is certainly a profound insight. This could account for the frequency of the codes of deceitfulness too.

Magical Africa

‘The magical dimension is a central dimension of the nature of public authority and leadership in Africa’ states Florence Bernault (2001) as do many other Africanists. In African societies, as is or was the case in many others, misfortunes of all sorts are not easily ascribed to nature or hazard, but to the work of evil forces or spirits, possibly temporarily serving the wills of other human beings. This phenomenon seems to have proliferated in politics after the democratization wave.

To protect themselves, neutralize enemies, and influence events, presidents, powerful and/or ambitious people have always tended to surround themselves with manipulators of spiritual forces and other marabouts, not necessarily local or even if local, not necessarily traditional ones but ‘syncretist’ ones emanating from recent cults. But the intensification of ‘competition’ for power and the multiplication of potential hostile forces, due to liberalization, have reinforced the trend. The fashion for ‘Western-type’ secret societies, such as Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, seems conversely to have notably receded from its high tide.

⁶² Cited also by Easterly (2002).

The fact is that invisible forces do exist to some degree in the beliefs of most actors at all levels of society, from the criminals to the politicians, from street vendors to senior executives. Typically people do think they can help or hurt, heal or kill. They fear these forces and resort willingly to witchcraft when they can afford to. Credulity is high and can come close to the grotesque when huge amounts of money are ceded by otherwise clever African people to persons who pretend to chemically convert local banknotes to greenbacks or even ‘multiply’ them. But superstition can take very hideous proportions too when, for instance, frightened villagers in Southern Malawi (February 2003) beat to death a man suspected of being a vampire or when mobs in Senegal (Summer 1997) burned foreigners suspected of having the power to make penises disappear with a handshake.

Most Western-educated Africans do share a belief in magical forces and at best hint at a very possible explanation for some successes: A common standardized view might well be: ‘I do not believe in witchcraft operating by the virtue of the mind but I do believe in poisons and drugs that our *ngangas*⁶³ have and who only they have the secrets of’. And some take great care to eat food of their own cooking when they have acquired some eminent position and are making a stay in villages where envy might be brewing.

Politicians may find it very useful to be perceived as holders of invisible forces as an incentive for deference and as a marker of their eminent right to leadership. And they dread each other’s schemes. This translates into the observance of very practical rules; for instance the ritual removing of hypothetical spells on objects or furniture left in a minister’s office by the predecessor (when a new government is formed or reshuffled), especially if he left anything of value, which is highly suspicious since unlikely; plus the actual repainting, recarpeting, and refurnishing.

But in some countries resort to magic can go as far as rituals involving the use of body remains, such as eyes and heart, the most expensive being the genitals of either sex. Prices inflate during electoral campaigns, it is cynically reported. The condition of

⁶³ ‘Witchcraft’ and ‘sorcery’ are testimony to the universality of the thing but do not absolutely and literally fit with the practices in Africa. *Nganga*, (the word is common to many Bantu languages) is a sort of religious healer. He is expected to use the dangerous invisible powers only for the well-being of the community...

horribly mutilated bodies on beaches or in forest clearings is attributed by the police and the forensic doctors to the need to supply⁶⁴ this hateful market. The resilience and ascendancy of witchcraft in politics as in many other dimensions of life, at least in Western and Equatorial Africa, has received different interpretations: the 'retraditionalization of Africa' (Chabal and Daloz, 1999), the 'reenchantment of modernity' and a way to approach it (Geschiere, 1997), one of the cultural 'repertoires' impelling the likely return to the Heart of Darkness (Bayart, 1997), or a new phase of 'mystical configuration' after many others in the past (Bernault, 2001). Whatever the reason or the effect, the resort to witchcraft to control hostile forces, or at least to impress opponents by very individualistic policy entrepreneurs, is very common. Nevertheless, it does not illustrate the dominance of society over the individual, but the determination of some to use all available means to advance their ends.

Temporality and Chiefs

Other supposedly African cultural traits have been considered as conflicting with the requirements of growth and development: the conception of time and the myth of the African chief.

According for instance to Etounga Manguelle (in Harrison & Huntington, 2000), 'Africans have always had their own time' and colonialists did agree that 'it was easier to deprive someone of life than to put them to work' (Bayart, 1999). The stereotype is they do not plan for the future because they do not think they can influence it, except with 'irrational' means. Maintenance over time of equipment, infrastructure and cars, even of their own private cars, is quite an extraterrestrial concept on the continent. They do not accumulate capital or savings, they prefer ostentatious consumption and joyful binges...

The problem with stereotypes is that they carry often (not always) some evidence and truth but usually not in an exploitable form. And this one could actually stand for most undeveloping non-African countries as well, except perhaps for the

⁶⁴ The question of whether the murders are perpetrated just to provide the human 'parts' or are full-fledged ritual murders 'celebrated' on location seems besides the point. Young children, orphans or of derelict families, and vagrant people are the usual victims, as expected.

irrationalist dimension. Africans may well happen to look like the stereotype, but it essentially depends in which environment and what this environment means for them.

Jean-Emile Mbot (1997), a Gabonese scholar, makes a few classic arguments with local materials about the meaning of time in traditional African culture. He reminds us that planning for the future was part and parcel of rural life. He mentions for instance the rule that groundnuts should be divided in three baskets, one for the seeds of the next planting, one for bad unexpected times, and one for current consumption. Whatever was kept aside for the future, groundnuts, smoked mushrooms... was to be looked after regularly in case some rodent or rottenness contaminated the rest. The works for the year were precisely ascribed to certain months and to the two sexes; the same for the social events such as puberty rituals and the end of mourning. Time was 'socially instituted' and planned for whatever was part of traditional life.

But working in an office, a house, a plant, in a distant town is not part of this cultural heritage, and many 'tribes' in their own language do call such works or places 'the work of the Whites' or 'the place of the Whites'. In Gabon, this work was often also called 'the work that never stops', in contrast to all the men's works which had a special season in the year with a finite amount of tasks to be achieved in that season. There was no 'socially instituted' time or cultural foundation for such a new type of work with a precision in time (minutes), which was useless and never thought of before colonization. But the intellectual resources are there in the traditional values regarding saving, accumulation and the sense of hard work. Maybe they have been neglected; maybe they have not been adapted. But certainly there is no intrinsic conflict with modernity's conceptions of time.

The myth of the autocratic absolute African chief has also been very operative in postponing democracy and freedoms. It was not at all typical of the precolonial polities which had a very complex social order, but not unknown either. In non-acephalous societies, decision-making happened usually after deliberation among eminent people of

the polity (elders,⁶⁵ noblemen, court dignitaries, heads of clans, from case to case) and this was not democracy either. The myth stems from the allegedly large use of chiefs in the administrative colonial system with a mandate, a delegated authority, which could happen to be much more comprehensive than the one they possessed in the preexisting society and even more obviously so when they were pure colonial creations. This building block of rural colonial administration came to be popularly seen as the ‘traditional organization’ of Africa, although it was at best just a strong accentuation of what preexisted.

Curiously, during the 1970s and 1980s, African leaders were not the last ones to recycle these beliefs and visions in the hope of erasing or postponing the demands for democracy they realized could be growing inside and overseas. They echo part of the ‘Asian values’ argument as initiated by Asian politicians with some aversion to civil liberties and democracy (e.g., Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore).

Wounds to Heal for Building Self Confidence

The search for a growth-retarding socio-psychological dummy throughout the alleged ‘African culture’ has been vain. There are certainly frictions between macro-cognitive representations and development in Africa but none are specific to this continent or its culture. But one major problem could stem from the sensitivity of the relationship of Africa with the West in these representations.

Many authors have come close to rendering the difficulty of being an African. Bayart (1989) cites a Cameroonian philosopher F. Boulala arguing that ‘What comes first for the muntu [the African human being] is neither amazement nor astonishment, but only stress and shock caused by the feeling of total defeat’. It is not only suffering that was a central part of African experience as Illife stated, but also ‘domination of the mind and the body’ argues Mudimbe (1988).

How and when could the slave trade and colonization have nurtured self-appreciation and self-confidence among Africans? It can only be infuriating that access to

⁶⁵ Illife (1996) makes clear that the elders were not likely to be very ‘old’ due to life expectancy and health conditions in pre-colonial Africa. Elderness meant probably vigorous adulthood and social status from wealth, marriage and procreation and not toothless graybeards. There are even indications of disrespect towards old age. The junior male class could be as old as needs must in order to afford a wife.

knowledge has to occur in a language different from the one spoken inside the family. And moreover, Africanists have been explaining for such a long time to Africans who they were. This relation of suffering and violence has also coincided with the opening of new intellectual and cultural horizons that possess an authentic attractiveness. Education and science have generated new ways of thought and dispersed new values. The genius cannot be stuffed back into the bottle.

There is high fascination for Western goods. Things may look better or are valued more if foreign. Rural and traditional values and beliefs are usually viewed negatively, conveying a sense of backwardness. But ideological defenses have also been developed and have displayed a veil of intellectual mistrust towards what seems to emanate from a perceived unending Western tutelage. It is suggested here that this historically useful and healthy ideological defense, or even defiance, is now obstructing this very task of rebuilding the de-complexed self-confidence Africa needs. Romanticized Afro-centrism or self-denegation cannot achieve that. But some elements of this dilemma may be found elsewhere, though transposed, as for instance in the Middle East, within Muslim societies.

Valentin Mudimbe (1982) conveyed something of this complexity: 'For Africa to really escape the West, it requires to appreciate exactly what it costs to be detached from it; that requires to know how close the West, insidiously perhaps, has come to us; that requires to know what is still Western in what empowers us to think against the West; and that requires finally to measure the extent to which our recourse against it is still perhaps a ruse from it, at the end of which, the West awaits us, motionless and elsewhere'.

There is a lack of trust in African societies but this includes the absence of self-trust. That's the mission Chinua Achebe (1990) assigned to himself: 'Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse: to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement'.

No African Determinism

There is no African cultural destiny precluding Africa from accessing development and any of the freedoms development is about.⁶⁶

The first reason is that African traditional culture (or more accurately the various cultures of precolonial Africa, essentially rural) obviously included the seeds of all the values that are considered to fit with productivity and democracy. As other cultures, including the Western one, it comprised components of other values too, leading to quite different outcomes. Abuse of authority by bumptious arrogant chiefs, stealing of crops, labor tools and hunting weapons from neighbors, absenteeism from the work to be done, laziness, and improvidence occurred too, as always and everywhere, but were never African values. Using stratagems in front of a superior force is a pure manifestation of wisdom and intelligence, and all peoples who had or have a limited technical efficiency in controlling their environment do turn to other forces for help.⁶⁷

Certainly colonization and the penetration of literacy, education, technology and industry were a cultural shock as much as the new level of authority, at state-level after independence, was a spatial leap of scale for African concerns. But qualitatively similar challenges, although not with same intensity, did or do face many other former colonies in Asia. And they seem determined to take them up and do blame neither their traditional culture nor their former masters when they do not succeed.

Another reason is that Africa as it is now, with so little impact of its best traditional rural values remaining in its day-to-day life, and such a visible highly negative contemporary social capital, cannot be reduced to this pervasive complex of mistrust, corruption, trickery, witchcraft and violence. However, at the individual level, most

⁶⁶ In *Development as Freedom* by 1998 Economics Nobel Prize laureate Amartya Sen (1999), development is considered as 'the expansion of the freedoms of people to lead the kind of lives they value and have reason to value'. Freedoms are diverse; they may relate to processes (permissive liberties of taking actions and decisions) as well as to actual capabilities, the 'substantive freedoms', and they reinforce each other. Hence, the famous proposition that 'no famine has ever taken place...in a functioning democracy'. Freedom is 'both the primary end of development and the principal means of achieving it'.

⁶⁷ That's perhaps why the 'reenchantment of modernity' strikes in the West too with the proliferation of sects, witchcraft and astrology, at a time when the potential of science and technology to control everything has been seriously revised downwards by a majority of people as compared with the early twentieth century.

Africans obviously are neither corrupt nor violent, if only because predators need plentiful prey. Even those who are in a position to resort to corruption may not enjoy, when in a financial dead end, crossing what most still see as an ethical border. Civil servants remember with nostalgia the times when they or their fathers could feed their families and give their children a good education solely on their pay. At the institutional level, not all structures and organizations are just the trappings of a democratic modern state displayed for the donors over the real ‘board of predators’.

However the main reason why there is no determinism is that culture, values, and beliefs continue to evolve just as they have always done in Africa, as elsewhere. Anthropologists and Africanists took a snapshot of Africa during the first decades of colonization; this has been much refined and nuanced since then but an historical perspective of Africa over the centuries has now been generated. The African polities and customs varied across the continent and have much evolved over time too. Unsurprisingly there were political histories. At times chiefs claiming seniority did succeed in enforcing their authority upon their peers though there had never been a central authority before; then their successors lost supremacy again. States appeared and disappeared.

Societies, identities, beliefs and rites evolved too, in many cases without any Western pressure, challenge, or advice. The formation of the Zulu kingdom and nation the Mfecane (the ‘great crushing’ in Ngoni), ultimately unified under Shaka’s leadership in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, is clear evidence of that. One innovation was the replacement of local initiation rites of young men by chiefdom-wide age regiments which allowed ‘militarism’ to overcome segmentation (Illife, 1996).

Another trait is the pragmatism in religious practices. The ultimate test was ‘whether they worked,⁶⁸ whether they relieved human misfortune, secured fertility...health’ (Illife, 1996). More generally, religion import has been a constant growth sector. Christianity and Islam have made vast inroads through various forms from traditional to fundamentalist ones including locally flavored and revivalist branches.

⁶⁸ Validation by success, if by chance, allowed, for instance, some British missionaries in Malawi in 1889 to get permission to set up a mission from Mbelwa, a Ngoni ruler, because rain fell the day after their prayer, though Ngoni rainmakers had failed to make it happen for several weeks

And societal evolution is ongoing right now, though the outcomes are not always obvious. Urbanization is rapidly taking place and according to most projections by 2025, a majority of Africans will probably for the first time live in an urbanized environment. There are countries and zones where it is already the case and others where the 50% urbanization rate will not be reached, but the trend is strong. The shift from rural to urban society with high intermingling of diverse people will again transform social attitudes and behaviors. Some norms will be less strictly enforced, some may emerge, and pressures will rise in populations that will be massively young.

CONCLUSION

This paper argues vigorously that the answer to the question of the African curse is 'no'. In brief there is nothing distinctively specific to Africa predisposing it to slow growth or decline but it does present a rare combination of negative factors which do or did exist elsewhere and which usually measure more in Africa than elsewhere.

Economically it means there is not a different effect in Africa of the usual variables impacting on growth. But this is no great reason for optimism as expectations are not very high in the short run with so many handicaps: poor soils, infectious diseases, small economies, landlockedness, declining rainfall since the 1960s, hasty and badly prepared independence, high dependency demographic ratios, terms of trade losses since the mid 1970s. None of these is specific to Africa. All are or have been experienced somewhere else and should not be insuperable.

Cultural and sociological factors cannot be discounted a priori. The stylized view is the spatial leap of scale from local-minded ethnically homogeneous communities to ethnically diverse wider modern state-type polities. Loyalty to family, lineage and ethnic group, if not culturally reinterpreted and adjusted to this larger context, or just effectively restrained, can only undermine the formal institutions whose efficiency is required for development at this level of transactions. Manipulation of these loyalties by politicians and the sensitivity of the relationship with the West make things even worse and harder to deconstruct. But this is not unknown elsewhere.

Moreover, some new handicaps have emerged for most African states in the post-independence period due to an exceptionally harmful historical trajectory. Inept and predatory policies have certainly produced poverty traps, forcing a low-level equilibrium. The neopatrimonial state has generated widespread corruption within the civil service and the public sector, causing a massive negative externality with a pervasive lack of trust.

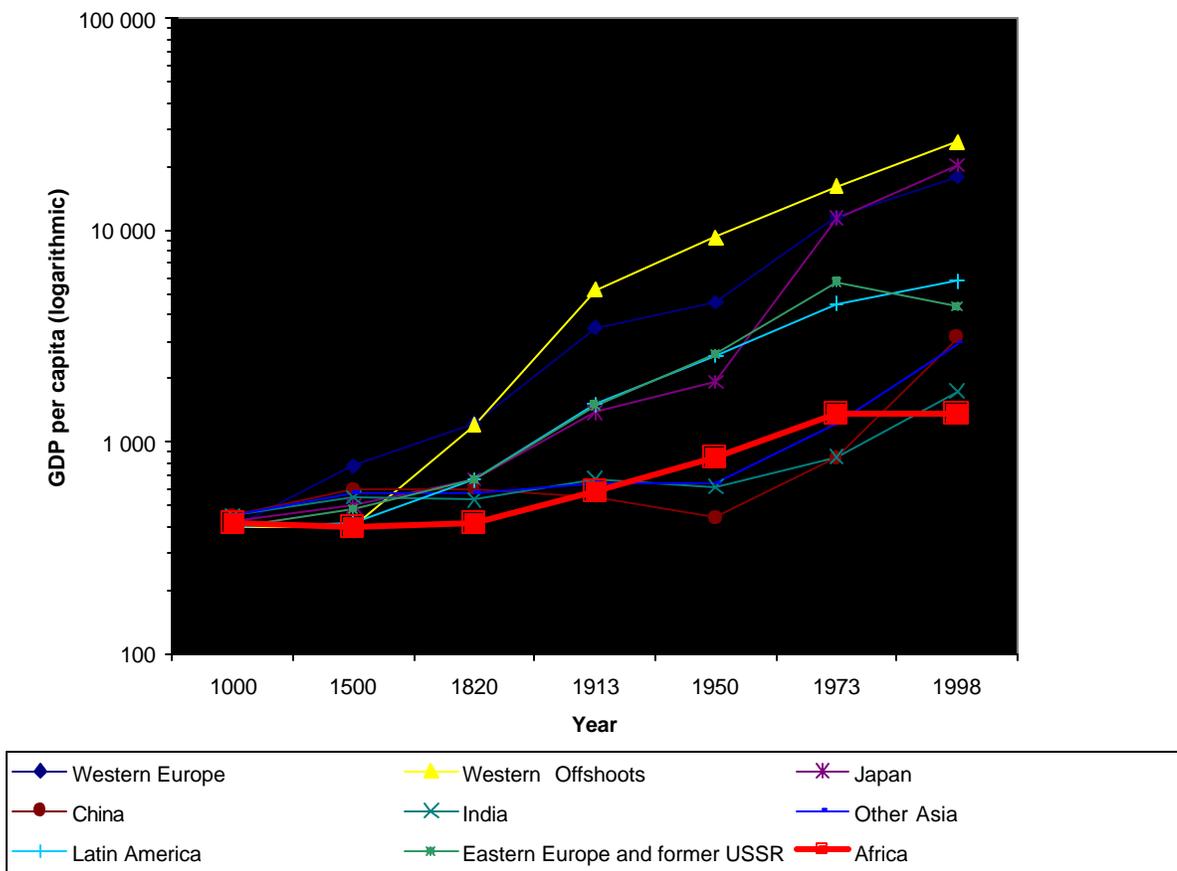
This could well be a sort of 'ethical trap'. Simply reversing economic policies will not suffice to escape from it. Democracy might be more helpful in that. It may not yet be firmly embedded but Africans are less and less amused. In every country, there is a growing 'tribe of democracy'. African NGOs are increasing the pressure for transparency and progress in political, social and cultural matters. These are flames of hope and indications that more and more Africans want a deeper change. They might prevail if they can be freed from the ethical trap. After all, isn't freedom the 'ultimate ethical frontier', as Achille Mbembe (2002) asserted?

Democracy has obviously not only importance of its own, but some academics have also emphasized its development-enhancing role. Democracy is held by Rodrik (2000) as the 'meta-institution' most likely in the long run to deliver the policies and to mould the institutions that are required for high growth and development. Domínguez (1998) has also described the 'mutually reinforcing nature of market development and democratic development'.

Africans will make their own history, for better or worse. But they themselves, and the foreigners who care for them, should try to ensure that all Africans are allowed to make an informed choice and have a voice.

EXHIBIT I

Level of GDP per capita in 1990 international dollars
Source: Maddison, 2001



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