

## Editorial

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# Reclaiming Our Future

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Every new century comes with its own challenges. Although the rapid changes in virtually all spheres of life make it difficult to clearly identify all the challenges that Africa will face this century, the fact remains that Africa has a lot to contend with, there are many global issues that are craving for attention – emerging world powers, neoliberalism, interculturalism, climate change, poverty, rapid urbanization, and many others.

Some pertinent questions arise from these challenges, and these are essentially what the 13<sup>th</sup> CODESRIA General Assembly, taking place after the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary of most African countries, will tackle during its conference through lectures and round-table discussions as the Council hosts scholars on Africa from the continent and the outside world between 5 and 9 December, 2011, Rabat, Morocco. The communication that announced the forthcoming General Assembly raised two questions: “How does all this affect Africa? And how prepared is the continent to face these challenges as well as those that will arise in the future?”

Some of the major disadvantages that Africa is faced with at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century include low level of education of many Africans, lack of modern techniques of production, transport, a fragmented political space and the extrovert structure of the majority of the economies among others. Institutions of higher education and cultures of the elites are strongly marked, not by a philosophy and development strategies guided by the interests of African peoples, but by influences coming from the North, influences that are more alienating than liberating.

Some of the “remedies” to the economic crisis and, more generally, to the problems of underdevelopment and widespread poverty that have been proposed or imposed on Africa have, in some cases contributed to the worsening of problems that they were supposed to solve. Special attention should be paid to higher education, given the importance, and the uniqueness of the role that knowledge plays in development, and its ability to influence the whole system. Isn't the “vulnerability” of Africa the result of its marginal position in the world of knowledge? With the ongoing changes in higher education

around the world and the weakening of many African universities as a result of both deep crises and twenty years of structural adjustment, brain drain and sheer negligence on the part of the State, African research has encountered considerable difficulties in its attempts to study and interpret these events and more.

The question we need to ask is: How can Africa take charge of its future and make this century the one of its renaissance? How could the social sciences and humanities address the challenges that we already know, and what type of improvements are required in the African higher education and research systems in order for them to better prepare Africa to face the challenges of the coming decades of this century?

We seek to understand the role of intellectuals in general and CODESRIA in particular in addressing these challenges. The theoretical issues are very important. The production of knowledge informed by and is relevant to the social realities of Africa has always been the ambition of CODESRIA and of all the great intellectuals of this continent. The intellectual struggles of Africa and the Global South against the consequences of Western domination are far from having been won. The scientific division of labour in which Africa is still mainly seen as a purveyor of raw materials of little use to the transformation of African societies is still in force.

CODESRIA has decided to revamp the Economic Research Programme (ERP) as part of the Council's continued efforts toward analyzing the dynamics of economic processes and policies on the African continent through multidisciplinary teams comprising economists and researchers from other disciplines of the social sciences. The motivation for this multidisciplinary approach is based on the assumption that African economies cannot be studied in isolation from the prevailing social and political conditions on the continent. The programme therefore features critical reflections on the economy, politics and development challenges in Africa that are capable of laying the groundwork for further research. This edition of the Bulletin contains three of the presentations from the planning meeting. They include “Africa's Recent Growth Performance and Development Challenges” by

Mike Obadan; “Africa’s Economies and Relevant Economic Analysis: A Heterodox Approach to Economic Research in Africa” by Alemayehu Geda; and “Pertinent Economic Issues and Challenges Facing Africa” by Demba Moussa Dembele.

On the role of higher education, we have reflections from Adam Habib in “Managing Higher Education in Contemporary South Africa: Advancing Progressive Agendas in a Neo-Liberal and Technicist World”. He decries the present situation whereby higher educational systems are victims of eloquent and flowery policies which do not translate into tangible physical improvements, as discussions about cogent management issues have been grossly neglected. This article underscores the importance of experience-sharing among higher institutions in order to achieve the required effective balancing in the educational sector.

Continuing with the challenges of higher education we have Mahmood Mamdani with “The Importance of Research in a University” in which he shares his experience at the Makerere Institute of Social Research at Makerere University. He stresses the need to train future African researchers on the continent, preferably in their prospective employer-institutions, rather than overseas. He decries the market driven model and its resultant corrosive consultancy culture that presently dominates African universities while advocating a re-direction of commitment towards local knowledge production as the basis for understanding global phenomena.

In this issue, we return to Sudan with a piece on post-referendum Sudan in which the author, Peter Nyaba, makes a case for self-determination. In his article entitled “Peace is Better than Unity – Post-referendum Sudan”, he argues that ‘breaking apart and having peace’ is better than ‘living together in continued animosity under the guise of maintaining territorial integrity. Blaming the secession of South Sudan on the ruling political elite

in Khartoum that was insensitive to the yearnings of the people, he concludes that the people made a right choice in deciding to break away and form a new nation. He offers some key suggestions that will help South Sudan succeed.

The media has changed so much to the extent that it is currently the biggest tool that shapes public opinion and thus determines how majority of issues are understood and interpreted. This role is likely to expand even more in the coming decades. At this year’s CODESRIA Gender Symposium, researchers focused on the implications of media liberalization in Africa. We have reflections on media representation of women. Ly Ossome in “Feminism in the African Media: Possibilities for Diversification of Gender Representation” presents some new perspectives on gender representation, highlighting the potentials of women’s media for feminist liberation struggles against economic, political and cultural marginalization. Along the same lines, Abdoulaye Sounaye in “Gendered Religion: Female Preachers, Audiovisual Media and the Construction of Religious Authority in Niamey” discusses the role of gendered media in promoting female voices in religious arenas, placing them in a space that has hitherto been monopolized by the male folk and liberating them from the traditional confines dictated by religion. Illustrating with two women preachers from Niamey in Niger, this article advocates a gendered Islam, one in which women can take their rightful place beside men in religious activities, through creative rather than conservative media

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## 'Peace is Better than Unity' - Post-referendum Sudan\*

**P** 'Peace is better than unity' was the slogan with which the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in Addis Ababa in May 1991. Notwithstanding the unfortunate hostilities that later emerged between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Ethiopian leaders have been vindicated by electing peace rather than continued war in order to maintain territorial integrity.

Contemporary history reveals that the territorial integrity of any country or the unity of its peoples cannot be imposed by force of arms. The era of imperialism and local despots has gone for ever. Sudan had been a colonial construct since 1899 when the conquering Anglo-Egyptian forces re-occupied northern Sudan and extended their rule southwards and westwards to engulf South Sudan and Darfur respectively. It will be recalled that 'Equatoria' was until 1910 part of the 'Lado Enclave' under the Belgian crown, while Darfur was annexed to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in 1917 after the defeat of Sultan Ali Dinar.

Independent Sudan (1956) had the opportunity to remain one stable and prosperous country. But the ruling political elite remained oblivious to the country's multiple diversities. It insisted on defining the country along the two parameters of Arab and Islamic orientations. The policy to construct a highly centralised state based on these parameters precipitated civil wars initially in southern Sudan and then in other parts of northern Sudan, notably southern Kordofan, southern Blue Nile, eastern Sudan and finally in Darfur.

In fifty-five years of social and political engineering, the Sudanese political class has failed in the state and nation building processes. That more than 99 per cent of South Sudanese voted for secession in the referendum which leads to Sudan's dismemberment epitomizes this failure. The turbulent history of the Sudanese state formation may have been a factor in the South Sudanese decision to break away. However, governance, and good governance for that matter, remains the

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determinant factor in Sudan's stability as a state and nation. Governance rooted in the country's multiple diversities could have been the only guarantee for Sudan's unity and viability.

So when we speak of the consequences of South Sudan's secession, it is important and indeed imperative to focus on the future rather than on the past. The emerging two states, both the predecessor and the successor states, each carries the virus for future instability and possible dismemberment. The South Sudanese have been running their affairs independently for the last six years, thanks to the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA). The political elite have committed grievous mistakes of government that jeopardised the opportunity for mitigating the negative consequences of war.

Following the tragic death of Dr John Garang, a paradigm shift from liberation to a power agenda occurred, triggering a power struggle between the factions. This manifested itself in the widespread insecurity in southern Sudan, ethnic conflicts, corruption in government and society, lack of social services, and so on. No wonder that some spectators of the Sudanese theatre passed the verdict that South Sudan would emerge as a failed state. It was only owing to the civilised and orderly manner with which Southerners behaved during the referendum that some of these people changed their minds. The ruling political elite in South Sudan must change their *modus operandi* if South Sudan is not to slide back into anarchy.

Similarly, the ruling political elite, particularly the NCP, should draw a serious and honest lesson from the secession of South Sudan. A modern state cannot be built with the instruments of political domination, oppression and social dis-

crimination. The voice for South Sudanese secession grew louder only during the Ingaz regime. This was precisely for lack of accommodation of different views, while at the same time projecting an Arabo-Islamic identity on the South Sudanese. The mistakes of the 1950s and 1960s should not be repeated. The strong calls for regional self-rule coming from Blue Nile, southern Kordofan and Red Sea states should be heeded, and appropriate responses formulated immediately, lest they are transformed into calls for secession. The war raging in Darfur must be addressed immediately.

Looking at the region, South Sudan should build good neighbourliness with the countries with which it shares common borders, including northern Sudan. This will create conditions necessary and conducive to its immediate and accelerated social and economic transformation. This is because, all along, the borders have invariably divided the same ethnic communities. These communities such as the Azande in CAR, DR Congo; Kakwa and Pajulu in DR Congo and Uganda; Madi, Acholi and Dodoth in Uganda; Taposa and their cousins the Turkana and Karimajong in Kenya and Uganda respectively; Nuer and Anywaa in Ethiopia; should become bridges for social, economic and cultural cooperation and integration.

The communities living in the north-south border areas, and who have for a long time been involved in proxy wars, should be encouraged to look at where their interests for survival lie. The Messiriya, the Rezeighat, the Kenana and all the nomadic communities who spend most of the year in some parts of South Sudan will have to change their attitude towards their neighbours in the South. In fact, both governments should work together to permit free and unhindered access and to transform by peaceful means any resource-based conflict which may arise from time to time.

The independence of South Sudan is a precedent likely to trigger similar claims in other parts of Africa. One would not like people with similar historical claims

to independence and freedom to suffocate in unity on account of the OAU doctrine of the inviolability of colonial borders. Nevertheless, should the ruling political elite in a particular country fail to accommodate the concerns of their disadvantaged citizens (minorities), secession becomes an inevitable option. However, this option should be carefully weighed against other important factors of state viability. In this respect, the African Union should engage actively in the resolution of endemic conflicts, particularly those with an ethnic and religious streak that threaten the territorial unity of member states.

Most of us are sometimes passive spectators of the social and political engineering undertaken particularly by radical political and ideological groups that come to power. Nevertheless, opportunities exist for influencing the course of events. The National Council for Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry attach importance to the Peace Study Centres established in some of our universities: the Hafad University for Women, University of Khartoum, Univer-

sity of Juba, Nyala and Fasheir Universities in Darfur. Peace and conflict transformation and resolution studies should take centre stage in the coming period. I am glad that CODESRIA, UNECA and ARRF have been involved, from the very beginning, to provide the necessary resources and expertise.

In the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, we are developing a policy paper to be submitted to both governments – GOS and GOSS – for endorsement. The concept is for both governments to permit higher education institutions, particularly the University and the Faculty, to continue as the vital and lively link between the two countries beyond diplomatic and economic relationship. This will facilitate joint research activities in different spheres – research whose results should inform policy. In this respect, one envisages that South Sudan's secession and its consequences at the local and regional level, particularly its impact on the regional security architecture in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, should constitute an important research theme. Under this wider theme,

peace studies can be undertaken, entailing such issues as cross-border cattle rustling, small arms and light weapons trafficking, as well as other social and cultural studies which promote understanding and harmony.

We would want to suggest to the leadership of CODESRIA to hold this forum on a permanent, regular annual basis, and to take on board studies of such sensitive but unavoidable themes of Afro-Arab relationships in the context of the simmering conflicts in the Afro-Arab borderlands of which the conflicts in Darfur, Mali and Niger are part. We cannot afford any more to bury our heads in the sand. The uprising in Arab North Africa is likely to influence events in the Sudan and the rest of Africa as people cry aloud for human rights and political freedoms.

\* Speech delivered at the CODESRIA-UNECA-Africa Research and Resource Forum Workshop on the 'Consequences of the South Sudan Self-Determination Referendum for Sudan the East and Horn of Africa Region' held in Nairobi on 28 February-1 March 2011.

## Africa Development / Afrique et Développement

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*Africa Development* welcomes contributions which cut across disciplinary boundaries. Articles with a narrow focus and incomprehensible to people outside their discipline are unlikely to be accepted. The journal is abstracted in the following indexes: *International Bibliography of Social Sciences (IBSS)*; *International African Bibliography*; *African Studies Abstracts Online*; *Abstracts on Rural Development in the Tropics*; *Cambridge Scientific Abstracts*; *Documentationseliens Africa*; *A Current Bibliography on African Affairs*, and the *African Journals Online*. Back issues are also available online at [www.codesria.org/Links/Publications/Journals/africa\\_development.htm](http://www.codesria.org/Links/Publications/Journals/africa_development.htm)

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*Afrique et Développement* souhaite recevoir des articles mobilisant les acquis de différentes disciplines. Des articles trop spécialisés ou incompréhensibles aux personnes qui sont en dehors de la discipline ne seront probablement pas acceptés. Les articles publiés dans le périodique sont indexés dans les journaux spécialisés suivants: *International Bibliography of Social Sciences*; *International African Bibliography*; *African Studies Abstracts Online*; *Abstracts on Rural Development in the Tropics*; *Cambridge Scientific Abstracts*; *Documentationseliens Africa*; *A Current Bibliography on African Affairs*, et *African Journals Online*. Les numéros disponibles de *Afrique et Développement* peuvent être consultés à l'adresse suivante: [www.codesria.org/Link/Publications/Journals/africa\\_development.htm](http://www.codesria.org/Link/Publications/Journals/africa_development.htm).

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# Managing Higher Education Institutions in Contemporary South Africa: Advancing Progressive Agendas in a Neo-Liberal and Technicist World<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

South Africa's university and higher education system has been the focus of widespread investigation and reflection in the last two decades. The impetus for this has been both global and domestic. At the international level, political elites across both the developed and developing world, driven in the main by the challenges of and the assumptions informing conservative macro-economic policy paradigms, have subjected the university systems to critical review with the goal of enhancing the relevance of graduates and increasing the output of universities. At the domestic level, South Africa's democratic transition has ushered new stakeholders and political elites into the societal mainstream who have their own aspirations and needs, and as a result have generated new challenges and priorities for the public higher education system. Both developments have resulted in an ongoing research, critique and transformation of the higher education system in South Africa.

Yet, despite this, almost all of this intellectual energy has been directed at the level of policy and, more recently, its impact. The Zuma administration, whose political priorities, in part informed by the ANC's Polokwane conference in 2007, has reinforced this focus on higher education policy by initiating a widespread policy review of different elements of the higher education system. Even academic critics of the higher education reforms have been focused on policy, critiquing its orientation and detailing the negative impact it has on the system. The only exception to this policy focus has been some of the mainstream media's assessments of universities' capacities and their rankings of these institutions. But even here, these reflections have returned to a policy focus, as opposition politicians used the relatively poor global rankings of South African universities as a basis for which to launch a critique of the government's higher education policies.

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Missing in all of this debate is any reflection of higher education managerial practice. The only level at which there is some reflection in this regard is in the capacity development initiatives within the higher education system. But even here, the focus is largely on enhancing administrative skill sets, like broadening higher education managers' understanding and knowledge of financial or human resource protocols. But while these are important issues and technical skill sets to learn, they not really the core of what management is about. At its most basic level, management is about understanding the context within which one is located, reflecting on the options one has for achieving desired ends, and then galvanizing the support one requires for implementing the choice that has been made. The lack of reflection on this issue is tragic, for it creates the implicit impression that nothing progressive is possible as long as we are subjected to the current political economy paradigm.

But this is just not true. The varied performance of universities in South Africa suggests that much can be learnt from comparative reflections on managerial practice. Moreover, even in the last two decades, there have been South African cases where impressive transformation, productivity and efficiency gains have been recorded. Perhaps, the two most well known institutional examples of this has been the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Human Science Research Council (HSRC). Can anything be learnt from these and other experiences and be applied by higher education executives in other universities and research institutions?

This then is the focus of this article. Methodologically, it essentially consti-

tutes the reflections of a bureaucrat in a South African university who is interested in advancing a social agenda. Perhaps, some may interpret this merely as the justifications of one who has become a mere cog in the wheel of the higher education system. But the article is written in the hope that some may see the value of engaging higher education executives who are at least critically reflecting on their managerial experiences in the hope that lessons can be learnt for advancing a socially progressive higher education agenda in a less than perfect world.

## South Africa's Transforming Higher Education System

As has been suggested earlier, universities are the product of the political and socioeconomic systems they embedded in. South Africa's political and socioeconomic system has undergone significant transformation as a result of the country's democratic transition. This transition has been a double-edged one. On the one hand, we have a political transition which involved enabling the access of South Africa's black population to the institutions of governance and the state. On the other, we had an economic transformation in which the South African economy has been increasingly integrated into the global economy with significant consequences for private and public enterprises.

The political transition has had a number of positive consequences for the higher education system. It has increased the pressure on universities to become more accountable. It has massified and diversified access to the nation's universities. While it has not yet non-racialised the academy, it has made it much more diversified than it was 15 years ago. It is true that one of the downsides has been that the state has become much more interventionist in the higher education system which has resulted in some erosion of the autonomy of the universities. But on balance, the net effect on the universities from the political transition is, I believe, positive.

The economic transition has also had significant impacts on the higher education system. But this time, the impact, on balance, has been negative. As a result of the impact of a very conservative macro-economic agenda, especially in the first decade of the transition, state institutions, and through them other public entities like universities, have become increasingly corporatized. Managerial practices and accountability mechanisms from the corporate sector have unthinkingly been imported into public institutions and universities. Universities and their divisions are increasingly treated as business entities, and power has shifted decisively from structures like Senate (where academics predominate) to Finance and Council (where administrators and external stakeholders are in the majority).

The net impact on South Africa's universities has been dramatic. Profitability, rather than sustainability, seems to be the driving ethos of universities. Academic departments have had their budgets slashed dramatically in real terms. The administrative workload on academics has significantly increased. There is a greater push for third stream income, and qualitative indicators of performance have begun to proliferate in these institutions. The net effect of some of these developments is that the academy is no longer an attractive career prospect. The brightest students stay away from the universities. We have an aging cohort of academics and researchers with the result that alarm bells have begun to ring loudly in important quarters of the higher education system.

What is to be done? Four distinct responses have emerged to this state of affairs. The first is from those on the right and in business circles who have celebrated this corporatization of the higher education environment. These stakeholders view this development as a maturing of the sector and are ignorant of the negative effects that these developments are having on the academy. There is of course sufficient research that has demonstrated the fallacy of the assumptions of this response, and there is no need to reiterate these arguments once again.

The second response is mainly from progressive quarters, many from within the academy but some from elsewhere, including the state and university executives. This response has been largely one

of wringing one's hands and bemoaning the current state of affairs. Sometimes, there is a romanticisation of the past higher education system where universities were defined by a sense of collegiality. The problem with this response is that it is simply confined to critique. It does not involve any active attempt to do something about the current state of affairs. The past is also misrepresented in a serious way. The apartheid higher education system was not a friendly, collegiate place, either in the historically black universities (HBUs), or in their historically white counterparts, especially for young black academics who were never part of the power brokers (both ruling and oppositional) within the universities.

The third response is a more active and nuanced version of the second. Essentially, it bemoans the current state of affairs, but tries to fight back by attempting to keep at bay the worse consequences of corporatization dynamics. It is a response manifested in most universities in the country but is perhaps most successfully practised in small towns where corporatization dynamics are least intense. This third response is seen as the typical progressive one. However, it is a response that is failing and is unlikely to be successful in the long term. For a while, it may seem as if a successful strategy is being waged, particularly in small towns, but it is going to be impossible to create islands of collegiality in a market oriented higher education system. This is especially so since universities are funded through the state in accordance with a funding formula that is itself market oriented.

The fourth response, of which I see myself a part, is a proactive engagement with the context one finds oneself in with a view to subverting it in the long term. It is akin to a strategy suggested by John Saul in the early 1990s entitled 'structural reform'. This is a response which involves an engagement with a view to initiating reforms that have the effect of enabling further reforms, all of which in the long term create a new structured balance of power that enables the transformation of the very system itself. This is a response that tries to advance a progressive agenda within the context in which one finds oneself. It is a response that recognizes that there are negative consequences to the engagement, but

nevertheless argues that it is better to advance a progressive agenda with some negative consequences than do nothing at all.

It is a response that recognizes that there is a difference between a corporate culture and a managerial agenda. There is a difference between profitability and sustainability. There is a difference between corporate behaviour and entrepreneurial leadership. It is a response that attempts to engage in ways that pluralize power in the higher education system because as long as power is dispersed, checks and balances can emerge in a system that contains authoritarian tendencies and enables progressive change. But it is also a response that recognizes that there will be costs, and while it tries to mitigate the costs, it does not use it as an excuse for non-engagement.

What then are examples of this fourth response? The examples detailed below are not initiatives of my own. Rather, they are a part of collective experiences I was or am a part of in different organizations over the past decade. It is also worth noting that these organizations may have initiated other experiences that are more negative and that do not comfortably lie within the framework of this response. These institutions must not be imagined as homogenous entities whose experiences coherently demonstrate one response or the other.

In any case, one significant feature of this fourth response is a recognition that any serious restructuring of an academic institution is going to require excellent academics who have a relative autonomy to focus on their work, are provided with an enabling environment to do so, and are rewarded for their initiatives. Restructuring also requires resources and if they are not immediately available, then they have to be mobilized, sometimes through hard choices, having to be made about what gets sacrificed so that more crucial and core initiatives are adequately resourced. So, in the institutions that have been successful in restructuring and enhancing academic and research efficiencies – the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) being two such cases in the last decade – there has been the hunt for successful academic talents who are sometimes paid beyond the scales of the mainstream academy.

In the institution where I currently work – the University of Johannesburg – we have created an environment of incentives where productive researchers are rewarded. There is a small core of excellent research and teaching staff who are rewarded in their remuneration beyond the normal scales through a special non-pensionable allowance. In addition, we have an annual Vice Chancellor's award where the top researcher gets R500,000 and the top new researcher gets R250,000. Three top teachers also annually get a reward of R150,000. The institution has also established a research incentive system where a minimum between R22,000 and R33,000 of the research subsidy is invested in individual researcher's research accounts to support the continuation of their research. Finally, the university has more than quadrupled its internal investment in research activities.

The downside of this development is that it creates a much more unequal academic environment. But there are a number of upsides as well. First, the systemic message for younger academics is one that suggests that one does not have to leave the academy and become a bureaucrat if one wants to earn higher salaries. This is after all the message that became prevalent in the higher education system in the post-apartheid era where managers were increasingly better rewarded than the academics who undertook the core business of the universities. Now, younger staff can identify role models within the academy – A and B rated researchers for instance – who could also earn generous packages. Second, and perhaps even more importantly, the effect of this incentivized academic environment is the pluralization of power within the academy because of the creation of a new group of privileged and empowered stakeholders like top researchers. Suddenly, the Vice Chancellor and the senior executives within the institution are not the only power brokers within the university. A and B rated researchers have also become institutional power brokers in their own right.

A second example of this fourth response is a New Generation Scholars Programme adopted at the institution. One of the biggest contemporary challenges South Africa's higher education system confronts is an aging professoriate and there is an urgent need to reproduce the academy. The problem is that South African stu-

dents are no longer interested in post-graduate studies. Scholarships for such studies are not attractive because they are structured on the assumption that the students are middle class. Yet most South African students in the higher education system are first generation working class students who are under enormous pressure to earn a salary. The University of Johannesburg, therefore, developed a New Generation Scholarship programme – in partnership with Petro South Africa, Nedbank, Ford Foundation, Murray & Roberts – which offers Masters candidates a scholarship of R80,000 per annum for two years. On completion of their Masters, the top 50 per cent of the graduates are offered a doctoral scholarship of R150,000 per annum for three years, and are automatically offered a job on successfully graduating. This final element is absolutely essential, otherwise, there is no incentive to continue studying. The programme is founded on the realization that South Africans have to take direct responsibility for the training of their new generation and cannot rely on American or European Foundations or Official Development Assistance to do it for them.

A third example of this fourth response relates to third stream income. This has become a major focus of South African universities, either driven by the necessity of declining public subsidies or by perceptions by university executives that this represents modern global managerial practice. Most universities around the world look to American institutions for leadership in this regard. But there is much misunderstanding about this state of affairs in the United States. Many assume that American universities are driven by private money. But this is just not true. Their research and innovation platform is completely dependent on public investment, not private resources. Take for example the National Health Institute. Its annual budget is in the region of \$38 billion, of which at least \$30 billion is targeted for deployment in the nation's universities. Compare this single institute's budget to South Africa's system investment in research through the NRF. The latter has a budget in the region of R1 billion (\$150 million). Is it any wonder that we have such differentials in the research and innovation outcomes of the two societies?

It is true that student fees do constitute a substantive portion of American university budgets, but these are mainly the

private ones. South Africa is trying to do this in a public university system with a student base that is much more impoverished. In similar circumstances, the European societies established a model of higher education that was entirely free. A warning must be sounded that South Africa should avoid the African path in this regard which follows the European precedent and declared higher education free, but refused to make any additional investment in this sector. The net effect was the complete collapse of substantive higher education in Africa.

But all is not doom and gloom. In South Africa, we have a third stream funding possibility – Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) – that is not available elsewhere. BEE is an important driver of South Africa's post-apartheid political economy and, increasingly, it has become mandatory that each BEE deal have a developmental/broad based component. How is it that university executives have not mobilized for this? After all, there could be no more developmental or broad based impact than investing in universities and in the education of South Africa's next generations. If universities had mobilized only ten per cent of BEE deals which it is estimated had a total value of R500 billion in the last decade, they would have in 2010 had an additional independent asset base of R50 billion. On a ten percent return, these institutions could have had an additional R5 billion to invest in scholarships, programmes and infrastructure – twice the size of the state's annual infrastructure grant of the last few years.

A fourth example of this kind of response would pertain to the procurement of academic and research journals for university libraries. The essential dilemma in this regard is that there are huge profits to be made in the international academic journals publication industry. Reed Elsevier, a UK-based international academic publication corporate, for instance, made £1,379 million, while its competitors, Informa (housing the popular Taylor & Francis group) and Springer made smaller, but similarly obscene profits of £305.8 million and •285 million, respectively. There are of course huge social costs to these profits. Most academic libraries cannot afford to get all of these journals, so hard choices must be made. The more well-endowed universities do manage to get the best of the journals, but the poorest do not. This effectively means that

the least well-endowed universities, those that service the poorest of our citizens, do not have access to a quality academic journal base which is an absolute necessity for quality higher education to be delivered. The better of universities are also impacted upon. Their budgets are being stretched, and every rand that gets handed to multinationals as their profits is a rand taken away from a scholarship for a poor South African student with the potential to succeed.

South Africa's higher education is confronted with three major priorities: produce a highly qualified human resource base which is needed for development, develop a new generation of academics to sustain our higher education system, and produce high quality research and innovation that can enhance our global competitiveness. All three priorities are dependent on access to widely used publication outlets – academic journals and books – that enable the dissemination of research results, but, just as importantly, access to the papers published by other scholars in leading journals. Yet, this is precisely what we do not have because an international commercial industry of academic publishing has been allowed to undermine the public good of higher education for massive profits.

There is already some movement on the part of the state to address some of these problems. The Department of Science and Technology commissioned the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) to search for solutions. The Academy has recently proposed a set of measures to encourage and facilitate the publication of academic books in and from South Africa. It has also proposed the development of a cost-effective, high-quality indigenous journals platform to serve as an outlet for the free online dissemination of research results worldwide. The platform is called SciELO South Africa, and is embedded in the growing multi-country SciELO system originally created in Brazil.

The main problem standing in the way of a real improvement in the scholarly performance of our researchers, however, is access to the high-impact 'international literature' emanating from North America and Europe. These are published by multi-national companies on highly profitable commercial platforms, and represent most of the more important scientific journals on the planet. Access to these

is necessary if our postgraduate students, researchers and academics are to get to the cutting edge of global knowledge in their respective fields. To develop cost-effective access to these journals, DST has requested ASSAf to investigate how other countries have been able to do this, with a view to making recommendations for a suitable local approach. Consideration is currently being given to what Brazil, Pakistan and Chile have done in this regard. In Brazil, one of its science institutions, CAPES, is mandated with the responsibility of buying access to international journal platforms for most of the public universities with strong postgraduate degree programmes. Pakistan and Chile have a variant of this model which is much cheaper, and provides public universities with access to a smaller range of journals. The implementation of either model would benefit South African universities, for not only would it be highly cost-effective for our higher education system in comparison with the present 'individual library budget' system, but it would also provide more equitable access, enabling students in Venda and UCT to have access to the same range of scientific journals.

Despite the progress, however, is ASSAf not being too timid in the reforms it has proposed? Should it not direct public support for only one or two consolidated academic publishing houses in South Africa? Instead of proposing that indigenous journals should be supported by author fees paid by academic institutions, as if there are enough research resources circulating within these institutions, should it not be recommending that such a platform be subsidized directly by the DST?

More importantly, however, it has to be asked: why is it that sixteen years after South Africa's democratic transition, we still have not implemented a system-wide procurement of academic and research journals when it would be cheaper and would enable equitable access for all students in the country's public university system? Is it not because of the competitive logic that has emerged among South Africa's universities? Is this not an example of institutional autonomy run amok? And does it not point to a lack of entrepreneurial imagination by South African universities' executive and managerial layers who have become so immersed and preoccupied with international benchmarking exercises and protecting

their institutional turf from the state, that they have not been able to come together as a collective to develop custom-made solutions to the contextual challenges this country's higher education system confronts? It needs to be borne in mind that if university executives fail in their singular duty to enable quality education by providing their students with access to the latest high quality research and knowledge, then it would become necessary for the Ministers of Higher Education and Training and/or Science & Technology to pass legislation, making it mandatory for South African universities to make scientific articles published by their academics available free online within six months to a year of appearing in international journals. After all, it is the money of South African taxpayers that enabled the research for, and the writing of, the article in the first place.

These are just some examples of what a progressive entrepreneurial higher education managerial practice would entail. Obviously, this does not exhaust the full list of reforms and/or practices. Many of these practices should be determined by the context of individual institutions. Larger institutions in urban settings may be able to use shifts in expenditure to drive reforms that enhance efficiencies. Universities in attractive geographic settings can use this to attract higher quality staff. Universities in small rural towns may be able to play on the safe and collegial atmosphere to attract other staff. Historically black universities in rural contexts would need to constitute themselves as core elements in a broader regional development agenda, without which the best funding formulae in the world would not lead to the development of these universities. The singular lesson to be learnt is that the focus must be on the local, and university executives need to develop a custom-made strategy for the specific conditions their institutions are located in.

### **Transformative Change?**

But what makes these reforms transformative or structural? What suggests that they are not simply accommodative within the parameters of the existing political economy?

The examples of the reforms and practices detailed above, despite some negative consequences like the increasing inequality in the remuneration of the academy, has nevertheless had some positive

outcomes for both the higher education system and for the University of Johannesburg. The hunt for academic talents by the University of Johannesburg has broken the ethnic logic of academic recruitment in the Gauteng region. Until recently, English-speaking academics and a few Afrikaner academic dissidents, gravitated towards the University of the Witwatersrand. Afrikaner academics, with a smattering of English-speaking dissidents who fell out with the academic mainstream at Wits, tended to locate themselves at the Universities of Johannesburg and Pretoria. The University of Johannesburg's active recruitment across the ethnic divide broke this logic, and created an open academic market which has enhanced the leverage of academics vis-à-vis their respective executive managements.

The infusion of new academics and the activation and empowerment of existing staff at UJ has significantly enhanced the research productivity of the institution. In 2009, its output was 40 per cent higher than what it was three years earlier. Yet, all of this is occurring in an institution that is increasingly racially and ethnically integrating and that continues to service primarily a working and middle class student base. The University of Johannesburg's student fees still run at a significant discount to those of its regional and national peers, and it consciously acts to ensure that none of its campuses become *de facto* racial enclaves.

Similar progressive outcomes define the other three reforms and/or practices recommended above. The New Generation Scholars programme would enable the development of a new generation of academics. BEE resources would enable poorer students to study at universities and allow these institutions to provide better infrastructure, instructional and human resources. System buying of information resources in libraries would enable more cost efficient purchase of, and enhance equitable access to, academic journals across the system. But it is not these positive ends – however important they may be – that define these reforms and practices as structural or transformative. What makes them so is that they begin, however timidly, to pluralize power and change its balance among stakeholders to enable further reforms down the line. If the prevailing state of affairs in higher education is a product of the existing balance of power, then

any agenda of change has to speak to the immediate context and be directed to changing this structured balance of power in the medium- to long-term.

The four reforms and practices suggested above are intended to achieve this. The new practices of remuneration and drive to incentivize efficiency and productivity, while undermining the relatively egalitarian character of the academy, nevertheless change the balance of power between academics and institutional executives. Younger academics do not only have to cast a gaze at senior managers as role models of better remuneration, and better remunerated A and B rated scholars constitute an alternative configuration of power within the institutional settings. The New Generation Scholars programmes, by creating a more diversified new generation of academics, would in the long term enhance the legitimacy of higher education among the society. This, together with independent BEE resources, would greatly enhance the power of internal institutional stakeholders, including academics and executive management vis-à-vis external stakeholders like system bureaucrats in government and corporate executives. System buying of information resources would similarly enhance the leverage of both government bureaucrats and institutional executives vis-à-vis the academic publishing industry. These changes in the structured balance of power within both institutions and the higher education system create the conditions for further reforms down the line.

There are some within higher education who argue that these reforms cannot be transformative because they engage the market and permit increased inequalities in remuneration. For these critics, the universities must be institutional imaginaries of a more progressive and egalitarian future. But not only do these critics not speak to the realities of the moment, assuming it is possible to create islands of equality in an unequal world, but they also confuse means and ends. For them, transformative means an outcome which agrees with their vision of a progressive future. As a result, they forever try to keep out unwelcome system pressures, and run the risk of a slow incremental capitulation to these very system effects.

Given this, does it not make more strategic sense to not solely focus on ends?

Ends are important, and progressive outcomes should be attempted by higher education executives as the reforms and practices detailed above demonstrate. But perhaps even more important than ends is the means for change. Higher education executives need to recognize that sustainable progressive change is a product of an engagement that is directed to changing the existing structured balance of power. Reforms and practices must be explicitly embarked upon because they deliberately alter the relations of power among stakeholders within universities and in the higher education system. In a sense, the agenda must be to create structural conditions, meaning a balance of power, to enable further battles in the future.

## Conclusion

As of now, higher education executives in South Africa, as elsewhere, fall into two camps. There are those on the conservative fringe who explicitly or implicitly see universities as business entities which should be treated as such. Other higher education executives are hostile to this idea, recognizing that universities can never be simply treated as corporate organizations with students as clients and academics as workers. Were this to happen, they realize that the nobility of the higher education project itself will be compromised. I count myself among this progressive group of executives. But until now, the mainstream of this progressive group has fought a rearguard battle to hold at bay corporate systemic pressures bearing down on the universities. The recommendation here is to engage the system with a view to advancing reforms that focus on the methodologies of change, that transform the balance of power among stakeholders within the universities and the higher education system as a whole. Only then, would we be able to change the tide in favour of progressive social and educational ends.

## Note

1. A version of this article was first presented at a seminar at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa, on 'First Thoughts at the Higher Education Roundtable', 27-29 October 2010.

## The Importance of Research in a University

**M**y remarks will be more critical than congratulatory. I will focus more on the challenge we face rather than the progress we have made. My focus will also be limited, to the humanities and the social sciences rather than to the sciences, to postgraduate education and research rather than to undergraduate education.

I would like to begin with a biographical comment. I did my 'O' Levels at Old Kampala Secondary School in 1962, the year of independence. The US government gave an independence gift to the Ugandan government. It included 24 scholarships. I was one of those who were airlifted to the US, getting several degrees over 10 years – BA, MA, PhD – and returned in 1972.

Those who went with me were divided into two groups. There were those who never returned, and then those who did, but were soon frustrated by the fact that the conditions under which they were supposed to work were far removed from the conditions under which they were trained. In a matter of years, sometimes months, they looked for jobs overseas, or moved out of academia into government, business or other occupations.

The lesson I draw from my experience was that the old model does not work. We have no choice but to train postgraduate students in the very institutions in which they will have to work. We have no choice but to train the next generation of African scholars at home. This means tackling the question of institutional reform alongside that of postgraduate education. Postgraduate education, research and institution building will have to be part of a single effort.

I would like to put this in the context of the history of higher education in Africa. I do not mean to suggest that there is a single African history. I speak particularly of those parts of Africa colonized after the Berlin Conference in late 19th century.

There is a contrast between older colonies like South Africa or Egypt where Britain embarked on a civilizing mission – building schools and universities – and newer

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colonies like Uganda where they tended to regard products of modern education as subversive of the existing order.

### History of Higher Education in Africa

One can write a history of higher education in Africa that begins a millennium ago.

It is now well known that there existed centers of learning in different parts of Africa – such as Al-Azhar in Egypt, Al-Zaytuna in Morocco, and Sankore in Mali – prior to Western domination of the continent. And yet, this historical fact is of marginal significance for contemporary African higher education. This is for one reason. The organization of knowledge production in the contemporary African university is everywhere based on a disciplinary mode developed in Western universities over the 19th and 20th centuries.

The first colonial universities were few and far between: Makerere in East Africa, Ibadan and Legon in West Africa, and so on. Lord Lugard, Britain's leading colonial administrator in Africa, used to say that Britain must avoid the Indian disease in Africa. The Indian Disease referred to the development of an educated middle class, a group most likely to carry the virus of nationalism.

This is why the development of higher education in Africa between the Sahara and the Limpopo was mainly a post-colonial development. To give but one example, there was 1 university in Nigeria with 1,000 students at independence. Three decades later, in 1991, there were 41 universities with 131,000 students. Nigeria not an exception, everywhere, the development of universities was a key nationalist demand. At independence, every country needed to show its flag, national anthem, national currency and national university as proof that the country had indeed become independent.

We can identify two different post-independent visions of the role of higher education. One was state-driven. I spent six years teaching at the University of Dar es Salaam in the 1970s. The downside of the Dar experience was that governments tended to treat universities as parastatals, undermining academic freedom. The great achievement of Dar was the creation of a historically-informed, interdisciplinary, curriculum.

A later post-independence vision was market-driven. Makerere University came to be its prime example. I spent nearly two decades at Makerere, from 1980 to 1996. During the 1990s, Makerere combined the entry of fee-paying students [privatization] with the introduction of a market-driven curriculum [commercialization]. The effects were contradictory: payment of fees showed that it was possible to broaden the financial base of higher education; commercialization opened the door to a galloping consultancy culture.

The two models had a common failing. Neither developed a graduate program.

Everyone assumed that post-graduate education would happen overseas through staff development programs. I do not recall a single discussion on post-graduate education at either Dar or Makerere.

### A Pervasive Consultancy Culture

Today, the market-driven model is dominant in African universities. The consultancy culture it has nurtured has had negative consequences for postgraduate education and research. Consultants presume that research is all about finding answers to problems defined by a client. They think of research as finding answers, not as formulating a problem. The consultancy culture is institutionalized through short courses in research methodology, courses that teach students a set of tools to gather and process quantitative information, from which to cull answers.

Today, intellectual life in universities has been reduced to bare-bones classroom activity. Extra-curricular seminars and

workshops have migrated to hotels. Workshop attendance goes with transport allowances and per diem. All this is part of a larger process, the NGO-ization of the university. Academic papers have turned into corporate-style power point presentations. Academics read less and less. A chorus of buzz words has taken the place of lively debates.

If you sit in a research institution as I do, then the problem can be summed up in a single phrase: the spread of a corrosive consultancy culture. Why is the consultancy mentality such a problem? Let me give you an example from the natural sciences. In 2007, the Bill and Malinda Gates Foundation decided to make eradicating malaria its top priority. Over the next 4 years, it spent \$150 million on this campaign. Even more important were the consequences of its advocacy program, which was so successful that it ended up shaping priorities of others in the field of health.

According to a recent study on the subject, WHO expenditure on eradicating malaria sky rocketed from \$ 100 million in 1998 to \$2 billion in 2009. The rush to a solution was at the expense of thinking through the problem. From an epidemiological point of view, there are two kinds of diseases: those you can eradicate, like sleeping sickness or smallpox, and those you cannot – like yellow fever – because it lives on a host, in this case monkeys, which means you would have to eradicate monkeys to eradicate yellow fever.

The two types of diseases call for entirely different solutions: for a disease you cannot eradicate, you must figure out how to live with it. Last year, a team of scientists from Gabon and France found that malaria too has a wild host – monkeys – which means you cannot eradicate it. To learn to live with it calls for an entirely different solution. Eradication calls for a laboratory-based strategy. You look for isolated human communities, like islands with small populations and invest all your resources in it – which is what the Gates Foundation and WHO did. But living with malaria requires you to spend your monies in communities with large, representative populations.

The Gates Foundation and WHO money was spent mostly on small islands. A WHO expert called it ‘a public health disaster’. The moral of the story is that diagnosis is more important than prescription. Research is diagnosis.

### **Creating an anti-dote to a Consultancy Culture**

How do we counter the spread of the consultancy culture? Through an intellectual environment strong enough to sustain a meaningful intellectual culture. To my knowledge, there is no model for this on the African continent today. It is something we will have to create. The old model looked for answers outside the problem. It was utopian because it imposed externally formulated answers. A new model must look for answers within the parameters of the problem. This is why the starting point must go beyond an understanding of the problem, to identifying initiatives that seek to cope with the problem. In the rest of this talk, I will seek to give an analysis of the problem and outline one initiative that seeks to come to grips with it. This is the initiative at the Makerere Institute of Social Research.

### **The Consultancy Problem**

Let me return to my own experience, this time at MISR, where I have learnt to identify key manifestations of the consultancy culture. I took over the directorship of MISR in June 2010. When I got there, MISR had 7 researchers, including myself. We began by meeting each for an hour: what research do you do? What research have you done since you came here? The answers were a revelation: everyone seemed to do everything, or rather anything, at one time primary education, the next primary health, then roads, then HIV/AIDS, whatever was on demand!

This is when I learnt to recognize the first manifestation of consultancy: A consultant has no expertise. His or her claim is only to a way of doing things, of gathering data and writing reports. He or she is a Jack or a Jane of all, a master of none. This is the first manifestation. Even though consultancy was the main work, there was also some research at MISR. But it was all externally-driven, the result of demands of European donor agencies that European universities doing research on Africa must partner with African universities. The result was not institutional partnerships but the incorporation of individual local researchers into an externally-driven project.

It resembled more an outreach from UK or France rather than a partnership between relative equals. Next, I suggested to my colleagues that our first priority

should be to build up the library. I noticed that the size of our library had actually been reduced over the past 10 years. I understood the reason for this when I looked at MISR’s 10-year strategic plan. The plan called for purchasing around 100 books for the library over 10 years.

In other words, the library was not a priority. The second manifestation of a consultancy culture is that consultants don’t read, not because they cannot read, or are not interested in reading – but because reading becomes a luxury, an after-work activity. Because consultancies do not require you to read anything more than field data and notes.

My colleagues and I discussed the problem of consultancy in meeting after meeting, and came up with a two-fold response. Our short-term response was to begin a program of seminars, two a month, requiring that every person begin with a research proposal, one that surveys the literature in their field, identifies key debates and locates their query within those debates. Second, also twice a month, we agreed to meet as a study group, prepare a list of key texts in the social sciences and humanities over the past 40 years, and read and discuss them.

Over the long-term, we decided to create a multi-disciplinary, coursework-based, PhD program to train a new generation of researchers. To brain-storm on the outlines of this program, we held a two-day workshop in January with scholars from University of Western Cape in South Africa and Addis Ababa University. I would like to share with you some of the deliberations at that workshop.

### **Reflections on Postgraduate Education in the Humanities and the Social Sciences**

The central question facing higher education in Africa today is what it means to teach the humanities and social sciences in the current historical context and, in particular, in post-colonial Africa. What does it mean to teach humanities and social sciences in a location where the dominant intellectual paradigms are products, not of Africa’s own experience, but of a particular Western experience? Where dominant paradigms theorize a specific Western history and are concerned in large part to extol the virtues of the enlightenment or to expound critiques of that same enlightenment? As a result, when these theories expand to other parts of the world

– they do so mainly by submerging particular origins and specific concerns through describing these in the universal terms of scientific objectivity and neutrality?

I want to make sure I am not misunderstood: there is no problem with the reading texts from the Enlightenment – in fact, it is vital – the problem is this: if the Enlightenment is said to be an exclusively European phenomenon, then the story of the Enlightenment is one that excludes Africa as it does most of the world. Can it then be the foundation on which we can build university education in Africa?

The assumption that there is a single model derived from the dominant Western experience reduces research to no more than a demonstration that societies around the world either conform to that model or deviate from it. The tendency is to dehistoricize and decontextualise discordant experiences, whether Western or non-Western. The effect is to devalue original research or intellectual production in Africa. The global market tends to relegate Africa to providing raw material (“data”) to outside academics who process it and then re-export their theories back to Africa. Research proposals are increasingly descriptive accounts of data collection and the methods used to collate data, collaboration is reduced to assistance, and there is a general impoverishment of theory and debate.

The expansion and entrenchment of intellectual paradigms that stress quantification above all has led to a peculiar intellectual dispensation in Africa today: the dominant trend is increasingly for research to be positivist and primarily quantitative, carried out to answer questions that have been formulated outside of the continent, not only in terms of location but also in terms of historical perspective. This trend either occurs directly, through the “consultancy” model, or indirectly, through research funding and other forms of intellectual disciplining. In my view, the proliferation of “short courses” on methodology that aim to teach students and academic staff quantitative methods necessary to gathering and processing empirical data are ushering a new generation of native informers. But the collection of data to answer pre-packaged questions is not a substantive form of research if it displaces the fundamental research practice of formulating the questions that are to

be addressed. If that happens, then researchers will become managers whose real work is to supervise data collection.

But this challenge to autonomous scholarship is not unprecedented – indeed, autonomous scholarship was also denigrated in the early post-colonial state, when universities were conceived of as providing the “manpower” necessary for national development, and original knowledge production was seen as a luxury. Even when scholars saw themselves as critical of the state, such as during the 1970s at University of Dar es Salaam, intellectual work ended up being too wedded to a political program. The strength of Dar was that it nurtured a generation of public intellectuals. Its weakness was that this generation failed to reproduce itself. This is a fate that will repeat in the future if research is not put back into teaching and PhD programs in Africa are not conceived of as training the next generation of African scholars.

Someone once told me that Makerere requires every PhD thesis to end with a set of recommendations. If true, this indicates a problem. A university is not a think tank. A university may house think tanks, even several, but a university cannot itself be a think tank. Think tanks are policy-oriented centers, centers where the point of research is to make recommendations. In a university, there needs to be room for both applied research, meaning policy-oriented research, and basic research. The distinction is this: unlike applied research which is preoccupied with making recommendations, the point of basic research is to identify and question assumptions that drive the very process of knowledge production.

### **The Postgraduate Initiative at MISR**

I believe one of the biggest mistakes made in the establishment of MISR as a research institute was to detach research from postgraduate education. The formation of the new College of Humanities that has brought the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences and MISR under a single administrative roof gives us a historic opportunity to correct this mistake. MISR will aim to offer a multi-disciplinary doctoral program in the qualitative social sciences and the humanities.

The initiative at the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR) is driven by multiple convictions. One, key to research is the formulation of the problem of re-

search. Two, the definition of the research problem should stem from a dual engagement: on the one hand, a critical engagement with the society at large and, on the other, a critical grasp of disciplinary literature, worldwide, so as to identify key debates within the literature and locate specific queries within those debates.

Faced with a context where the model is the consultant and not the independent researcher, we at MISR think the way forward is to create a PhD program based on significant preparatory coursework, to create among students the capacity to both re-think old questions and formulate new ones.

Our ambition is also to challenge the foundations of the prevailing intellectual paradigm which has turned the dominant Western experience into a model which conceives of research as no more than a demonstration that societies around the world either conform to or deviate from. This dominant paradigm de-historicizes and de-contextualises other experiences, whether Western or non-Western. The effect is to devalue original research in Africa. The global market tends to relegate Africa to providing raw material (“data”) to outside academics who process it and then re-export their theories back to Africa. Research proposals are increasingly descriptive accounts of data collection and the methods used to collate data, collaboration is reduced to assistance, and there is a general impoverishment of theory and debate. If we are to treat every experience with intellectual dignity, then we must treat it as the basis for theorization. This means that we need to historicize and contextualize not only phenomena and processes that we observe, but also the intellectual apparatus used to analyze them.

Finally, MISR will seek to combine a commitment to local (indeed, regional) knowledge production, rooted in relevant linguistic and disciplinary terms, with a critical and disciplined reflection on the globalization of modern forms of knowledge and modern instruments of power. Rather than oppose the local to the global, it will seek to understand the global from the vantage point of the local. The doctoral program will seek to understand alternative forms of aesthetic, intellectual, ethical, and political traditions, both contemporary and historical, the objective being not just to learn about these forms, but also to learn from them. Over time,

we hope this project will nurture a scholarly community that is equipped to rethink – in both intellectual and institutional terms – the very nature of the university and of the purpose it is meant to serve locally and globally.

### Coursework

Coursework during the first two years will be organized around a single set of core courses taken by all students, supplemented by electives grouped into four thematic clusters:

1. **Genealogies of the Political**, being discursive and institutional histories of political practices;
2. **Disciplinary and Popular Histories**, ranging from academic and professional modes of history writing to popular forms of re-telling the past in vernaculars;
3. **Political Economy**, global, regional and local; and
4. **Literary and Aesthetic Studies**, consisting of fiction, the visual and performing arts and cinema studies.

Translated into a curricular perspective, the objective is for an individual student's course of study to be driven forward by debates and not by orthodoxy. This approach would give primacy to the importance of reading key texts in related disciplines. In practical terms, students

would spend the first two years building a bibliography and coming to grips with the literature that constituted it. In the third year, they would write a critical essay on the bibliography, embark on their own research in the fourth year, and finally write it up in the fifth.

### Inter-disciplinarity

Over the 19th century, European universities developed three different domains of knowledge production – natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences – based on the notion of “three cultures”. Each of these domains was then subdivided into “disciplines”. Over the century, from 1850 to the Second World War, this became the dominant pattern as it got institutionalized through three different organizational forms: a) within the universities, as chairs, departments, curricula, and academic degrees for students; b) between and outside universities at the national and international levels, as discipline-based associations of scholars and journals; c) in the great libraries of the world, as the basis for classification of scholarly works.

This intellectual consensus began to break down after the 1960s, partly because of the growing overlap between disciplines and partly because of a shared problematic. For example, the line dividing the humanities from the social sciences got blurred

with the increasing “historicization” and hence “contextualization” of knowledge in the humanities and the social sciences. The development was best captured in the report of the Gulbenkian Commission chaired by Immanuel Wallerstein. As inter-disciplinarity began to make inroads into disciplinary specialization, the division between the humanities and the social sciences paled in the face of a growing division between quantitative and qualitative perspectives in the study of social, political and cultural life.

But these intellectual developments were not matched by comparable organizational changes, precisely because it is not easy to move strongly entrenched organizations. Though the number of interdisciplinary and regional institutes multiplied, collaboration rarely cut across the humanities/social science divide.

The challenge of postgraduate studies in the African university is how to produce a truly inter-disciplinary knowledge without giving up the ground gained in the disciplines. The challenge of MISR is how to reproduce a generation of researchers by joining research to postgraduate education. Our incorporation into the new College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and thereby an end to our stand-alone status, has created this opening for us – one that we hope to seize with both hands.

### Journal of Higher Education in Africa (JHEA)

### Revue de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique (RESA)

The *Journal of Higher Education in Africa (JHEA)* is published by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Senegal. The Journal publishes analysis, information, and critique on contemporary issues of higher education in the continent with special emphasis on research and policy matters. The journal accepts contributions in English and French from researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

La *Revue de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique (RESA)* est publiée par le Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique (CODESRIA), Sénégal. La revue publie des analyses, de l'information et des approches critiques des défis actuels auxquels l'enseignement supérieur reste confronté à travers le continent tout en mettant un accent particulier sur la recherche et les politiques d'orientation en cours. La revue publie des contributions de chercheurs, de professionnels et de décideurs politiques, en anglais et en français.

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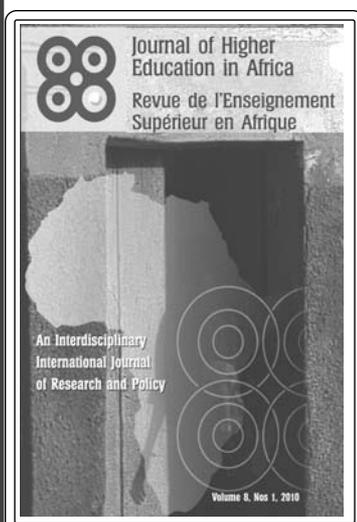
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# Africa's Recent Growth Performance and Development Challenges<sup>1</sup>

For most of the period up to the mid-1990s, Africa's growth performance was unimpressive, attracting characterizations as "a growth tragedy over the past three decades" (UNU/AERC 1998:10), and "a continent of missed growth opportunities" (UNCTAD 1998:115). Although, overall, economic growth rate improved slightly from the late 1990s into the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, average per capita GDP growth was still negative, at -0.5 per cent over the 1991–2000 period. The average economic growth rate over the 1993–2003 period was only 2.8 per cent. Generally, Africa's economic growth performance in the 2000s marked a significant improvement over the 1990s decade. Table 1 shows the overall real GDP growth rates.

**Table 1: Africa's Real GDP Growth Rates, 2000–2010**

Year	Growth Rate (%)
2000	3.5
2001	4.3
2002	3.2
2003	3.8
2004	5.2
2005	5.3
2006	5.7
2007	6.0
2008	5.1 (4.9)
2009	2.3 (1.6)
2010	4.7

Note: The figures in brackets are alternative growth figures for 2008 and 2009 obtained from another edition of the UNECA Economic Report.

Source: UNECA, Economic Report on Africa (Various Issues)

The economic recovery which began in the second half of the 1990s stretched into the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and was sustained at much higher levels, particularly from 2004. The growth rate peaked at 6.0 per cent in 2007 before recession

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started in 2008 as a result of the global economic and financial crisis. The relatively high economic performance up to 2007 was driven by increased prices in primary commodities which constitute Africa's key exports, given increased demand for these commodities, with strong emphasis on oil. Accordingly, growth was significant in oil, metal and mineral producing countries without diminishing the role of the agricultural sector which also generates key exports. Improvement in macroeconomic management in most African countries has also been cited as a factor of growth in recent times.

However, the growth performance varies substantially by region and status as oil exporter. For example, in 2009, growth in oil exporting African countries was 6.1 per cent while the growth rate achieved by the non-oil exporting African countries was 5.2 per cent. Besides the growth differences between oil and non-oil exporting African countries, the aggregate GDP growth rates hide important variations among the continent's five sub-regions. In 2010, the growth rates of the sub-regions were as follows:

- East Africa – 6.8%
- West Africa – 6.0%
- North Africa – 4.7%
- Central Africa – 4.3%
- Southern Africa – 3.3%

Overall, the economic growth rate for Africa decelerated to 5.1 per cent in 2008 compared to 6.0 per cent in 2007. Nevertheless, despite the deceleration, growth could be said to have remained strong in that year in view of the global economic slowdown ignited by the global financial turmoil. The very high commodity prices up to the third quarter were instrumental to the growth. Indeed, despite the global slowdown, oil exporting African countries

sustained a relatively high growth rate (5.9%) in 2008 because of the high oil prices. However, the lower average rate in Africa in 2008 is mainly due to the notable slowdown in GDP growth in oil importing countries, from 5 per cent in 2007 to 4.4 per cent in 2008 – due to increased energy and food costs, and also the effect of the financial crisis in the form of lower export demand and revenue.

The heaviest impact of the global economic turmoil on Africa's economic growth was in 2009 when the growth rate slumped to 2.3 per cent compared to 5.1 per cent in 2008. In 2009, the second round effects of the shock unfolded in the form of weakened demand and lower prices for export of goods and services, decreased remittances and reduced private capital inflows to much of the continent. As economic activity weakened, so did employment in the majority of African countries. In the year 2010, however, Africa witnessed significant and strengthened recovery as prices of commodities and demand experienced rebound. The continent recorded an average growth rate of 4.7 per cent. The indication is that most African economies have recovered better than many other parts of the world, but they face uncertain sustainability and have narrow production and export structures (UNECA Economic Report on Africa, 2010).

## Poor Social Development Outcomes

Very importantly, even though Africa recorded over 5.0 per cent GDP growth rate during most of the decade, these growth rates are insufficient to increase welfare and are very much below the 7 per cent required to have a significant dent on poverty or achieve the Millennium Development Goals. At current growth rates, only few African countries are positioned to achieve the MDGs by 2015. Indeed, the relatively strong economic performances since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have not resulted in satisfactory social development outcomes. Poverty rates

have remained high in sub-Saharan Africa and the notable growth spells have not transformed into solid employment creation which is one of the most important means to reduce poverty. While in the rest of the world, national economic policy packages aimed at promoting economic efficiency and improved resource allocation have yielded positive results in terms of enhanced economic growth which has, in turn, generated significant poverty reduction, Africa has not experienced similar positive development. It has the highest poverty incidence among the sub-regions of the world – 46.8 per cent in 1990 – but managed to reduce it to 41.1 per cent in 2004, having achieved the lowest rate of reduction (12.2%) over the period, 1990–2004. Africa's unemployment remains high. Its economic rebound since the 2000s is yet to translate into meaningful reductions in unemployment, especially among the youths and vulnerable groups. On average, 21 per cent of African youths are openly unemployed, a rate over three times higher than adults. National youth unemployment rates of more than 30 per cent are not uncommon. When there are no opportunities to earn a living, intergenerational cycles of poverty will persist. In recent years, the combination of steep unemployment and rising food prices has engendered political unrest in some African countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. UNECA (2010) considers the low employment content and poor social outcomes of Africa's growth as the result of lack of meaningful economic diversification and continued heavy dependence on commodity production and exports.

### **Subsisting Development Challenges**

In light of the foregoing, it is clear that several daunting growth-related and other challenges remain:

- How to significantly raise domestic savings and investment to provide a secure basis for sustained growth and hence remove the stigma of Africa having the lowest savings and investment rates among the regions of the world;
- How to take control of the domestic policy process and readjust the economies (away from the present maladjusted states) along the path of sustained growth and development;
- How to create a stable and conducive environment that encourages investment. For a long time, Africa has had difficulties in attracting private capital inflows with the consequence that it has had to rely on Official Development Assistance (ODA) which has not been stable;
- How to achieve environmental sustainability in view of substantial degradation, in a number of African countries, and its consequences;
- How to effectively combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic in view of devastating economic and social consequences;
- How to cope with energy price shocks, especially petroleum, by net oil importers. While negative oil shocks (fall in price) may have beneficial effects on the majority of African economies, as net oil importers, positive shocks, reflected in price increases, have tended to have very serious macroeconomic consequences in terms of output, higher unemployment and higher inflation, among others;
- How to cope with the global economic recession and its implications. The global economic and financial crises have had varying macroeconomic and sectoral impacts on African economies, and the impacts have posed significant challenges to economic management;
- How to handle issues of peace, security and good governance. Achieving lasting peace and security as well as good governance has continued to elude most African countries.

### **Major Issues**

#### ***Global Economic and Financial Crises and African Economies***

The latest financial crisis which metamorphosed into a global economic crisis, began in July 2007, resulting from rapid risky debt accumulation and a loss of confidence by investors in the sub-prime mortgage market in the United States. A liquidity crisis ensued and confidence in the value of securitized mortgages which had become popular plummeted. In September, 2008, the crisis deepened as stock markets worldwide crashed and entered a period of high volatility, and a considerable number of banks, mortgage lenders and insurance companies failed in the following weeks. Although the crisis derived from a credit crunch in the United States, it spread to both developed and developing countries through trade and financial linkages. The implications have tended to be the same in the economies affected by the crises, namely:

- Economic recession, losses of output, increased unemployment and poverty;
- Reduced capital inflow, including aid, and increased capital flight;
- Exchange rate and balance of payments crisis and large fiscal costs related to resolving the crisis;
- Embracing of Keynesian economic strategies and policies by both developed capitalist economies and emerging economies as well as the poor ones, including African countries.

In particular, African economies, as a result of their relative openness and linkage to the global economy through international trade and finance, have experienced adverse impacts, especially in relation to macroeconomic performances, government finances and fiscal operations, financial sector and real sector. It is important to examine the impact of the crisis on African economies and the implications of the consequent responses for shifts in development paradigms.

#### ***Commodity Price Shocks and African Economies***

Energy is a critical input in the production and distribution of goods and services, and crude oil constitutes the main source of energy that drives the wheel of production of goods and services. Over

the years, oil has acquired great significance in world industrial production. Most African countries depend in a significant way on imports of crude oil to meet their domestic energy needs. Consequently, shocks manifested by increases in crude oil prices in the international market, have the potential to impact adversely and significantly on domestic economic activities. Oil price shocks have manifested in both price falls and increases. But for most of the time, in the 2000s, the global economy has had to grapple with the phenomenon of high and persistently rising prices. The oil price which oscillated between US\$ 17.0 and US\$ 26.0 per barrel at different times in 2002, rose to US\$ 40.0 per barrel in 2004 and to a high of US\$ 70.85 per barrel in August, 2005. The price fell slightly in December 2005, but resumed its upward trend in early 2006 and recorded another high mark of US\$78.4 per barrel on July 14 of that year. Between this date and November 2007, oil price had fluctuated significantly and hit the US\$98.0 mark in November 2007. As at April 2008, oil prices trended towards the US\$120.0 mark and, in July of that year, oil price got to the peak of US\$147.0 per barrel. Thereafter, the effect of the global economic recession on oil prices began to manifest such that by the end of 2008, crude oil price was less than US\$40.0 per barrel. However, crude oil prices picked up from early 2009 and are currently hovering around US\$115.0 per barrel. The current oil price levels are causing serious concerns, especially to the net oil importers. Only a few African countries, for example, Nigeria, Libya, Gabon and Angola, are oil exporters. Even then, because of very weak domestic refining capacity, Nigeria imports most of its refined petroleum products.

Oil price hikes can be very destabilizing to the macro-economy, causing fundamental disequilibria. For the net oil importers, rising oil prices have a stagflationary effect on their economies, transfer of income from them to oil exporters, and adverse effect on the balance of payments, among others. Although the oil exporting African countries benefit from oil price hikes, they are not immuned to the Dutch disease phenomenon. Thus, in light of the macro- and microeconomic implications of oil price shocks for the economies of the net oil importing countries of Africa, it is important to conduct empirical investigation of the impacts on the economies and come up with appropriate policy responses.

### **Trade Policy, Industrialization and Poverty**

This theme is considered in the context of globalization which is characterized by liberalization, trade and capital flows, migration and technological progress, and described as bringing prosperity to the world and reducing inequality. The potential power of trade through globalization has been stressed by the Bretton Woods institutions. It has also been acknowledged by the Monterrey Consensus (2003) which characterized "International trade as an engine of development and affirmed that "a universal rule-based open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system, as well as meaningful liberalization, can substantially stimulate development worldwide benefitting countries at all stages of development". It is stressed that the exports of developing countries as a whole have grown robustly, outpacing the growth of world exports. But many developing countries have not participated in this trade boom. And about 2 billion people in these countries, many of them in Africa, are not participating meaningfully in globalization. Yet, many of these developing countries have undertaken rapid and big bang trade liberalization. As UNCTAD (2004:179) has shown, using the IMF's index of trade restrictiveness, the least developed countries subgroup (which has over 30 African countries) of the developing countries have undertaken greater trade liberalization than other developing countries. Using the Sachs-Warner index of openness, all the LDCS are now 'open'. Only a few developing countries, particularly in East Asia, were able to benefit from the trade flows in dynamic categories of exports.

Thus, there has been an extensive debate on the economic rationale for trade liberalization. The rationale is commonly based on the view that liberalization would lead to more efficient use and allocation of resources. And the move towards a more open economy is expected to enhance the medium-term growth prospects of the developing countries and hence reduce poverty and inequality. Some empirical evidence, though challenged on both theoretical and empirical grounds, has been produced to show that countries with more open trade regimes grew faster than those that were more inward-oriented (Dollar and Kraay 2001a and 2001b). But UNCTAD (1989) has shown, from the experiences of many developing countries

with successful export performance, that a high degree of import liberalization is neither necessary nor sufficient for export expansion. Besides, what has tended to occur is de-industrialization in many LDCs. UNCTAD's Least Developed Countries' Report, 2004, observed that "rapid and deep liberalization has been associated with de-industrialization as import-substitution industries collapse when they are exposed to international competition without any prior preparation". But the above have not derived from indepth and systematic empirical analysis. Also, whereas the relationship between trade and development has been an important issue for over five decades, it is only recently that the subject of trade and poverty has become an issue of intense interest (UNCTAD 2004: 68). But the empirical evidence is not settled, and the situation in sub-Saharan Africa that has been found to be very open requires indepth investigation. In other words, it will be interesting to know what indepth research will show about the relationship between trade and poverty/ inequalities in open SSA countries during and after the liberalization era.

### **Savings, Investment and Economic Growth**

Economic development theories recognize a close inter-relationship among savings, investment and growth. Rapid growth raises the savings rate which, in turn, releases resources that are necessary for growth through higher investment. However, even though increases in savings, investment and economic growth (and reductions in poverty) have tended to go together in the developing world, the casual links among the variables are less clear. Nevertheless, it remains generally accepted that increasing savings and ensuring that they are channelled to productive investment are central to accelerating economic growth, notwithstanding the reservations of the neoclassical theorists of the 1960s and 1970s and those of the new endogenous growth theorists of the late 1980s/ early 1990s on investment. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in its Economic Report for Africa (2003) expressed concerns about low savings and investment rates and how to get the trinity right in Africa – more savings, investment and higher growth. Sub-Saharan Africa remains not only the poorest among the regions in the world, but also

the region having the lowest savings and investment rates and growth performance (until in recent years when growth rates improved). For the region as a whole, savings, investment and growth rates had declined between the 1970s and 1980s and declined further in the 1990–2002 period. Low savings and investment rates explain Africa's overall growth record, although the role of investment productivity has also been called to question. In other words, there are a number of issues that require further empirical investigation. These relate to the role of investment in the growth process, the productivity of investment in Africa, the productivity of public and private investment, role of investment climate in investment performance, etc.

### **Development Finance and Aid Effectiveness**

The mobilization of adequate resources to finance public expenditure programmes remains a crucial challenge for developing countries, especially the poor countries. The Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development, March 2002, observed that in the pursuit of growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development, a critical challenge is to ensure the necessary internal conditions for mobilizing domestic savings, both public and private, sustaining adequate levels of productive investment, and increasing human capacity. Even though references are frequently made to Africa's abundant resources, the continent has not been able to meet the challenges of effectively mobilizing these resources to actualize the goals of growth. Consequently, as the NEPAD document has acknowledged, foreign borrowing and aid have underlined the logic of Africa's development with all the attendant problems that have become very well known – external debt burden through loans mismanagement, declining and unreliable ODA, and issues of aid effectiveness. The United Nations had expressed deep dissatisfaction with the performance of the developed countries under the ODA target of 0.7 per cent of the GNP of their countries set in the 1960s. The ratio realized had declined from 0.53 per cent during the early 1960s to 0.32 per cent during 1970–73 and to 0.21 per cent at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, we know from lessons of history that domestic resources are central to any sustained development efforts. In the absence of

well-organized and locally controlled money markets, fiscal measures (principally government tax policies) can be relied upon to mobilize domestic resources. But many African countries have not been able to mobilize significant amounts of revenue through taxation, unlike modern economies where taxes are the most important sources of government revenue. SSA countries have extremely narrow tax bases and weak tax collecting capacity. Because of low tax effort, recourse is often made to internal debt, deficit financing and aid. Deficit financing tends to be inflationary and can lead to an unstable economy, especially where it is not used to finance economic development. Thus, while the experience of Africa suggests the need for less faith in foreign sources of financing, a number of issues need to be empirically investigated in relation to domestic sources of financing, specifically taxation and deficit financing. It will also be important to have insights into the use and productivity of foreign loans and aid.

### **The Political Economy of Privatization**

Privatization of state-owned enterprises, as an economic policy instrument, began to gain popularity in both developed and developing countries after the apparently successful privatization experiments of the British conservative government in the late 1970s. However, in the 1980s, privatization became an integral part of the policy package, which was later christened the “Washington Consensus” model of economic development. Since the late 1980s, privatization, as a major instrument of economic reform, has been stepped up in almost all African countries. After about two decades of vigorous implementation of privatization programs in Africa, with the tempo further heightened in recent years with the privatization of large-scale public enterprises in various sectors, the need has arisen for a comprehensive and systematic analysis of various privatization issues, particularly, the economic and social impacts.

Although so many claims have been made by advocates on behalf of privatization, empirical knowledge of the impact of privatization in Africa is so far very limited, unlike other developing regions and the industrial countries. Nellis (2003) confirms this to the effect that “Rigorous assessments of privatization are increasingly available in Latin America,

transition economies, OECD and Asian countries. Such studies are relatively rare in Africa”. Obadan (2008), in his state-of-the-art-review of privatization issues in Africa concludes that the few studies on privatization in Africa that have appeared are highly descriptive/qualitative. It is, perhaps, against this background, or none at all, that policy makers have made pronouncements on the success or otherwise of privatization exercises on the continent. Recently in Nigeria, President Goodluck Jonathan, while inaugurating the Nigerian Council on Privatization, expressed serious concerns about the apparent lack of success of privatized enterprises. Most of the privatized enterprises appear not to have lived up to expectations. Such conclusions need to derive from serious case studies of privatization. Thus, there is a clear need for a comprehensive and systematic empirical analysis of the impact of privatization in Africa, in terms of case studies on different aspects. In other words, such studies would have multi-country (comparative) and case study components, and employ rigorous analytical techniques.

### **Economic Growth, Poverty and Inequality, and Employment**

The relationship among economic growth, poverty and inequality is complex and interdependent. For example, inequality is an intervening variable between growth and poverty. Poverty reduction depends on both economic growth and inequality; this relationship is such that while economic growth helps poverty reduction, inequality harms it (UNDP 2010). This is probably why there are often cases of countries achieving respectable economic growth rates without significant reduction in poverty, because inequality was high or rising. Not only does inequality inhibit economic growth, it also contributes to high levels of poverty, in that, for a given level of mean income, higher inequality implies higher poverty as smaller resources are obtained by those in the lowest deciles or quintiles of the population. Also, lower level of poverty reduction may be achieved if higher initial inequality results in lower subsequent growth. Thus, the absence of one-to-one correlation between growth and poverty reduction is due to the intervening influence of inequality and its determinants as well as those factors through which growth can

positively impact poverty, such as employment. Inequality remained high and even increased in much of the developing world over the 1970–2000 period. But then, Africa experienced one of the highest levels of inequality, which rose from 0.649 in 1970 to 0.668 in 2000. It has been observed that countries with high inequality are unlikely to halve extreme poverty by 2015 (UNDP 2003).

A major issue of concern in Africa's recent growth experience is the issue of jobless growth and economic performance. The observed improvements in growth performance have not been accompanied by meaningful job creation. The employment-to-poverty ratio has largely stagnated since 1991 (UNECA 2010). West Africa has even registered a decline in the employment-to-output ratio over the last decade as aggregate output is heavily dependent on extractive industries. In Nigeria, for example, over the 2000-2007 period, employment growth rate failed to keep pace with expansion in economic activity in the key sectors overall (UNDP 2010). The phenomenon of output growth being faster than employment in all the years, in addition to low poverty elasticity of growth, largely explains the coexistence of high poverty incidence in spite of the relatively high growth rates recorded.

Given the significance of the relationship among growth, poverty and inequality, and employment, and the subsisting concerns about jobless growth, high poverty incidence, rising inequality and growing unemployment, empirical research on the issues cannot be too much, particularly individual country studies.

### **Liberal / Post-liberal Development Strategies and Policies**

One of the objectives of the Economic Research Program noted earlier is to “encourage a critical appraisal of conventional theories and paradigms that are advocated by the Bretton Woods Institutions and most Western countries”. These theories and paradigms were fully embraced in an unrestrained manner by African countries from the 1980s through the widespread implementation of the Bretton Woods Institutions' structural adjustment programs (SAPs). Through the programs, the SSA economies became very open, having undertaken widespread and rapid trade liberalization.

The neoliberal foundation of the adjustment programs has shaped policy making in the continent, resulting in significant transformation of the policy landscape to reflect the “Washington Consensus” model. This model stresses the market approach, private sector as engine of development, minimal or no government, liberalization of economic activities, and privatization of state-owned enterprises, among others. While the adoption of SAPs has resulted in alienation of ownership in policy making, the promises of liberalization and openness have not yet materialized. Indeed, the recent global economic and financial crisis, which began in 2007 and stretched to 2009, has not only stressed and strained the world capitalist system, it has also threatened the foundation of the system. The crises have shown that the free market system is highly vulnerable to serious crises and that markets cannot be left on their own while government has a significant and necessary role in the management of a market economy. The crises showed the hollowness of the neoliberal theory which assigns little or no role to the state in development.

Essentially, the uninspiring economic and social performance in Africa is a clear indictment of the economic and social policies implemented within the framework of adjustment programs. A critical review of these policies and the proposing of alternative development models and policies are thus compelling.

### **Economic Structures, Shocks and Economic Performance**

One of the subsisting concerns about Africa's economy is its undiversified structure and narrow base. For a long time, the continent has depended heavily on primary commodities and this remains a common feature of production, exports and growth in all the sub-regions. This heavy dependence exposes the continent to external shocks as the economies are subjected to booms and busts which pose significant challenges to economic management. Besides external shocks, African economies have at different times been buffeted by other types of shocks originating from the supply or demand sides or taking the form of energy shocks, food supply shocks, drought, political violence, accidents or disasters, etc. For example, most developing countries are

prone to supply shocks owing to their high dependence on agriculture and imported energy. Also of significance are the macroeconomic policy shocks arising from the sudden or unpredictable implementation of fiscal and monetary policies, for example. Following the eruption of the recent global financial and economic crisis, fiscal and monetary policies acquired heightened significance in economic management. Since 2010, Africa has begun to experience a strong recovery from the crisis. Part of the economic revival has been attributed to continued supportive fiscal and monetary policies. Relatively robust public spending buoyed growth, but also widened fiscal deficits. As the UNECA Economic Report for Africa, 2010, has observed, the expansionary fiscal and monetary policies and widening fiscal and current account deficits occurred as African governments felt compelled to mitigate the economic and social effects of the global economic crisis.

Rigorous empirical policy research is thus necessary to provide insights into the linkages between economic structures, shocks and economic performance. It is crucial to provide a basis for effective policies for structural transformation, employment generation, poverty reduction and food security as well as address shocks.

### **Conclusion**

This article has highlighted some issues for economic research in Africa today. It has tried to take cognizance of the past initiatives of CODESRIA and other international organizations at promoting organized research to enhance debates and dialogues on Africa's development. Very importantly, the article takes cognizance of Africa's economic performance and subsisting development challenges. Accordingly, it first reviewed briefly Africa's recent economic performance and subsisting development challenges and then suggested some new research themes.

### **Note**

1. This article was first presented as ‘Africa's Recent Economic Performance and Subsisting Challenges’, A background paper for the CODESRIA Planning Meeting on its Economic Research Program in Dakar, 29 – 30 September, 2011.

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# Pertinent Economic Research Issues and Challenges Facing Africa<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The general context of this article is the deepening of the systemic crisis of global capitalism and, with it, the discredit of the neoliberal paradigm. The current turmoil on financial markets will worsen, even if leading capitalist centers succeed in taming the beast temporarily. The world is witnessing the acceleration of the demise of capitalism. It is irreversible and inexorable. The agony may last longer but the end is the only horizon. Leonardo Boff, a Brazilian theologian and philosopher, said recently that the current crisis of capitalism is not temporary, it is “terminal”.

Capitalism can only survive by destroying more human lives and nature. Already, tens of millions of men and women are out of work, even in “developed” countries. In Spain, Greece, Portugal, the average jobless rate is in double digits. The young people are the main victims of the high level of unemployment in those countries. Things will only worsen as governments and central banks attempt to “calm” markets by taking more austerity measures in response to the crisis of sovereign debt and under the threat of speculators and credit rating agencies.

The ecological destruction will keep worsening as imperialist powers scramble for the control of natural resources in order to solve the crisis and preserve their hegemony against rising powers from the South. The festering crisis may bring about authoritarian regimes, even fascism, as the growing influence of right-wing racist, xenophobic political parties in Europe, shows. Already, in the United States and Europe, the reference to “terrorism” has become an excuse to impose severe measures against all those who contest the dominant system.

With the demise of market fundamentalism, people and institutions everywhere are freeing their mind from the shackles of the neoliberal ideology. Even in the leading capitalist centers, the pillars of the neoliberal ideology are being challenged by some of its erstwhile most zealous proponents.<sup>2</sup>

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## Daring to Think Outside the Box

So, the only alternative left to people, countries and nations is to step up the struggle against global capitalism, against rampant fascism, against imperialist wars of aggression to control and plunder the resources of the planet.

For Africa, it is an opportune time to free itself from the domination of neoliberal thinking and the nefarious influence of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. It is time to put an end to their hegemony on the debate on development in Africa. Now is the time for Africa to begin thinking and acting by itself. Africa must definitely put aside all the models imposed upon it by Western powers and multilateral institutions. A new and bold thinking is needed. Africans must look at the world from Africa, not from Paris, Washington or Brussels. This is the big challenge and Africa must meet that challenge now, not later! And CODESRIA has an important role to play in this regard.

## Pertinent Research Issues and Challenges Facing Africa

### *Macroeconomics*

In this section are outlined some of Africa's most critical challenges:

### *Industrialization and Domestic-led Growth model*

Industrialization is a must, and there is no alternative to it. Africa must transform, domestically, its raw materials and commodities for two major reasons. First, this would add value and, therefore, create and increase wealth that would remain on the continent. Second, this transformation would provide jobs and revenues for Africans. These will in turn create the right conditions for a viable domestic market at the regional level. Then, it will

be possible to shift to a domestic demand-led growth strategy as opposed to the export-led growth model.

On the other hand, industrialization will lead to a greater use of endogenous knowledge and technology, and stimulate research and development. However, a viable and credible industrialization strategy should be envisaged at the regional level. Indeed, past experiences have demonstrated that industrialization within small countries has little chance of succeeding. It is even more difficult now to imagine a successful industrialization at the national level, except for a very few countries. Therefore, it is fair to say that regional integration may provide the right framework for industrialization and a sustainable domestic demand-led growth strategy.

### *Natural Resources and Commodities*

Are natural resources and commodities in Africa a curse or a boon to African countries? It is legitimate to ask this question, given the growing military intervention from Western countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Libya), the numerous wars and conflicts in several African countries around the issues of natural resources (Sierra Leone, Liberia, DRC, Niger Delta, etc.). The big issues are: How can Africa be able to control its natural resources and use them for the African people? What strategy should African countries pursue in order to take advantage of the strong demand for its resources, while avoiding their plunder by foreign countries and corporations? Obviously, these require walking a tight rope, given the extreme weakness and vulnerability of African countries and the difficulty to forge a common policy in Africa. In any case, this is one of the most critical challenges facing Africa, and the search for solutions that are in the best interests of the continent should be given utmost attention.

### *Land Grabbing and Food Sovereignty*

The ownership of land by foreigners, which social movements have called ‘land grabbing’, has become a big and controversial issue in recent years. This has raised serious concerns from farmers and

agricultural specialists, partly because it has a direct link with food production. Food sovereignty is one of the pillars of national sovereignty, because a country that cannot feed itself remains vulnerable and can be subjected to blackmailing by foreign countries. This is one of the reasons why food production is considered a national security issue in developed countries, especially in the United States. In light of this, the issue of land grabbing and its impact on food production deserves serious attention and should be top on the list of CODESRIA's research agenda.

### *Climate Change*

Africa is among the most vulnerable regions in terms of climate change, and this has become a major development issue. Already, desertification, deforestation, floods and drought, among others, are creating climate displaced persons in several African countries. From all indications, it is obvious that climate change is having a huge impact on the continent's development prospects. Therefore, several African associations and networks are now focusing attention on the issue, to alert African governments and institutions on the urgent need to tackle it. No African government or institution can afford to ignore the impact of climate change. Therefore, CODESRIA should look into the matter and conduct research in collaboration with other institutions, to assess the global impact of climate change on the development of African countries. The research may focus on the economic and social impact, possible solutions, the issue of financing for adaptation and mitigation.

### *Finance*

Financing Africa's development has been, and still remains, one of the most intractable issues since independence. The influence of the IFIs, the dependence on external "aid" and debt, the abject poverty in most parts of the continent, are all linked to the inability of African countries to mobilize resources for their development. This inability results from several factors, among which are weak state apparatus and misguided fiscal and monetary policies. After more than 50 years of "independence" and the failure of international development cooperation, African countries must come to grips with the reality that they should first and foremost count on their own resources to finance their development.

So, research on sources of financing should focus on the following areas:

1. **Internal Revenue Generation:** This requires restoring capital control to limit capital flight, and new monetary and fiscal policies aimed at improving domestic savings and stimulating job creation. Up till now, African Central Banks have been following the neoliberal policy of targeting inflation at the expense of growth and job creation. However, the financial crisis has shown that such policy has failed, with interest rates near zero in the United States and Europe, without stimulating growth. Therefore, African Central Banks need to rethink their monetary policies and give priority to stimulating economic growth and creating jobs.
2. **Development Finance:** The necessity to restore development banks and institutions has become obvious in light of the failure of "international cooperation", especially in official development assistance (ODA) and the external debt crisis.
3. **Regional Currencies:** The first objective is to give more autonomy to African countries and strengthen regional integration. Another objective is the need to get rid of neocolonial currencies, like the CFA franc, which have constituted an obstacle to the development of some African countries.

### **Role of the State**

Now, it is widely acknowledged that African countries should build "developmental states". The subject is the focus of the 2011 ECA Economic Report on Africa (ERA). Prior to this, UNCTAD had issued a report on the subject in 2007. Obviously, the international financial crisis and the collapse of market fundamentalism have provided the momentum to challenge the notion of "state minimal intervention" and the orthodox policies.

The attention given to the role of the state in Africa by United Nations institutions is a welcome development. It has come to strengthen what African research institutions like CODESRIA, social movements and networks, have been advocating all along. The need to restore the role of the state has been one of the major criticisms levelled against the IMF and World Bank, and neoliberal policies in general. So, the context is right for CODESRIA to further strengthen the idea of restoring a strong role for the state in economic and social development.

### **Role of Social Movements**

The state no longer has the monopoly over the design and implementation of public policies. Over the last two decades or so, African social movements, including research institutions, have joined the main actors on development, both in the African context and at the international level. They have made major contributions to the critique of neoliberal policies and the IFIs. The latter's crisis of legitimacy is partly the result of African social movements' criticism. They have played an important role in exposing the continent's illegitimate debt and the hidden agenda of the European Union in its drive to impose the "free trade" agreements called Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).

African social movements did not just criticize, they have also proposed alternative policies on several of the key issues at the heart of Africa's development. In the process, they have gained more credibility and become a key actor in the debate on Africa's development. It is therefore important to look into their multifaceted contribution and how it would strengthen the strategic goal that "Africa must think and act by itself".

### **International Relations**

#### ***Africa and Global Economic Governance (UN, IFIs)***

Africa is part of the world, even though it plays a marginal role in world affairs. Africa bears the brunt of economic and financial policies, often decided without its opinion. It has little say at the institutions of global governance, such as the IMF and the World Bank. Even at "its" own institution, the African Development Bank (AfDB), Africa has lost much of its autonomy in shaping the institution's policies for the continent. Even with the changes that have taken place after the break of the international financial crisis in September 2008, with the birth of the G20, Africa has only one representative, South Africa, while all other continents have several representatives. In the same vein, the observer status granted the African Union Commission does not compensate in any way for the negligible spot given to Africa.

Therefore, it is critical to look at potential changes at the level of global governance and see how Africa should position itself in order to play a more significant role.

What should be Africa's position and proposals regarding the reforms of the international financial institutions? Should Africa propose new, more democratic and representative institutions, or should it accept the kind of reform being advocated by Western countries, which are trying to preserve their hegemony, one way or the other?

New groups are changing the face of global economic balance of power with the rise of the BRICS, which now include South Africa as a full member. What does this mean for Africa? How should Africa use this new group as a counter weight to traditional Western "partners"?

### South-South Cooperation

Research in this area should focus on the opportunities the rise of the South presents for Africa, in both geopolitical matters (change in the balance of power at the UN and other international institutions, possible alliances in those institutions, etc.) and economic terms (new partnership, new sources of financing, technology transfer, new markets, etc.).

On the other hand, research should look at some of the most important experiences taking place in the South, and which could be of relevance for Africa. Examples include the process of integration in Latin America, like ALBA, the South Bank project; or experiences in Asia, like the Asian Monetary Fund.

Research should also look at what cooperation from the Middle East (Arab countries and Iran) could be to Africa in terms of financing, investments, market access, etc.

### Militarization: AFRICOM and Western Military Intervention

The scramble for Africa's resources has a strong military component, as illustrated by the NATO attack on Libya. Faced with a deep crisis, Western countries are likely to resort more and more to military intervention as a "solution" to their economic and social woes. In Africa, the United States is using the "war on terror" to strengthen and expand its military presence, with the creation of the African Command (AFRICOM). This is part of its

strategy aimed at strengthening its position in the struggle for the control and plunder of African resources, especially oil.

After the imperialist aggression against Libya, Western powers will not hesitate under the doctrine of "right to protect" to attack other African countries with a view to occupying them and grabbing their resources. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to undertake research on militarization and its impact on Africa's development.

### Notes

1. This article was first presented as a 'think piece' at the CODESRIA Planning Meeting of its Economic Research Program in Dakar, 29–30 September, 2011.
2. See in particular World Bank President, Robert Zoellick's speech at Georgetown University (Washington, DC) in September 2010, titled "Democratizing Economic Development".

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## Feminism in the African Media: Possibilities for Diversification of Gender Representation

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### Introduction

Media content is not a mirror reflection of reality but a representation of reality that is, among other things, influenced by ideologies circulating in society. This is true of gender representation. Although most representations of gender in African media offer stereotypes of women, there is an increasing trend towards diversification to include non-stereotypical representation which requires critical analysis and offers possibilities for feminist politics and activism. This trend is evident in both the state-linked media and the new media that has emerged since media liberalization and democratization processes that started in the early 1990s. It is also present in women's media constructed for political and activist purposes. This article seeks to identify these representations and their distinguishing characteristics; their potential to influence changes in the ways

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in which women are represented; and their ability to influence a feminist agenda for social change. The article will also focus on analyzing which media offers more of these new ways of representing and what the possibilities and limitations for mainstreaming are. Framing the media as a site of struggle that has potential to both marginalize and liberate, the article ultimately seeks to understand the ways in which a critical feminist engagement with gender representations in the media can contribute towards the latter potential, by broadening perspectives on questions of representation.

### Feminism's 'Turn to Culture'

Stereotypical representations which predominate media in Africa are reflective of a trend within feminist media scholarship to lay emphasis on analysis of words and texts, rather than on *things*, what Barrett (1992) refers to as feminism's 'turn to culture'. In other words, feminist emphasis has shifted from social structures to discourses and symbols of marginality in texts, often with little attention to underlying material inequities (Steeves and Wasko 2002:17). Acknowledging the important contribution of feminist discourse analysis and cultural studies towards the study of representations, Steeves and Wasko (2002) nonetheless reject a narrow focus on discourse, without considering moral, political, and economic questions. Questions of concern less frequently relate to issues of social structure, includ-

ing capitalism and patriarchy, and more with issues of culture, sexuality, identity, and political agency. The focus of interest has moved towards processes of symbolization and representation, as well as of consumption and reception, in order to understand issues of subjectivity, psyche, and self (Barrett 1992:204-05).

Shifts within feminism itself have been blamed for this rapture and lack of interest in social structure, most especially the increasing yielding to a 'post-feminist' moment.<sup>1</sup> Angela McRobbie (2009) and Ros Gill (2003, 2007) both extensively criticize post-feminism from a perspective that recognizes an imperative to action bequeathed by second-wave feminism.<sup>2</sup> McRobbie (2009), for example, states that 'post-feminism' is a 'kind of anti-feminism, which is reliant, paradoxically, on an assumption that feminism has been taken into account' (p. 30) and through which 'feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s are actively and relentlessly undermined' (p. 11). Gill (2003, 2007) criticizes more specifically how the hypersexualization of women's images in post-feminist advertisements and other media leave out those who are not young, thin, heterosexual, or otherwise conforming to beauty's many stereotypical manifestations, and thus ignores one of the primary thrusts of the second wave critique (Press 2011:108-9).

Hilary Radner's 'neo-feminism' is a similarly 'anti-feminist' category, which she uses to describe changes from the second-wave era to the present. She contrasts Helen Gurley Brown's (1962) admonition to feminists of an earlier era that they be frugal and financially independent, with latter day emphasis on consumption itself – often unbridled consumption – as women's means to individuation and the establishment of an identity. This current emphasis, she argues, suffers from the popular American media's lack of class consciousness, relentless optimism in the possibilities for all of us to consume endlessly, and view of consumption as therapeutic, pleasurable, and unproblematically open to all, leading to a 'culture of unabashed self-gratification in which fantasy prevails over notions of professionalism and work' (Radner 2010: 37).

Further, Jameson (1993:45-46) problematizes these individualizing notions of power, suggesting that cultural studies' rhetoric of power is, in fact, a repudiation of economic analysis, 'an anti-Marxist move,

designed to replace analysis in terms of the mode of production'. The replacement of the mode of production by relations of power is accompanied by an inattention to class experience. In place of the old modernist conceptions of 'class', we now have new, post-modern conceptions of 'audiences', 'communities', and 'fans'.

These arguments that underline the post-modernist and post-feminist turn in cultural studies are summarized in Lisa McLaughlin's (2002) concern over what she sees as being the result of a shift in focus from 'structure' to 'discourse', which she contends conceptualizes power as highly dispersed rather than concentrated in identifiable places and groups. There is little sense of the specificity of power because it is treated as ambiguous, organized through discourse, and unrelated to prevailing material conditions or activities of agents and institutions (2002:37). Despite its rhetoric of power and resistance, cultural studies find it difficult to connect audience agency to individuals' subjective relationships to political participation and their roles in forming, reforming, and overturning practices and institutions (McLaughlin 2002:37). This article focuses on this later task of connecting agency to subjectivity, and discursively analyses the potential of feminism in African media to achieve this synergy.

### **Women's Media as a Site of Feminist Struggle**

The media constitute social realities, meaning and power, and in many developing states, are sites of social and political struggle (Bosch 2011). Readings of media representations or the standpoint(s) from which media information is sold out or presented to audiences bears crucially upon its reception, interpretation and impact. Being constructs, media representations derive meaning through production. As Khun (1985:5) observes, meanings are produced through codes at work in representations, and while meanings might appear to be natural, obvious, immanent, they are in fact produced: they are constructed through identifiable processes of signification at work in all representations. Critiqued from a feminist standpoint, this conception should be taken as a politicized origin where many categories of difference interact and at times conflict, and therefore defy any logic that naturalizes or obviates reality. In other words, the materiality of

images and information deriving from the media is a representation of powerful and dominant perceptions of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, disability and other biases, whose normative assumptions are not questioned, subverted or breached.

Moreover, meaning production takes place within social and historical contexts, and in a capitalist society, representations are no more exempt than any other products from considerations of the marketplace (Khun 1985:5). Media representations that fail to expose and interrogate urgent problems of injustice and inequality undermine the feminist desire to deepen understanding of the oppression of women and men entrenched in unjust social, political, cultural and economic structures, processes and institutions. This is a particularly pressing concern for feminists and gender activists in Africa, where women's immediate concern is with questions of landlessness and land dispossession, overconcentration in the unregulated, informal economic sector, poverty in relation to health, education and subsistence, and structural violence which has become part of the 'everyday' in the lives of many African women. Viewed from this perspective, it would appear then that the task of feminism in African media is to represent these realities in ways that neither fixates them as representations of the 'truth' nor renders invisible the historical contexts within which representations are produced.

Feminism is far from reconciled to this task. Many Third World feminists have argued against gender – or gender and class – as the primary social division(s) in feminist thought, agreeing with Foucault's view that there are no totalizing explanations, whether gender, class, race or nation. Rather, the nature of gender oppression shifts by historical and cultural context and cannot be generalized. However, while these feminists agree with postmodernists and poststructuralists on many points and disagree with traditional frameworks, their work retains a material political agenda (Steeves and Wasko 2002:25). This is partly due to the fact that nonmaterial conceptualizations of representation which shift focus to discourses, human agency and subjectivity, 'conceptualize power as highly dispersed rather than concentrated in identifiable places or groups' (Walby 1992:49). Such an approach is, however, problematic in African countries where democratization is

still very much grounded upon notions of state accountability and where the state is still considered to be the primary vehicle through which women seek recourse to wealth, resources and political legitimization. Representations that circumscribe dialogue between audiences and the political economy thus, in a sense, absolve the state and other structures of power from responsibility for the oppression of women.

On the other hand, Marxist and socialist forms of feminism, which share some fundamental concerns with political economy, have lost popularity for a number of reasons, including their neglect of the role of ideology in women's oppression, and also their failure to seriously consider social division aside from gender and class. In contrast, much current feminist scholarship emphasizes discourses of gender, with little or no attention to structures of inequality, which both shape and are shaped by discourses. The material nature of ideology thus remains inadequately addressed in feminist texts on representation, yet urgent global and continental problems of injustice and inequality necessitate both kinds of analyses (Steeves and Wasko 2002:26-28).

Rapprochement between the two tensions seems most desirable, yet as Steeves and Wasko (2002:28) contend, despite feminism and political economy having much to gain from each other conceptually and strategically, a merger between the two is difficult to theorize. Nonetheless, rather than seeking to resolve these complexities, possibilities do exist to analyze and work with[in] the tensions that stride discourse analysis and materialist analysis of gender representations in the media. There is, for instance, much critical thought that is going into the impact of new technology on women as participants, audiences, and agents in the ways in which stories are produced and how women are represented in them. One of the key questions confronting new media is that of labour: is a liberating discourse emerging from the ability of women to subversively insert alternative narratives of the female condition through new media technology, or is it a continuation of the appropriation of women's unremunerated labour? Are un-directed, unmediated spaces of performance and communication empowering women in allowing for autonomous representations, or do these spaces in reality minimize tangibility of the nature of women's oppression?

### **Liberating Potential of New Media in Africa**

It has been argued by feminists such as Chandra Mohanty (1996) that history frames black women as singular monolithic subjects, wiping away the histories specific to them, and leaving black women with no alternative representations of themselves. This problem affects media production. The lack of alternative views stems from the fact that the producers of this media are so far removed from the reality of their readers – black women in Africa in this case – that they subscribe roles that are caricatures, benefiting the producer, not the consumer (Masina 2010:11).

Old problems regarding representation still exist, but the rapid proliferation of new media, including online social networking and mobile phones, raises new areas of exploration. The so-called information revolution has created opportunities for women's groups to use information and communications technologies (ICTs) to create new spaces to promote diverse voices and networking (Opoku-Mensah 2001). Scholars and activists have, however, pointed out that technology is not gender neutral. African women have often been disadvantaged by ICTs, as well as empowered by the promise of new prospects (Gadzekpo 2009). In rural areas, mobile phones offer opportunities for social networking, for market and trade, and for getting news; but in some contexts, mobile phones also result in gendered interactions and representations of identities (Bosch 2011:30).

As Gadzekpo (2009) argues, feminist media academics need to reopen the debates about women and technology and expand the dearth of scholarly material on African women and ICTs. In particular, she raises issues of low-cost text messaging and whether this is being used by poor women; issues related to African women's use of the internet and the roles played by women in the information economy; as well as the types of economic opportunities created for women through ICTs. Women in Africa have used ICTs to facilitate empowerment, particularly to reconceptualise private and public spaces and recognising the dialectic between gender and ICTs and ICT policy. Bosch (2011:30) makes the important argument that access to technology is linked to social and economic development and could be a key dimension of women's advancement in these areas.

Yet, this potential for technology to drive development, including the ability of African women to utilize existing ICTs in ways that favorably represent their lives, situations and interests, is contingent upon the ways in which 'economics and gender are sutured into our smallest day-to-day actions' (Riordan 2002:4). Scholarship that fails to elucidate the connections between the day-to-day lived experience of people and the structures of capitalism and patriarchy will continue to participate uncritically in their production.<sup>3</sup> Relating this to questions of representation, it is necessary therefore to understand how structural factors influence women's insertion and interaction within technological spaces.

Part of the task involved here is in recognizing the quality of feminist media representations as a way of resisting dominant gender representations. Strategically, it might be a useful initial practice to sift through and move away from the stereotypical boundaries of representation within which images of African women are often reproduced: (i) Non-stereotypical representations do not erase the subjects' sociopolitical contexts; (ii) Non-stereotypical representations present gender, race and class as real markers, not as superficial markers on characters, for example asking why it is that so many women want to alter their appearances; (iii) Non-stereotypical representations might embody spiritual enhancing rather than only visual images of women's lives; (iv) Non-stereotypical representations invalidate performed sexual identities such as the fetishization of female bodies and their commodification, a common thread in mainstream media; and (v) Non-stereotypical representations reject compulsory heterosexuality. Strategies ought to build on from these complex but identifiable discursive limits.

### **Strategies: How can African Media Become a Site of Feminist Exception?**

Bell Hooks (1994) has written about the need for feminists to politically employ their cultural knowledge as a tool to subvert negative projections of women that are subject to public scrutiny, criminalizing the fact that those that have had (the privilege) to learn about other people's cultures have not been vocal enough to propagate representations that countered those dominant ones that prevailed in the mass media. Deliberately

casting a broader net and foregrounding the notion of subalternity, we should question then how we as feminists can 'unlearn our privileges as our loss' (Dhawan 2007) and re-present the stories of rural and indigenous women who have been cut off from the lines of mobility in ways that do not continue the fetishization of poverty (the basis of aid dependency and cyclical poverty in many developing countries). Rather, one of the tasks of African feminism should be to bring about an emergent discourse and material analysis that represents core survival strategies that rural poor women deploy in response to capitalist forces of which they bear little or no logic.

On this, Spivak (2002b) insists that the rural is the new front of globalization, for instance, through seed and fertilizer control, population control, and micro loans to women. Feminist analysis ought to be directed towards understanding the critical role played by new media technology in accessing, appropriating and exploiting labour in these subaltern spaces by global multinational corporations, while at the same time sustaining the invisibility of this women and their contribution to developed country capitalist economies. Ungendered representations of democracy and the 'game of numbers' has been deployed to this end, whereby figures denoting the widespread availability and use of mobile telephony and internet are uncritically accompanied by assertions 'development' which neglect the material realities of rural populations.

Spivak is consistent in dismantling such grand narratives of a world globalizing in unison, whereby she argues that imperialism establishes the universality of the mode of production narrative, so that to ignore the rural and indigenous subaltern today is, willy-nilly, to continue the imperialist project. The word 'transnational' now bears the weight of the untrammelled financialization of the globe, whereby capitalism is being re-territorialized as 'democracy'. Spivak explains contemporary international division of labour: with the so-called decolonization and growth of multinational capital, instead of transferring of raw material to the metropolis, maintaining international division of labour serves to keep the supply of inexpensive labour in the periphery. International subcontracting and minimal subsistence requirements for the worker ensures that labour is kept cheap in the

third world. Unorganized or permanently casual female labour is the mainstay of world trade, whereby the gendered subaltern in the global south form the base of contemporary globalization. Moreover, she argues, this structure of super-exploitation is compounded by patriarchal social relations (in Dhawan 2007).

A critical feminist intervention seeking to diversify gender representations in African media must take account of the questions Spivak and others raise. One way to narrow the privileged gap between producers of stories and the populations whose stories they narrate is by developing audiences through process. By involving people in production, it is possible for them to develop a sense of the way they see their own lives or histories in the stories that are told. By allowing temporal spaces to emerge through which audiences, by revisiting discussions and representations, can reflect on their own situations or contexts, alternative discourses of gender representation can emerge. Second-wave radical feminists engaged with this form of transformative text through the practice of consciousness raising, which sought to critically evaluate the relationships between feminist theory and practice, and to sustain dialogue between women positioned differently in relation to gender, race, age, and other categories of identity.

Media producers can also align with feminist aspirations of diversity by resisting representation of race, sex, class, etc., in ways that they are conventionally depicted in movies or television. Bell Hooks (1996:18) terms this resistance as 'reclaiming the space of artistic integrity'. She further argues that working against the requirements of Hollywood (or more relevantly for Africa, Nollywood) offers viewers the more diverse images of black female identities. Films can act as critical interventions, opening up cinematic spaces where women can disinvest from and disengage with old representations. Audiences too have to 'learn how to see race and sex while simultaneously looking beyond them'. In other words, we still live in a culture where black female bodies are stereotypically 'seen' in a sexual light so that it becomes difficult for audiences of any race to see images of black females standing for universal themes of identify formation, sexual agency, feminist resistance, unrequited longing, etc. (Hooks 1996:19).

Bell Hooks seems to suggest here a process of 'unlearning' the ways in which audiences view gender representations in the media. This is a complex process that should be accompanied by education and consciousness-raising targeting audiences. This strategy demands that audiences be made conscious of their own location or contexts in relation to the stories told about them and the information that they consume. In emphasizing audience individuality, this strategy can empower by formulating audiences as 'curators' in their own lives, narrating their own cultural histories and present locations, and allowing them to create links with and active connections to narratives told about them. More fundamentally, as Ooko-Ombaka (1985:174) suggests, an effective educational intervention must be relevant to the needs of rural communities. Relevance from a viewpoint of poverty quite clearly means that the substance of the education should be developmental, not in theory but in practical everyday terms of that community, in helping its members find a way out of their poverty.

## Conclusion

Feminism in African media bears an educative role that imposes the necessity of engaging with discourse analysis as a means of understanding questions of representation, and with political economy as the only way to critique and make visible the systemic ways in which gender representations are captive of economic, political and cultural systems. Media representations of African women are far from being neutral reflections of society, but rather embody the aspirations of powerful, hegemonic forces within society. The media is a site of struggle that has potential to both marginalize and liberate, to both subvert dominant gender discourses and generate alternative representations of gender that narrow the gap between the imagined and the real. What this article shows is that it is possible to expand our understanding of gender representations, and at the same time hints at the difficulty with theorizing such transformation. More importantly though, it recognizes the complexity of framing such a shift in representation within only one theoretical framework, outlining the shortcomings of each on its own without other explanatory regimes.

There is merit in examining alternative and interdisciplinary spaces such as the arts,

within which this subversive shift is already taking place. Art has been able to pay tribute to women's oppression by transforming representations into symbols of black female struggle within discourses of racist supremacist capitalist patriarchy. The arts have succeeded in finding the language, tools and processes to enable a more critical re-entry into media, itself an art form, through feminist praxis.

I leave the readers with an example of art's intervention, a short video depicting South African feminist artist, Tracey Rose's take on feminism's role, in her critical performance done in conjunction with the exhibition titled 'Global Feminisms' (view video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OX5iLPLWzPM>). Her performance as a black woman and contextualized in the West, foregrounds many of African feminism's unresolved, intersecting questions of gender, sexuality, race and class privilege, and at the same time demonstrates the use of process in developing audiences, through a dialogue that draws in the audience by unsettling their positions with regards to the questions that she raises. Her unique style of performance, delivered in part by temporarily stepping outside of her own subjective position, and mediated by two 'anonymous' women in conversation, allows or rather compels the (unsettled) audience towards a critical avenue through which to engage with the issues she raises without succumbing to the power dynamics that often hinder self-reflexive consumption and introspection in mainstream media. This hindrance is a typical aspect of direct audience consumption of media programs that do not offer female audiences the possibility of 'talking back'. It may be worthy to think through the role of feminism in African media from this point of broadened perspectives, about collaboration in this case between feminism and (audio, visual or digital) art/feminist art and feminist media, and to draw on the theoretical traditions that each field has developed.

Drucilla Cornell (1995) reminds us that women are still struggling to create a space where our sexuality and our sexual voices can speak freely, where female sexual identity and performance can be represented in their diversity and

difference. That space has to be imagined and created by both progressive, visionary men and women. Affirming our need to make this cultural journey, she writes:

There is space for the woman with glory in her heart as long as we insist that we are dwelling in it. We must write that dwelling into being as a place for us to 'be' differently, to be beyond accommodation.

### Notes

1. Scholars variously refer to 'post-feminism' using alternative terms like "new femininities", "third-wave feminism", "embedded feminism" and "neo-feminism" (Press 2011:108).
2. See Christine Hughes (2010) for an overview of second wave feminism.
3. Ibid.
4. Scholars variously refer to 'post-feminism' using alternative terms like "new femininities", "third-wave feminism", "embedded feminism" and "neo-feminism" (Press 2011:108).

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# Gendered Media and Gendered Religion: Female Preachers, Audiovisual Media and the Construction of Religious Authority in Niamey

In many African countries, the democratization process that began in the 1990s has created the conditions for alternative media outlets, generally referred to in Francophone Africa as 'médias privés'. Niger was no exception. By the mid-1990s, the deregulation of the media was already effective and had led to a proliferation of audiovisual outlets, mostly TV and radio stations in particular in urban context. Niamey, the capital became a field of waves as interest in audiovisual media increased as never before, among promoters, their audience and most of all media practitioners. Not surprisingly, this context of proliferation gave various public actors the opportunity to devise strategies designed to appropriate these platforms for various agendas. Among these are male Muslim leaders who found in the new radio and TV stations the platform to advance a religious reform agenda. However, at the beginning of this process, even though women were central to this agenda, they were generally absent from these platforms, mostly because, as many Muslim male preachers have argued, they should remain within the domestic arena. As Eisenlohr (2006) has shown, media can be 'systems of discursive dissemination with their own modes of exclusion and inclusion, sometimes establishing new spheres of discursive exchange and public debate in the Muslim world'. Such a point can validly apply to the Nigerien context where the democratization process and the proliferation of media outlets have introduced shifting dynamics with the public sphere, but more specifically within the Islamic sphere.

However, in Niger, one of the striking developments in recent years has been the emergence of female voices in particular on TV and radio stations, despite the prescription that their role should remain circumscribed within the domestic arena. Challenging the conventional arrangements within media and Islamic practices, women preachers have taken the role of speaking for Islam, using spaces they have conquered and secured on various

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TV and radio stations. Through various programs centering on Islam, they have now a sustained presence and visibility within both the media landscape and the public sphere.

Recent scholarly examinations of the dynamics of Islam and gender in Niger have highlighted two distinctive trends. In her book *Engaging Modernity*, Alidou describes and analyzes the spaces women Islamic leaders have created to promote a culture of learning, particularly in urban context. She shows how Muslim women who, a few years ago, were at the margin of public life have risen to become leaders of significant learning communities. I follow this same problematic in a recent publication (Sounaye 2011) showing how, building on a new knowledge economy, women in Niamey have not only contributed to learning the Qur'an, but have also broken taboos that have kept them under a status of mere recipients of Islamic learning. Now producers of Islamic learning, they have created their own Madrasa and have developed various strategies to make their voice heard, especially in matters related to women's social status and political representations.

Building on the argument that the reformist discourse of the beginning of the 1990s has affected not only the urban context, but also the rural and the semi-urban context, Masquelier tackle the problematic of women's resistance, showing how they develop a social pragmatism that would eventually redefine the terms of the debate over the role and the status of women with the Muslim context of a town she studied (Masquelier 2009).

As interesting and insightful as these studies may have been, they seem to overlook the central role of the media within the dynamic of the public sphere and particularly the role

women using the media have played in reconfiguring not only Islamic practices, but also the media landscape. Central to my argument is that with the democratization of Islam, the deregulation of the media and the gradual effect of women's entrepreneurship, gendered configurations of the media and religion have occurred, making these spheres, especially in urban context, a privileged locus to examine the historical transformations that resulted from the 1990s reform processes.

This article is located at the intersection of media, religious and gender studies. Based on a series of fieldwork I have undertaken from 2008 in Niamey, the capital city of Niger, I describe and analyze women's intervention in the Islamic sphere as they appropriate radio and TV platforms to construct their religious authority and suggest new interpretations related to women's rights and gender spaces.

## A Quick View: Religion, Media and Democratization

Religion is known for playing a dual role that may be seen as contradictory. It may be a vehicle for both social change and social control. While providing many communities around the world a discourse of liberation or resistance against hegemonic and dominant powers, institutions and discourses, religion has also appeared as a conservative force, used to maintain gender inequality, in particular in the way its distributes social roles. For example, in many religions only men are prophets. In addition, women are excluded from various positions related to instruction and preaching. Within a modernist framework, perhaps, no other source of norms and values has received more criticism for its conservative role.

Generally perceived as a discourse of an established order, religion in the Nigerien society has played a major role in the configuration of gender roles. This became particularly visible and of public interest with the rise of the Islamic organizations in the early 1990s, as a political liberalization

process was getting rid of the one-party rule that has characterized governance in the country since independence in 1960. As political parties multiplied, so did the Islamic organizations, breaking the monolithic religious sphere dominated until then by the state-sponsored *Association Islamique du Niger* created shortly after Kountche's military took over in 1974. For more than fifteen years, the *Association Islamique du Niger* was the only organization authorized to speak for Islam in the country. At the beginning of the 1990s, a trend of democratization within the political arena and within the Islamic sphere began, with many underprivileged, marginalized, disenfranchised actors formally gaining prominence and assuming public roles. Political pluralism became a reality while the Islamic sphere restructured, giving way to numerous Islamic organizations. Recent statistics from the Ministry of Interior, for example, show more than 45 legally registered Islamic organizations.

One of the most affected by the 1990s' wave of democratization, the mediascape will also restructure with various private initiatives, which eventually led to the end of the monopoly of the state media. Until 1993, there were only 2 main mass-media outlets – La Voix du Sahel and Tele Sahel – both controlled by the state and therefore reflecting only the opinion of the government. However, media deregulation in 1994 propelled this number to more than a hundred established media outlets with regular and daily broadcast. In comparison, a recent study on medias and religions in West Africa (Bathily and Institut Panos Afrique de l'Ouest 2009), for example, listed for Niger 148 medias outlets (143 radios and 5 televisions). Media houses such as *Bonferey*, *Dounia*, *Tenere* have become major players in the mediascape, in particular because they combine radio and television and have branches across the country offering valid alternatives to the state-sponsored outlets.

Obviously media deregulation played a significant role in the democratization process. It has also helped to restructure the Islamic sphere, providing a platform for truth claims for competing Islamic trends. Thus, the discourse of democratization, in particular in its freedom of association and freedom of religion dimension, favored an increased religious activism resulting in the creation of numerous organizations (Niandou and Alzouma 1996). The reformist movement, known as Izala, emerged within this con-

text, now that the public sphere has opened up to multiple and often competing perceptions of Islam, governance, social institutions and gender roles (Masquelier 2009; Soares, Otayek et al. 2009). The genealogy of the Izala, a trend that promotes Islamic practices strictly in line with the Qur'an and the Sunna (the tradition of the prophet Muhammad), show how this movement was able to devise strategies and capitalize on the alternative media by developing systematic preaching campaigns on the newly established non-state media. This move allowed the Izala trend to fight back against critics who have portrayed it as a troublemaker, and even establish itself as an alternative to the Sufi organizations. The new media outlets, especially the network of urban FM radios helped this Islamic trend to reach a large number of urban dwellers, the primary target of its reform discourse.

Analysts have consistently highlighted the structural changes democratization brought to Africa. At a closer look, we realize that the significance of these changes is intricately related to the cultures and subcultures that emerged within this context. Larkin suggests that we look at media as an infrastructural basis that shapes socio-cultural life (Larkin 2008). The media world in that sense is primarily a cultural world where norms and values are exposed.

From this perspective and to close this background section, I will observe that media became important in Niger's democratization process in part because the overarching preoccupation revolved around the Nigerien moral order. What social order and what normative framework should shape the democratization process became two key questions that have driven activism in the broader public sphere, but also within more limited spheres. Gender became central to the attempts by political actors, religious figures, feminists and human rights' activists to answer these questions (Sounaye 2005; Alio 2009) while polarization became the distinctive feature of the views expressed: on one hand are Secularist activists who articulate a human rightist agenda and hope to promote women's rights and gender equality; on the other hand are Islamic organizations which, in their rejection of what they viewed as a ramping secularization of France-inspired *laïcité*, demanded the implementation of political norms in conformity to Islam.

The religious views challenged the normative framework of the democratization

process and attack its symbolic sites such as the constitution, the educational system and its promotion of women's status. In their criticism of the democratization norms, Muslim activists have generally pointed to the foreignness of these norms and their unfitnes to Niger's society. More specifically, these views translated into Muslim activists' hostility to the family law reform (*Code de la Famille*) (Alio 2009; Zakari 2009), their opposition family planning initiatives and the Convention for the Elimination of Discriminations Against Women (Sounaye 2005; Kang 2009) and more recently in 2007-2008, their rejection of the Maputo Protocol aimed at gender equality. In many ways, women's status has kept the public sphere in Niger busy, making gender 'one of these symbolic confrontations', to use Cruise O'Brien's (2003) terminology.

### Gendering the Islamic Presence in the Media

The 1990s democratization process has produced in many African contexts, and particularly in Niger, one of the historical transformations that redefined not only the political arena, but also many sectors of public life. The impact of the democratization on the Islamic sphere has been structural, breaking the monolithic nature of the Islamic sphere and providing many individual and collective entrepreneurs the opportunity to emerge as public actors. The conjunction between the deregulation of the media that followed the end of the monopoly of the state-sponsored media, and women's religious entrepreneurship, resulted in an increased presence of women on TV and radio. Using media to preach and popularize the message of Islam has proved strategic for many women who are seeking to change the gendered conditions of their lives. As Root et al. (2009) notes, 'sociologists use the term *agency* to describe the ways that people seek to change their social circumstances, to dismantle existing ways of thinking and acting, and to create new ideas and new social institutions'. It is precisely this agency that I intend to illustrate. To that end, I present two cases to illustrate how media have provided a platform for Muslim women activists to challenge conventional perception of their role and space and eventually lead them to popularity.

Within a religious sphere dominated by male figures, radio and TV are giving female figures the tools and the platforms

to construct religious authority as they challenge not only the propensity of media houses to privilege male figures, but also religious institutions (sermons and fatwa) which have traditionally been defined as male preserve. I quickly present two cases that illustrate this trend, before I focus on the case of Bushara, presenting her views and outlook on Islam and gender roles.

### **Mallama Huda**

More than her teaching responsibilities in a secondary school in Niamey, it was her appearance on national TV (Télé Sahel) that propelled Mallama Huda to fame and provided her with the platform to promote Islamic learning and defend the cause of women. For a long time, she was the only female speaking for Islam on the media. In that capacity, she was sometimes the guest of 'Émission islamique', a program on which she answered questions and formulated *fatwas* [legal opinions, generally the preserve of the male clerics] on social and political issues.

More recently in 2008, she was the leading figure in the opposition women's Islamic organizations expressed against the Maputo Protocol. Within the democratization era, she gained more prominence, moving from a secondary figure on national TV to a much visible one. She became the independent voice who 'dares' to challenge conventions and practices well established by the *ulama*. Her interventions concentrated on two media outlets: Télé Sahel, the state-run TV station which broadcasts across the country; and Ténéré, a private complex of radio-TV station broadcasting only in the main urban areas of the country. Her tone and arabized-Hausa accent made her a recognizable voice on all audiovisual media in Niamey. Many refer to her affectively as *Mamma* to show her respect. In return, she refers to her followers as *diya ta*, *kangwa ta* (my daughter, my little sister), especially during 'Courrier Musulman', her program on TV Ténéré which has drawn her harsh criticisms. Often, her interventions have focused not only on women in Islam, but also on household management in conformity to the prescriptions of the Islamic scriptures. In making a case for women and children's well being, she rejects the conventional female behavior at odds with the Sunna and the Qur'an. She promotes mutual understanding within the household, but most importantly, she calls for solidarity among

women, especially the elite and the uneducated housewives.

Before 2000, very few outlets existed to allow a significant representation of Islamic sensibilities in the media. Today, as more than 30 FM radio and TV stations broadcast in Niamey alone, many Muslim scholars and entrepreneurs like Mallama Huda have managed to capitalize on the pluralism and the multiplicity of the mass media. However, Mallama Huda is 'gradually retiring' from TV programs, leaving this space for disciples who are now following in her footsteps. Thus, her interventions on the media have remained minimal, though she is still invited to make *fatwa*. With the activities of her organization (Union des Femmes Musulmanes du Niger) that keep her busy, she has little time for preaching and TV programs. Still, she hangs on her role as a Muslim scholar on the path of Aikin Adini, a Hausa concept that stresses the obligation for Muslims, in particular the learned ones, to 'help Islam expand'. This notion, which shapes Muslims' participation in social transformation, encompasses activities such as preaching, teaching, learning, a sum of activities that define contemporary Islamic culture in Niger. It becomes for Huda, her disciples and peers, a mission to spread the Sunna of the Prophet, and simultaneously offer the model of behavior expected from a Muslim woman. In her emergence and that of many others, the audiovisual media played a significant role.

### **Mallama Zahra**

The daughter of a prominent Sufi Sheik, Zahra does not owe her making as an authoritative young Muslim figure to her family's social capita. She emerged amid a controversial debate over family planning in the late 1990s. While many *ulama* and most Islamic organizations rejected the proposal, sometimes with an anti-feminist tone, Zahra's organization was one of the few to maintain contact with state officials and international agencies such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on the issue. Criticized for her involvement in the initiative, she defended her position, claiming that Islam values dialogue and consultation, therefore, Muslims should consider any proposition they are presented, even if they have to reject it afterwards. In her view, dialogue and consultation should be given a chance in a Muslim context. She has often stressed this point in her nightly program on national TV (Télé Sahel) when

she answers questions sent in by the audience. *Tambaya da Amsoshi* (Questions-Answers) has become a platform where she expresses the recommendations of Islam, and her own views on social issues debated in the public sphere.

As is the case with Mallama Huda, the media played a significant role in helping Zahra gain public exposure and establishing her authority as a scholar and community leader. Her appearances on national TV were read as the validation of her degree of learning and her preparedness to assume leadership positions. This represented for many of her followers a key moment in the formation of their community. In addition to being the validation of her level of learning, this public exposure contributed to the broadening of her audience beyond her family, village circles and Sufi community. It is precisely at that moment that many organizations and international agencies began requesting her opinions on the 'Islamic implications' of their programs or projects. Gradually, she established a reputation of public speaking. Many organizations began to invite her to give lectures and presentations, generally on issues related to women and Islam. In these instances, various institutions and organizations sought to tap into her symbolic power, her expertise in Islam, her social capital and her access to the media (Alio 2009; Sounaye 2011). Indeed, her access to audiovisual media has made her a fierce defender of women's education and an advocate of women's rights. She has constantly described her taking the stand to preach and make *fatwas* as a contribution to fight ignorance, which, in her view, has hindered the promotion of women's rights.

In both cases that I present, audiovisual media become the platform where an introspection of the Nigerien society is articulated. Social critics, both women have found in the media the platforms that help them voice their views as Muslims and committed to the promotion of better gender relations. The media has also helped them to build their communities through programs that gradually provide them with an audience.

### **Erecting the Pulpit in the Studio: Bushara, a Media Personality**

I use the image of the pulpit in the studio as a metaphor for the increasing role many women are playing in making themselves authoritative voices in the midst of a

religious economy that has opened to women both religious and media spaces. This occurs also in a context where the proliferation of media outlets has provided a space for young female figures to take on significant public roles. Bushara is precisely one of those young female figures.

In approaching the problematic of gender from the intersection of religion and media practices, I wanted to highlight how Islamic activism has provided many women with the opportunity to re-draw gender borderlines as far as religious practices and leadership are concerned. Most striking in the last decade has been the emergence of women authoritative voices which use the TV as a platform to disseminate their discourses of conversion or ethical transformation. But they have also promoted a women-based view on Islam and its practices. As a conservative trend among the clerics has insisted that women should 'remain at home', regardless of their learning, Bushara, a young woman graduate of the Islamic University of Niger, has challenged this viewpoint, rejecting the domestic circumscription of female Islamic leadership, and also hosting a talk show on Bonferey, an audiovisual complex in Niamey. 'No one has exclusive rights on Islam, so let's not drive Muslims astray!' she observes.

I have interviewed many women involved in similar construction of their contribution to Islam, using media outlets. In the 1990s, there were only two women (Malama Huda and Malama Zainab) who would sporadically take the stand on TV to discuss matters related to women and household. In the last five years, however, numerous young women, generally trained at the Islamic University of the country have led the trend of public address, taking the role of preachers contributing to what they view as *da'wa* (call to Islam), not only for women, but for all Muslims in general. Bushara, for example, sees her involvement in the *da'wa* as a 'work', a religious labor that would help Muslims better understand their religion.

In Niamey, her access to the waves of the audiovisual complex Bonferey, a media created by a wealthy trader, has propelled her to the public stage and has provided her with such a visibility that she is constantly invited to participate in fora, gatherings and seminars mainly devoted to Islam. I first heard about her when, attending an Islamic seminar in the summer

2008, I asked some colleagues whether I could interview some young Muslim leaders involved in sermon activity. A woman who overheard my request immediately suggested: 'Bushara is the person you should talk to'. I have never heard about her, but quickly realized that she was a prominent voice on the media. As I would discover later, Bushara, now in her early 30s, is a media personality who has made a name for herself in hosting a religious program on one of the FM stations in Niamey. She has actually inherited the program from Hawa, another prominent female figure who spent several years advocating women's religious rights. Engaged in the popularization of Islam, and focusing on the role of women in Islam, Hawa has constantly argued that women are abused and their rights are not recognized. She is nowhere the secular feminist who allies with the liberal human rights discourse. But, taking inspiration in such women-oriented discourse, she construes women's rights systematically as the most sacred domain on Islam. Hawa has since retired and handed over the program to Bushara.

Mentored by Hawa, Bushara has gradually become a major voice among women preachers. Her program centers on the biography of Prophet Muhammad (*seerat*), but with a particular emphasis on female figures that played key roles in his life. Every Saturday afternoon, she receives calls from women seeking answers to their numerous questions related to Aisha, Khadija, Fatima, etc. all women whose lives were intricately linked to that of the Prophet. Bushara receives also calls from men, as she states: 'people don't know much about Islam's female figures...and don't be mistaken: my audience is replete with male listeners'.

She is aware of the challenge she represents in an Islamic sphere where controlling women's voice and public presence has become a major issue. Obviously, the issue is further aggravated because of the religious institution women similar to Bushara are appropriating. In effect, until recently, sermon has always been the preserve of the male cleric. Thus, a woman taking such role challenges the traditional practice of this institution. During an interview she offered me, she brought up the issue and argued:

I think the prohibition [of women from preaching on the media] can be interpreted as jealousy. It sounds like that.

This has been a recurrent issue. Last week, a friend of mine faced the same issue...it keeps coming...a few years ago there was a *Mukabala* (conference to resolve the issue), we thought it was over...and now people are bringing it up again. Those who oppose women's preaching have no arguments...they can't provide any sound justification of this prohibition...we had a conference at Palais des Congres in Niamey. I was among the presenters...we were only two female participants. The day of the presentation of my colleague, the participants [male clerics] didn't want her to speak. They refused to give her the floor for her presentation, arguing that as a woman, she should not be given the floor to speak in public. The next day, I got to address the participants and did my presentation. Afterwards, a man stood up and made some remarks. Actually, he gave no justification why women should not preach.

Pursuing her argument that the prohibition is groundless, she added:

It is right a woman stays home; but whenever necessary, she can go out. The only thing is that she cannot go out and forget about her household responsibility. Women are allowed to go out, there is no question about that. There are clauses under which she can do it, she just need to respect them.

Following the episode at Palais des Congres, more voices articulated their objection to the presence of women preachers on audiovisual media. The controversy escalated to the point that:

A few weeks ago, a cleric took the stand on TV and insulted all women preaching on TV. We are just asking that they show us the scriptures that forbid women from public preaching. We are just asking them to show us that God has made it unlawful...let's see the hadith if it does exist...Of course, we have some people who translate the verses of the Qur'an as they like and who could fabricate whatever suits them...no, we are just asking to be shown the scriptural proof (*Hujja*)...we are asking to be convinced. On our side, we know many women have contributed to the development of Islam.

Bushara's views are not unusual in the Islamic sphere where, since 2003, a second wave of restructuring has begun. In effect, women's Islamic organizations have emerged, aiming at correcting Mus-

lims' views and practices, which, against the prescription of the Qur'an and the Sunna, have been detrimental to women's rights and gender equity. In Niamey, there are now 6 TV stations and 23 FM radio stations, on which women regularly preach, translate and comment on the Qur'an and the Hadiths. In recent years, they have also designed debates during which they engage social and policy issues.

### **Closing Remarks: Democratization, Discourse of Dissemination, Media Proliferation and Gendered Islam**

In its initial steps, the main issue for the democratization process in Niger revolved around the type of governance to be implemented. The challenge in this process was less the institution of political or religious pluralism, but the content of the contested notion of women's status. Sociologically, however, the challenge translated into what kind of gender relations the process should inform. Political and religious reform projects throughout history have often revolved around this problematic, making women's status a domain of key symbolic confrontations. Certainly, the case in Niger is a confirmation of the permanence of this problematic with the difference that while the issue opposed those who might be called the Defenders of Islam and the Radical Secularists, at least early in the democratization process, now, it seems that the same challenge has emerged within the Islamic sphere where, female actors, voices and entrepreneurs have taken the role of gendering media spaces and religious institutions.

The creative use of media and Islam has provided women with a public space, a voice and a stage where their discourses and social entrepreneurship can affect gender relations and therefore alter social configurations and images. In a way,

this is actually happening with more than 30 women Islamic activists now appearing on the audiovisual media in Niamey alone, as I have found in a recent personal count. The early 1990s democratization and development of Islamic organizations has made women's status one of its central preoccupations. Within the Islamic sphere and because of the configuration of the organizations speaking for Muslim women, women hardly had the chance to take the stage and articulate clearly their positions. A shift has occurred since the end of 1990s with the gradual restructuring of the religious sphere and the emergence of exclusively women Islamic organizations. One can easily conclude that the case in Niger is one in which a political reform, a religious reform and a social reform combine to trigger a female representation that was unthinkable a decade ago. Democratization has provided the context, media proliferation the stage, and female entrepreneurship the agency.

Finally, I will remark that though seeking to popularize the Sunna, a move that could be associated with a conservatism characteristic of religious reform in the Muslim world, especially with the *izala* movement in Niger and Nigeria (Charlick 2004; Sounaye 2005; Masquelier 2009; Zakari 2009), the women I have focused on in reality promote a social reform that would support women's right, at least in some specific sectors of public life. They also seek gender equity when it comes to Islamic learning and accessing the pulpit, hence the rise of the social category of the Mallama, the female Muslim leader. In that regard, and in order to draw a complete picture of this problematic – located as I noted at the intersection of media, religious and gender studies – how the activism of the Malama affects Muslim media cultures is a question worth investigating.

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# African Economies and Relevant Economic Analysis: A Heterodox Approach to Economic Research in Africa<sup>1</sup>

In this article, an attempt is made to critically examine how the African economic crisis is understood by mainstream neoclassical economics. This is contrasted with an alternative way of looking at the same crisis from another angle, which can loosely be termed as the heterodox approach or the political economy approach to economic analysis. These two approaches are different not only in the application of economic tools to understand the African economic crisis, but more importantly by the philosophical basis or methodological basis of how economic research should be conducted. To this end, the article examines the philosophical basis of the two approaches so as to deepen our understanding of these two different approaches to economic analysis. This will, in turn, help us to understand the methodological basis of neoclassical economic research in Africa, sponsored by the International Financial Institutions (IFS) and which has dominated the continent in the last three decades. The article then outlines the practical manner in which economic tools are deployed by economists with heterodox persuasion within the developing countries context. From these two fundamental backgrounds, the last section of the article draws up lessons for use by CODESRIA in its future economic research in Africa.

## The Challenge: Understanding the Political Economy of Growth and Poverty Reduction in Africa

The recent optimism about African economies notwithstanding, the performance of these economies since the time of political independence can only be described as dismal. There has been a clear deterioration in terms of trade, particularly from the mid-1970s. The level of external debts has grown enormously, leading to near insolvency. Dependency on foreign aid has grown at an alarming rate, and this has been exacerbated by stagnation in exports. In contrast, levels of investment have been extremely low. Partly as a result of the latter, physical and social infrastructures have also deteriorated. Political instability, frequent wars, and natural disasters have further aggravated

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this situation. The major question to be asked then is 'why?'. In fact, it might be relevant to ask whether there are identifiable features specific to Africa that can help explain the massive poverty and inequality that have engulfed the continent. What is interesting in this regard, which is the focus of this study, is that the approach to these challenges also has implications.

## Africa's Economic Crisis: What Caused It?

There are three sets of contending explanations for Africa's economic crisis. The first is set out by the World Bank in the Berg Report of 1981 and a number of subsequent World Bank publications. An alternative explanation for Africa's economic problems, associated with the United Nations' Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) is outlined in *African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes*, AAF-SAP (ECA 1989a). Finally, there exists a third view, which is less clearly associated with any particular institution and largely held by academics of the Marxist orientation. This latter position is often offered as a critique to the other two explanations. The scope of all three sets of explanations is general, encompassing every aspects of the African economic crisis.

The World Bank's *Agenda for Action* (1981) argues that Africa's problems relate to underdeveloped human resources, political fragility, problems of restructuring colonial institutions, inheritance of poorly shaped economies, climate, and geography and population growth. The Bank's insistence that policy failure represents the *main* explanation for Africa's economic crisis, and consequently, emphasis on the need for reforms, has continued with the publication of its long-term perspective study (World Bank 1989). The Bank argued in the 1990s that orthodox macroeconomic management represents

the road to economic recovery in Africa and, hence, that more adjustment, not less, is required (World Bank 1994). This assertion has been the subject of various criticisms, coming from different angles (see, among others, ECA 1989; Adam 1995; Mosley, Subasat and Weeks 1995; Lall 1995; White, 1996; Alemayehu, 2002 cited in Alemayehu and Abebe 2006).

In contrast, the ECA (1989) prefers to explain Africa's problems in terms of deficiencies in basic economic and social infrastructure (especially physical capital), research capability, technological know-how and human resource development, compounded by socio-political problems. The ECA sees inflation, balance of payments deficit, a rising debt burden and instability of exports as resulting from a lack of structural transformation, unfavourable physical and socio-political environment, as well as an excessive outward orientation and dependence. The ECA study suggests that weaknesses in Africa's productive base, the predominant subsistence and exchange nature of the economy and its openness (to international trade and finance) have all contributed to the continent's dependence on foreign aids. Hence, one of the striking features of the African economy is the dominance of the external influence and control. This has the effect of rendering African countries quite vulnerable to exogenous shocks. Consequently, according to the ECA viewpoint, perceiving African problems in terms of internal and external balance problems and seeking a solution within that framework (most notably, through the implementation of structural adjustment programmes) implies not only a wrong diagnosis but also a wrong treatment. The ECA study argues that '...both on theoretical and empirical grounds, the conventional SAPs are inadequate in addressing the real causes of economic, financial and social problems facing African countries that are of a structural nature' (ECA 1989:25).

Based on this alternative diagnosis, and the major objectives of the Lagos Plan of Action (OAU 1981), the ECA formulated an African alternative framework to the

Bank/Fund's policy recommendations. The ECA framework focuses on three dynamically interrelated aspects, which need to be taken into account. First, the operative forces (political, economic, scientific and technological, environmental, cultural and sociological); second, the available resources (human and natural resources, domestic saving and external financial resources); and third, the needs to be catered for (i.e., focusing on vital goods and services as opposed to luxuries and semi-luxuries). The adoption of this general framework would allow the different categories of operative force to influence not only the level and structure of what is produced but also the distribution of wealth. These forces may then influence the nature of needs to be catered for and the degree of their satisfaction. At a concrete level, this is envisaged as taking a number of policy directions. Firstly, how to improve production capacity and productivity, mobilize and resources efficiently, develop human resources, strengthen the scientific and technological base, and diversify vertically and horizontally. Secondly, how to improve the level and distribution of income, adopt a pragmatic balance between the public and private sectors, put in place 'enabling conditions' for sustainable development (particularly economic incentives and political stability), shift (non-productive) resources, and improve income distribution among various groups. And, finally, how to focus on the required needs, particularly in relation to food self-sufficiency, reduce import dependence, re-align consumption and production patterns and manage debt and debt servicing (see Alemayehu 2002 for details).

Thus, the core of the disagreement between the views of the World Bank and those of ECA centres on the role of the market mechanism (Oskawe, quoted in Asante 1991:179). While the Bank believes in the market mechanism as representing the fundamental instrument of resource allocation and income distribution, the ECA questions this viewpoint. Thus, while the Bank focuses mainly on financial balances, the ECA considers a much broader transformation as an enabling condition for the former. While the Bank emphasizes the export sector, the ECA strategy advocates selectivity (see also Asante 1991:180). While the Bank expresses concern about anti-export bias and population policy, the ECA prefers to emphasize the need to ensure to-tal

structural transformation and food self-sufficiency. While the Bank places more emphasis on short-term policies than on Africa's long-term needs, the ECA strategy, as defined in the Lagos Plan of Action, stresses the importance of also addressing issues of long-term transformation, alongside these short-term policies. However, these institutions do agree on some major issues, such as the need for human resource development, improving the efficiency of parastatals, and sound debt management.

The ECA analysis was quite comprehensive in addressing the causes of the crisis and in suggesting not only short-run solutions but also a framework for long-term transformations. From ECA's (1989) analysis and recent events, it could be argued that some of the elements that may help explicate Africa's severe under-development include; 1) weak initial conditions (such as ailing institutions, human capital and an extractive and lingering colonial history) at the time of independence; 2) the dependence of almost all African countries on primary commodity production and trade; 3) the lack of non-aid financial capital and the alarming level of aid-dependency; 4) the lack of ownership of policies because they are invariably imposed on Africa by donors; and 5) the prevalence of conflict and poor governance.

It is unfortunate that this deeper insight and a heterodox/structural approach to economic analysis of the ECA in the late 1980s has been completely replaced by the World Bank and IMF policy of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in subsequent ECA research following this publication (since the 1990s). This has led the policy discourse in Africa to be dominated by the World Bank and IMF views noted above.

### **The Policy Discourse in Africa: 1980s to the Present**

Notwithstanding the ECA's intellectual challenge to the SAPs in the late 1980s, SAPs have been the (macroeconomic) policy framework informing policy making in Africa for the past three decades, beginning in the 1980s. The World Bank argued that the economic management strategies prescribed in SAPs represented the road to economic recovery for Africa (World Bank 1994).

According to Mkandawire and Soludo (ECA 1999), SAPs in Africa have made significant progress on economic funda-

mentals but poverty remains widespread and the institutional requirements for sustaining growth, and equitably extending its benefits to the population, remain onerous (ECA 1999). They noted that poverty in adjusting countries is comparable to the regional average, if not worse. Initially, there were attempts to address the negative social impacts of SAPs by ad hoc 'social safety net' measures, but this has changed over time. The recent emphasis of the World Bank and the IMF is to link SAPs with poverty reduction through Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). The PRSPs and the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are key elements of current public policy discourse in Africa. The PRSPs are essentially extensions of the SAPs where the major macroeconomic policy direction in SAPs cannot be questioned in the new PRSPs and sponsored by the Breton Wood Institutions. PRSPs suggest that there are opportunities to scale up participatory learning strategies from grassroots to national levels, while also offering new possibilities to budget for these activities and increase public interest and participation in poverty monitoring (UNDP 2002). Success in PRSPs requires, among other things, realization of sustainable growth.

The last five to seven years saw a significant improvement in growth and growth prospects of Africa. However, this optimistic scenario has been clouded by the possible impact of the global economic crisis. Though the impact was mild by world standard, the task of coping with the global crisis was daunting, especially when seen in the context of limited fiscal and monetary space countries in Africa have. It is interesting to see if this growth has been translated in poverty reduction. Some country experiences also show that growth is the most powerful weapon in the fight against poverty. It creates jobs that use labor, the main asset of the poor in developing economies like that of Africa. According to recent estimates, growth accounts for approximately 80 per cent of the poverty reduction that has occurred over the last 15 years, lifting 500 million people around the world above the poverty line (Ministry of Finance Japan, 2008). Growth among emerging and developing economies has been generally strong, with activity driven by a robust global growth, sound economic reforms, and strong domestic private demand in recent years. Thus, growth is definitely linked with poverty

reduction but this needs to be looked at in the context of the political economy of growth and policy making.

### The Political Economy of Growth and Poverty Reduction in Africa: The Recent Evidence

A recent comprehensive study of the political economy of growth in Africa, using over 27 countries as case study, by the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) noted that there were about four political regimes that characterized the political and policy landscape of post-independence Africa. These are: State Controls (SC), Adverse Redistribution (AR), Inter-temporally Unsustainable Spending (IUS), and State Breakdown (SB). Also presented is the complementary Syndrome-free (SF) category (see Fosu 2008 and Table 1). The study noted that the quality of economic policy pursued by each of these regimes has a powerful effect on whether countries seize the growth opportunities implied by global technologies and markets and by their own initial conditions (Fosu, 2008). According to Fosu's summary, this syndrome-based classification aggregates multi-dimensional policy into broad patterns that occurred repeatedly in African countries. The evidence that the syndromes reduce growth is strong in the AERC studies: Fosu and O'Connell (2005) find, for example, that avoiding the syndromes is simultaneously a necessary condition for attaining sustainable growth in SSA and a nearly-sufficient condition for preventing growth collapse. Indeed, being syndrome-free may add as much as 2.5 percentage points per year to per capita growth (See Fosu 2008).

**Table 1: Anti-growth Syndromes - Relative Frequencies of Occurrence from Independence to Year 2000, 46 [26] SSA Countries (%)**

	State Controls	Adverse Re-distribution	Inter-temporal	State Breakdown	Syndrome Free
Unweighted	33.8 [37.1]	21.9 [18.2]	8.8 [11.5]	10.2 [8.8]	25.4 [24.4]
Population-weighted	26.3	31.6	13.1	10.2	18.9

Notes: The first row comprises the set of non-weighted relative frequencies, with figures for the 26-country case-study sample in square brackets.

Source: Fosu 2008.

The AERC study underlined that at the time of independence in many African countries, strong central governments were perceived as the optimal mechanism for nation building. In many instances,

these efforts appear to have actually succeeded in preventing state breakdown in terms of open rebellion. Unfortunately, however, the strategies adopted then also resulted in the various anti-growth syndromes of controls, adverse redistribution and inter-temporally unsustainable spending (Fosu 2008). According to Fosu's summary from these studies, without the appropriate checks and balances, the executive was free to carry out policies unencumbered, a process that seems to have spawned many of the syndromes. Meanwhile, the military became the only real credible agent for changing governments through coups d'état. This situation resulted in elite political instability (EPI), which has been deleterious to growth in Africa (Fosu 1992, 2001 cited in Fosu 2008). In its severe form, furthermore, EPI could constitute state failure, a phenomenon that tends to be the most growth-inhibiting syndrome (Fosu and O'Connell 2005, cited in Fosu 2008).

What is also asserted in this AERC study is that the relationship between the type of political system and the choice of policy regime is found to be empirically significant (See Bates 2008a). According to Bates, based on AERC 27-country case study, the political forces that underpin the choice of control regimes seem to appear to arise from three sources. One is ideology. High levels of government intervention occur when governments find principled reasons for overriding the allocations generated by markets. A second is the power of organized interests – interest groups constitutes the primary means by which political preferences shape policy choices. Regional inequality constitutes the third; it generates incentives to adopt policies designed to overcome the economic impact of disparate endowments and to create political institutions with the power to elicit the transfer of resources (Bates 2008a). In short, these forces, according to Bates, have shaped the political conduct and economic performance of governments in post-independence Africa. This is compounded by tendencies of state failures with their associated cost for growth and poverty reduction in some conflict prone Africa countries (Bates 2008b).

What is the implication of such pattern of political process for the growth of African economies and poverty reduction? In short, as Bates (2008c) noted, the poverty of the state, the prospects of wealth from predation, and the prospect of losing

office form the conditions under which growth and development could be undermined. In a situation where these tendencies are avoided and yet competitive democracy and democratic institutions are missing, private sector operators may suffer from the risk and uncertainty related to the political order. According to Gunning (2008), again based on the 27 case studies of the AERC, African economies may well face more risk than other countries (e.g. because of their reliance on rain-fed agriculture in a situation where growing seasons are extremely short). In addition, the scope for risk-coping is often lower than elsewhere: low population density makes it difficult to rely on insurance or credit. Governments have increased the risk exposure of private agents while at the same time undermining institutions which support risk-coping (see Gunning 2008).

According to Bates (2008c) recent political reforms seem to have less impact upon the management of the macro-economy. In the face of prospective political defeat, the evidence suggests, Bates (2008) noted, that governments in competitive systems tend to spend more, to borrow more, to print money, and to postpone needed revaluations of their currencies than do those not facing political competition. The relationship between political competition and macroeconomic mismanagement appears to have weakened over time. This will compound the micro level risk that private agents face in Africa. As aptly remarked by Bates (2008c), the empirical results nonetheless pose a challenge to those who seek, in political reform, the remedy for Africa's economic malaise (Bates 2008c). In general, however, as noted by Gunning (2008), one needs to know to what extent growth is reduced by governance-based risk or by governance-related restrictions on risk-coping by private agents. However, on these questions, there is as yet no evidence, and further research is in order.

In general however, existence of economic and political stability, avoidance or scaled down bureaucratic obstacles and interventions, prudent investment regulations and availability of infrastructure are usually regarded as conducive environments for development. Wali (2000) indicates that sub-Saharan African countries, from South Africa to Senegal, from Ethiopia to Namibia, from Nigeria to Kenya have made considerable efforts over the past decade to improve their policy and investment

climate. Regardless of such improvements, from indicators in the areas of macroeconomic stability, finance, market structure, infrastructure, skills, customs procedures, labor regulations, business regulations, corruption, and security, it is evident that the African economic environments still have serious shortcomings compared with their international competitors (Eifert and Ramachandran 2004). Thus, good policies are central in improving the economic environment. It is perhaps for this reason that the first message of Africa Competitiveness Report 2007 (World Economic Forum 2007) is that good policies matter more for the investment climate than resource abundance or sea access – ‘for improving the investment climate, geography and geology count less than good policies’. Good policies however require, *inter alia*, good economic research which in turn is a function of the methodology of research adopted. However, in the context of the challenges noted above, a new approach to economic research and policy formulation in Africa need to be looked at.

## A Methodological Approach to Studying African Economies

### The General Philosophical Approach

Methodological discussions in economics are usually problematic. Mainstream (neoclassical) economists usually follow the Popperian approach [of theory -hypothesis - critical test/evidence - falsification or corroboration chain] (see Blaug 1992). However, it could be argued that this approach is more relevant for physics than it is for economics. Unfortunately, it is this methodological approach – referred as the ‘positivist approach to economic analysis’ by the Nobel laureate Friedman – that informed the methodological approach to the study of African economies and their policy formulation as espoused by the World Bank and IMF. We have briefly noted below. The section concludes by suggesting an alternative methodological approach to the study of African economies, from a philosophical perspective.

Most of the standard results of the mainstream/ neoclassical economic models that informed policy making in Africa and dominated economics departments of African universities depend on the assumptions of the model. This brings us to the question of the significance of the

realism of these assumptions to judge the relevance of a model for the issue at hand in a particular African country context. In other words, what will happen if we found that most of the assumptions of the models used by neoclassical economist in Africa do not tally with the reality of Africa? Does it imply then that the model and its predictions are not relevant for Africa? This is an important philosophical question which is beyond the scope of this article but which still needs to be looked into, at least briefly. Thus, we highlight two contending views on this issue so as to guide readers to the relevant literature and enable them to draw their own conclusion about the use of neoclassical models (or generally economic models) in the developing countries’ context in general, and African economies in particular.

One of the views is associated with the influential American Economist and Nobel laureate, Milton Friedman. In his *Essay on Positive Economics* (1953), Friedman argued that the realism of assumption is not relevant to evaluate a model or theory, so long as its predictions are acceptable. On the other hand, ‘Realist Economists’ (see below: for instance Lawson 1997, 2003), among others, argue against this view.

According to Friedman, economic theories should not be judged by their assumptions but by their predictive implications. In particular, the unrealism of the assumptions of a theory is no reason for validating a theory. For Friedman, the only relevant test of the *validity* of a hypothesis is the comparison of its predictions with experience. The hypothesis is rejected if its predictions are contradicted (‘frequently’ or more often than predictions from an alternative hypothesis). On the other hand, it is accepted if its predictions are not contradicted. In short, testing is by predictive implications, not by the realism of assumptions. Thus, what matters is the predictive performance of a theory relative to that of alternative theories. Friedman (1953) has two interesting examples that are given in Boxes 1 and 2 below, which are used as analogies to further explain this Friedmanist hypothesis.

#### 1. The Leaves of a Tree

In this famous example, Friedman considers the density of leaves around a tree. He suggests the hypothesis that the leaves are positioned *as if* each leaf deliberately sought to maximize the amount of sunlight it receives, given the position of its neighbors, *as if* it knew the physical

laws determining the amount of sunlight that would be received in various positions and could move rapidly or instantaneously from any one position to any other desired and unoccupied position. Now, some of the more obvious implications of this hypothesis are clearly consistent with experience: for example, leaves are in general denser on the south than on the north side of trees but, as the hypothesis implies, less so or not at all on the northern slope of a hill or when the south side of the trees is shaded in some other way. Is the hypothesis rendered unacceptable or invalid because, so far as we know, leaves do not ‘deliberately’ or consciously ‘seek’, have not been to school and learned the relevant laws of science or the mathematics required to calculate the ‘optimum’ position, and cannot move from position to position? Clearly, none of these contradictions of the hypothesis is vitally relevant; the phenomena involved are not within the ‘class of phenomena the hypothesis is designed to explain’; the hypothesis does not assert that leaves do these things but only that their density is the same *as if* they did. Despite the apparent falsity of the ‘assumptions’ of the hypothesis, it has great plausibility because of the conformity of its implications with observation. We are inclined to ‘explain’ its validity on the ground that sunlight contributes to the growth of leaves and, hence, leaves will grow denser or more putative leaves survive where there is more sun. The result achieved by purely passive adaptation to external circumstances is the same as the result that would be achieved by deliberate accommodation of them. This alternative hypothesis is more attractive than the constructed hypothesis, not because its ‘assumptions’ are more ‘realistic’ but rather because it is part of a more general theory that applies to a wider variety of phenomena, of which the position of leaves around a tree is a special case, has more implications capable of being contradicted, and has failed to be contradicted under a wider variety of circumstances. The direct evidence for the growth of leaves is in this way strengthened by the indirect evidence from the other phenomena to which the more general theory applies.

(Extracted from Friedman 1953)

#### 2. The Billiard Player

A largely parallel example involving human behavior has been used by Friedman and one of his co-author, Savage. In their

example, they considered the problem of predicting the shots made by an expert billiard player. It seems not at all unreasonable that excellent predictions would be yielded by the hypothesis that the billiard player made his shots *as if* he knew the complicated mathematical formulas that would give the optimum directions of travel, could estimate accurately by eye the angles, etc., describing the location of the balls, could make lightning calculations from the formulas, and could then make the balls travel in the direction indicated by the formulas. Our confidence in this hypothesis is not based on the belief that billiard players, even expert ones, can or do go through the process described; it derives rather from the belief that, unless in some way or other they were capable of reaching essentially the same result, they would not in fact be *expert* billiard players. It is only a short step from these examples to the economic hypothesis that under a wide range of circumstances, individual firms behave *as if* they were seeking rationally to maximize their expected returns (generally, if misleadingly, called 'profits') and had full knowledge of the data needed to succeed in this attempt; *as if*, that is, they knew the relevant cost and demand functions, calculated marginal cost and marginal revenue from all actions open to them, and pushed each line of action to the point at which the relevant marginal cost and marginal revenue were equal. Now, of course, businessmen do not actually and literally solve the system of simultaneous equations in terms of which the mathematical economist finds it convenient to express this hypothesis, any more than leaves or billiard players explicitly go through complicated mathematical calculations .... The billiard player, if asked how he decides where to hit the ball, may say that he 'just figures it out' but then also rubs a rabbit's foot just to make sure; and the businessman may well say that he prices at average cost, with of course some minor deviations when the market makes it necessary. The one statement is about as helpful as the other, and neither is a relevant test of the associated hypothesis. Confidence in the maximization-of-returns hypothesis is justified by evidence of a very different character. This evidence is in part similar to that adduced on behalf of the billiard-player hypothesis; unless the behavior of businessmen in some way or other approximated behavior consistent with the maximization of returns, it

seems unlikely that they would remain in business for long. Let the apparent immediate determinant of business behavior be anything at all – habitual reaction, random chance, or what not. Whenever this determinant happens to lead to behavior consistent with rational and informed maximization of returns, the business will prosper and acquire resources with which to expand; whenever it does not, the business will tend to lose resources and can be kept in existence only by the addition of resources from outside. The process of 'natural selection' thus helps to validate the hypothesis – or, rather, given natural selection, acceptance of the hypothesis can be based largely on the judgment that it summarizes appropriately the conditions for survival.

(Extracted from Friedman 1953)

After an examination of Friedman's examples and their implications for economic methodology, Maki (2003) noted that the key thesis of Friedman (1953) is to hail unrealistic assumptions, and prescribe against the pursuit of realistic assumptions. This has emancipatory effect on that top ranked part of economics that is mathematically highly refined and rigorous, but is also accused for being unconnected to real world facts and issues. The strong version of Friedman's view about unrealistic assumption acknowledges the claim that 'unrealisticness' is a virtue. He said, 'truly important and significant hypotheses will be found to have "assumptions" that are widely inaccurate descriptive representation of reality and, in general, the more significant the theory, the more unrealistic the assumptions .... The reason is simple; a hypothesis is important if it explains much by little, by abstracting the common and the crucial' (Friedman 1953). Many readers have found the strong version unacceptable, even outrageous. According to Maki (2003), it appears that Friedman himself does not hold either version of the thesis consistently or without qualifications. It appears that, for him, predictive tests serve as indirect tests of the approximate truth of assumptions. The required degree of approximation is relative to the purposes that a theory is supposed to serve: 'the relevant question to ask about the "assumptions" of a theory is . . . whether they are sufficiently good approximations for the purpose at hand' (Friedman 1953:15). And the way to measure whether the required degree has been achieved is to put the theory in predic-

tive test: complete 'realism' is clearly unattainable, and the question whether a theory is realistic 'enough' can be settled only by seeing whether it yields predictions that are good enough for the purpose in hand or that are better than predictions from alternative theories (Friedman 1953:41). This implies that the unrealism of assumptions is not irrelevant at all, something to be ignored, even for Friedman (Maki 2003). On the contrary, one is advised to pay attention to their actual degree of realism and to judge whether it is sufficiently high for the purposes at hand. Another way of putting these ideas is to say that some of the assumptions of a theory are to be paraphrased as statements about the negligibility of a factor, and that predictive tests are a way of assessing such claims about negligibility (Musgrave 1981; Mäki 2000, cited in Maki 2003; Friedman 1953). Summing up his view about the realism of assumptions, Friedman said: 'The confusion between descriptive accuracy and analytical relevance has led not only to criticisms of economic theory on largely irrelevant grounds, but also to a misunderstanding of economic theory and a misdirection of efforts to repair supposed defects'. Thus, for Friedman:

A meaningful scientific hypothesis or theory typically asserts that certain forces are, and other forces are not, important in understanding a particular class of phenomena. It is frequently convenient to present such a hypothesis by stating that the phenomena it is desired to predict behave in the world of observation as if they occurred in a hypothetical and highly simplified world containing only the forces that the hypothesis asserts to be important. In general, there is more than one way to formulate such a description – more than one set of 'assumptions' in terms of which the theory can be presented. The choice among such alternative assumptions is made on the grounds of the resulting economy, clarity, and precision in presenting the hypothesis; their capacity to bring indirect evidence to bear on the validity of the hypothesis by suggesting some of its implications that can be readily checked with observation or by bringing out its connection with other hypotheses dealing with related phenomena; and similar considerations. Such a theory cannot be tested by comparing its

'assumptions' directly with 'reality'. Indeed, there is no meaningful way in which this can be done. Complete 'realism' is clearly unattainable, and the question whether a theory is realistic 'enough' can be settled only by seeing whether it yields predictions that are good enough for the purpose in hand or that are better than predictions from alternative theories. Yet, the belief that a theory can be tested by the realism of its assumptions independently of the accuracy of its predictions is widespread and the source of much of the perennial criticism of economic theory as unrealistic. Such criticism is largely irrelevant and, in consequence, most attempts to reform economic theory that it has stimulated have been unsuccessful (Friedman 1953:40-41).

This positivist methodology is widely contested. Some researchers argue that the purpose of scientific theories is not to make prediction but to explain things. Predictions are then tests of whether the explanations are correct. But one has to test the whole logical chain of explanation, not just the conclusion reached at the end (Beinhocker 2006:49). Beinhocker (2006) illustrated this in his book, *The Origins of Wealth*, by stating that one could propose a theory that would explain that the sky is blue by assuming the existence of giants who paint it blue every night while we are sleeping. Taken to an extreme, Friedman's logic would say that the assumption of giants is irrelevant as long as the theory makes the correct prediction, that the sky is blue, which it does. The argument, however, is that one cannot just test the correctness of the conclusion. Rather, to accept such a theory, one would also have to observe the giants in action. Beinhocker (2006) noted, as the economic philosopher Daniel Hausman has put it, that one must 'look under the hood' of a theory to see that the causal chain of explanation is valid as well (Beinhocker 2006:49-50). Another interesting illustration Beinhocker (2006) offers is the map of a particular place or city (say Cape Town), and the reality (i.e. the city of Cape Town). The only perfect map of Cape Town is Cape Town itself, which is too big to fit into your pocket or car when you drive across Cape Town. Just as map makers idealize and leave out certain features of terrain, scientists simplify idealize their theories. What is included or left out depends on the purpose of the map or theory (i.e. if you are driving

across the country, say South Africa, you may need only the highways. If you are, on the other hand, looking for a particular house in Cape Town, you may need a detailed one). Likewise, a cosmologist might be looking at the universe at the level of galaxies, while a chemist might be looking at it at the level of atoms – each researcher needs different types and amounts of idealization. Hence, Beinhocker (2006) noted that the key is that both the coarse and fine-grained maps (and theories) must agree with each other and the observations of underlying reality. If a highway map places a river in a particular location, the river must be in the same location on the local map too, and must agree with observation of where the river actually is ... in map making, one cannot just move roads and rivers around for the sole purpose of making the maps easier to draw (Beinhocker 2006:50). In the same line of argument as that of Beinhocker (2006), there are also other groups of economists who disagree with Friedman's methodological approach and subscribe to an alternative methodology. One such tradition is what is called the 'Realist Approach to Economics'. The realist approach to economics differs from the mainstream approach of 'deductivism'. In the latter tradition, we have approaches such as that of Friedman's 'positive economics' or Karl Popper's 'falsification', where you have a theory or a model and a hypothesis to be proved or falsified (although some argue that the Friedman test is a specific methodological principle, which is not inferred from any preferred philosophy of science, such as Popperian – see for instance Boylan and O'Gorman 1995). In response to the Friedman thesis noted, Boylan and O'Gorman (1995) argue that of course all assumptions are unrealistic, as Friedman says, but some assumptions are more realistic than others. For them, thus, the 'realisticness' of assumptions need to be judged in the context of background knowledge such as observable behaviour of firms and consumers in economics, available knowledge of human information processing, the psychology and philosophy of human action and the like. The hypothesis such as 'optimization' may be unrealistic if the evidence noted does not converge to that in reality. These authors finally noted that in conditions where such evidence of convergence is lacking, and we hypothesize that firms will collapse if they are not profit maximizers, 'analogical arguments based on limited similarities between

a business firm and billiard player are no substitutes for a thorough empirical investigation into the collapse of firms over both the short and long run'. In short, the collapse of firms in the modern world 'cannot be settled by analogy to billiard players or to the density of leaves on a tree... it is a matter for empirical investigation' (Boylan and O'Gorman, 1995:193-195). Similarly, Kaldor commented about the unrealistic assumptions of neoclassical model by saying that most of them are either unverifiable – such as profit maximization – or are directly contradicted by observation. For Kaldor, the latter includes, *inter alia*, perfect competition, production function, etc., none of which are operationally defined in relation to empirical material (see Boylan and Oborman 1995 and Kaldor 1972, 1985). Thus, for Kaldor, science is '... a body of theorems based on assumptions that are empirically derived and which embody hypothesis that are capable of verification both in regard to assumptions and the predictions'. One important philosophical approach that subscribes to the basic tenets of this Kaldorian approach is what is called the 'realist' approach to economics. The 'realist' approach aims at identifying, explaining and illuminating the structures and mechanism, powers and tendencies that govern or facilitate the course of events. The scientific objective is to identify relatively enduring structures and to understand their characteristic ways of acting. Explanation, as opposed to prediction, is central in this approach and entails providing an account of those structures, powers and tendencies. Hinging upon such an approach, one of the components of the process of assessing the explanatory power of some hypothesis is checking the reality of any mechanism postulated. Lawson (1997) argues that:

... it is not good enough to argue, as Friedman (1953), that the hypothesis of mobile leaves moving about the branches of the tree in search of light explains the distribution of leaves on the tree, when we know the hypothesis of mobile leaves to be false. It is not good enough because, unlike Friedman, we have accepted (through argument and evidence) that the explanatory goal is to identify mechanism, etc., really productive of any identified phenomenon of interest. Thus, any hypothesis couched in terms of some mechanism known *not* to exist or to be in play cannot be said to be

explanatory in the requisite sense at all. It is for this reason that assessing the reality of some hypothesized mechanism can be subsumed under the head of assessing that hypothesis' explanatory power (Lawson 1997:217).

Hahn (1985), as quoted in Lawson (1997), has also picked on Friedman's example and noted that:

'.....As if prediction methodology' has taken over [in mainstream economics]. Recall Friedman's example: leaves on a plant orientate themselves as if the plant were maximizing surface area of the leaves exposed to the sun. This may well predict the orientation of leaves but it is not an account which we understand precisely because we know that plants are not, as Friedman notes, capable of any calculation. So we do not leave matters there. We investigate chemical feedback mechanisms which account for the observation and which we understand. They fit to what we know generally about chemical substance in quite different contexts and into what we quite generally stipulate about casual process (Hahn 1985, as quoted by Lawson 1997).

Having these contending views, we may now return to the question of where this does leave us about the importance of the realism of the assumptions in our economic models, in particular in the context of developing countries. Do we have to believe the policy implications of trade models if their assumptions are unrealistic? This is a major philosophical (or methodology of science) question.

### **A Suggested Methodological Approach for Economic Research in Africa**

Given the above contending views, some of the problems researchers in developing countries might face while following the Popperian (positivist) approach noted above include the possibility of excluding rival explanations *ex-hypothesis*, as well as the difficulty of obtaining 'evidence' or 'facts'. Moreover, as noted by Feyerabend (1975), a method that adheres to a binding principle stands in contradiction to the history of research/ science. Indeed, openness in research, and Feyerabend's principle of 'anything goes', may be defended under all circumstances. However, as Dutt (1990) notes, the problem that Feyerabend does not address is how a researcher may become versed in all the relevant theories pertaining to a particular

problem. Dutt's answer to this question is, 'by specializing in areas or problems' (Dutt 1990:6). One might add, by an explicit recognition of the fact that the researcher is dealing with an aspect of a problem, which is presumed to fit the overall structure, not as a jig-saw-puzzle but as an integral part of it – i.e. there is always a context. This implies an obvious trade-off between depth (in the sense of deeply focusing on the particular), and breadth (which entails focusing on the overall picture). The approach suggested here departs from the Popperian one in favour of a realist approach. It is our view that the adoption of such an approach represents a much more fruitful avenue of research in developing countries. This methodological framework is noted in the works of, *inter alia*, Lipton (1991, 2004), Mukhrjee and Wuyts (1991), Wuyts (1992a, 1992b), Lawson (1989, 1997, 2003) and Kaldor (1985). The overall framework adopted in such an approach is Lipton's 'inference to the best explanation' (or 'contrastive inference'), which looks for residual differences in similar histories of facts and foils as a fruitful method for determining a likely cause (Lipton 1991:78). This approach entails testing competing hypotheses in the process of research. On a practical level, a more refined version of this approach is proposed by Mukhrjee and Wuyts (1991), in which a *working hypothesis* is confronted with the evidence and various rival explanations. Wuyts (1992b) argues that 'the best way to test an idea (wrapped up as a hypothesis) is not merely to confront it with its own evidence, but to compare it with rival explanations. It then becomes easier to detect which explanation has more loose ends or will need to resort to *ad hoc* justifications to cope with criticism' (Wuyts 1992b:4). Once a working hypothesis has been arrived at, the dialogue between data and alternative explanations may best be handled by exploratory data analysis, which comprises graphical display, techniques of diagnostic analysis and transformation of data (Mukherjee and Wuyts 1991:1). This does not imply that theory has no role to play. Rather, that theory is important 'as a guide to pose interesting questions that we shall explore with data' (Wuyts 1992a:2). The generation of working hypotheses, and the subsequent examination of these, may be pursued along Kaldorian lines (Lawson 1989, Lawson et al., 1996, Kaldor 1985). In this realist approach to economic analysis, the researcher is free to start from

Kaldorian 'stylized' facts – broader tendencies ignoring individual details – and to construct a working hypothesis and model that fits with these facts. The final stage of the analysis entails subjecting the entities postulated at the modelling or explanatory stage to further continuous scrutiny (Lawson 1989; see also Boylan and O'Gorman 1995). Building on this methodological background, a research could be divided into three main steps. In the first of these steps, a theoretical literature study in line with the research problem could be undertaken. This would help to shape alternative theoretical explanations, in order that the questions and problems posed might be more clearly defined. In the second step, the dialogue between the data and alternative explanations will be explored. At this stage in the analysis, the researcher is faced with the practical problem of being open to all conceivable explanations for a particular phenomenon. However, economists might differ on their view on a particular economic phenomenon (Dutt 1990:6). Based on this line of thinking, the underlying view of structuralist economists is that the African economy has its own peculiarities. Moreover, it is a fact that different institutions and agents, both in the developed and developing countries, have different behavioral rules by which they operate. This, in turn, affects the functioning of the economy. Since such structures are explicitly incorporated in the analysis, the suggested approach may be seen as lying within the structuralist school (see, for example, Taylor 1983, 1991, 2004; FitzGerald and Vos 1989; FitzGerald 1993, 2003; Weeks 2011; Alemayehu 2002). Thus, the amalgamation of the view of an economy with the 'inference to best explanation' leads one to work under a specific paradigm *a la* Khun. The wider context of 'inference to best explanation' is not lost, however, because as research progresses, the view about the economy and judgment about theories follow a dynamic process of learning. Once the empirical exploration is conducted within this framework, the final step is to depict the stylized facts, which emerge from the dialogue between data and theory, using modeling techniques which, in turn, will be further scrutinized using observable facts. We are not saying this is 'the best' approach, but it is a better alternative approach to the neo-classical approach that has dominated research and policy making in Africa for the last three decades.

## Conclusion and Way Forward

We may begin by highlighting some of the major hurdles that today's African economic researchers may encounter in the course of their economic research. This list may include:

1. Their economy is usually analyzed by expatriate consultants whose only economics is mainstream neoclassical analysis *a la* the World Bank and IMF. These are powerful forces, not only because they hold the key to aid for African governments but also because they are intellectually dominant, owing to the resource and publication outlet they have for their type of research.
2. Critical and progressive thinkers on economics in Africa have worked on another extremely radical perspective of political economy (notice Amin's work here), using a Marxist approach. Such an approach, legitimate as it may be, has given little weight to quantitative economics and the operation of markets and economic agents' behavior at both micro and macro levels. We think there is a need to be open to other heterodox approaches which give due emphasis to the working of the market economy, and yet recognise the limitation of market (and hence market failure) as well as the limitation of government (and hence government failure). Such a heterodox approach uses both analytical (narrative) and quantitative (mathematical) approaches rigorously.
3. Finally, the global economy is dynamic and challenging. It is also fast changing with the emergence of newly developing countries such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and East Asians fast growing economies. Yet, African economists do not have enough resources and interest from their governments' to scan the changing global environment and inform policy.

This calls for a research program under which critical African economists articulate their arguments, share their ideas, advance their careers and push their research agenda to the policy formulation level.

Given the philosophical framework noted as methodology in the previous section, it will be a fruitful effort to adopt the approach of heterodox economists, including that of ECA 1989, in conducting research in Africa. This approach begins from the premise that an 'An economy has a structure if its institutions and the

behavior of its members make some patterns of resource allocation and evolution substantially more likely than others. Economic analysis is structuralist when it takes these factors as the foundation stones for its theories' (' Taylor 1983). The Structuralist/ heterodox approach embraces three premises (FitzGerald & Vos 1989; FitzGerald 1992, 2004):

- i. Economies are built up from agents such as firms, governments and households who are not simple optimizers but whose behavior depends on the context of institutions, production organization or social class in which they operate;
- ii. Markets may show rigidities, perverse response to price owing to institutional behavior, power, imperfect information and class interest;
- iii. Institutional setting and related market rigidities are basic structural features but are not unchangeable over time.

In addition, the structuralist approach (Taylor 1983, 2004; FitzGerald 1993) emphasize:

- i. The role of interest groups/ class and distribution of income and pursue a political economy approach in its analysis of economic issues;
- ii. The importance of intuitions and economic structures in shaping agents behaviors;
- iii. The possibility of both quantity and price clearing in markets (prices could be formulated either competitively (flexi-price) or as mark-up over prime cost (fixi-price) depending on the degree of monopoly firms have);
- iv. The assumption that saving propensities differ by class;
- v. That short-run models are set-up in variables normalized by capital stock (to emphasize growth and profit as opposed to levels of investment and payment to factors;
- vi. That macro balance is decomposed sectorally (stability is attained by minimizing sectoral excess demand to zero – with Jacobean checked for model stability);
- vii. That imports are split in several ways (capital goods as a function of investment; intermediate as a function of output) as different types of imports might have different impacts across social groups;

- viii. That long-run issues are investigated by setting up transitions between steady states in which all variables growth at constant rate;
- ix. Finally, that direction of causality varies model to model (that is all what analysis is about).

This heterodox approach is a relevant approach for conducting economic research in Africa because African economies have unique structures that emerged from their colonial history. It has been shown (see Alemayehu 2002) that African nations were in possession of an integrated and autonomous economic structure prior to their intensive interactions with Europeans. It is hard to speculate what the future of such a structure might have been in the absence of colonialism. However, it goes without saying that it would not have been what it is now, since clearly the present is the result of a specific historical process. More specifically, historical interaction with today's developed countries has shaped the structure of the economic activity of African nations. Indeed, economic domination accompanied by colonization has further cemented this structure. Thus, given such historical process, it is not surprising that almost all African nations had become exporters of a limited range of primary products and importers of manufactured goods with weak human capital base by the time of independence in the 1960s. This was further accompanied by a demand for external finance when export earnings were not sufficient to finance the level of public expenditures required for maintaining and expanding the commodity exporting economy. This structure has not changed in any meaningful way even today.

The historical legacy also shows that African countries generally inherited extractive, as opposed to developmental institutions (See Alemayehu 1998, 2002; Acemoglu 2001). These structure basically shapes the behaviour of economic agents and hence the economic outcome. It is imperative to take this structure on board in economic analysis. If that is done the approach used is a heterodox/ structuralist approach. It has to be noted in passing that this approach is what Lin (2011) named as 'old structuralist' as opposed to his 'new structuralist' approach. His 'new structuralist' (which could better be termed as 'neoclassical structuralism') approach does not seem to be that relevant

for Africa for two reasons. First, it is extremely dependent on the importance of the theory of comparative advantage (which can be theoretically challenged as less important to developing countries compared to absolute advantage – see Porter (1995), Shiak (1984), Alemayehu (2011)). Second, although his approach seems to recognize the role of active government and the importance of provision of infrastructure, it is completely devoid of the political economy analysis such as the role of classes and interest groups. Given his important position as chief economist of the World Bank, this is an understandable omission. Thus, what he called ‘old structuralist’ and what we call ‘structuralist’ or heterodox approach is the approach suggested here.

Having such an approach, in order to realize the objective of carrying out relevant research in Africa and inform policy, it is imperative to link with economists and universities that work in the rigorous political economy tradition that includes quantitative analysis.

## Note

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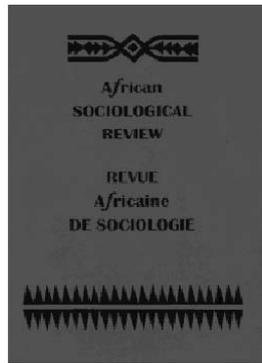
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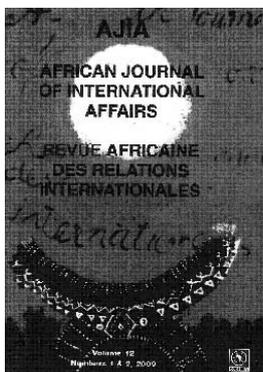
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