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Response to Mkandawire

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Response

Richard Cawood

No condition is permanent.
—*African proverb*

Africa's marginalization is all too real. For example, if you open the *New York Times* very little is ever written about Africa, other than brief reminders of disaster. In the newspaper's business section, the only acknowledgment of Africa's place in the global economy is a listing of the South African stock exchange and the dollar exchange rates for South Africa and Egypt. London's *Economist* has bureaus in Britain, the United States, the Americas, Europe, and Asia—but not one in Africa. Granted, there are frequently articles in the press about Africa, but they generally fall under the broader category of "international." Beyond that, Africa is invisible.

Concealed by popular and academic neglect of Africa is the genesis of a frightening problem. World Bank statistics estimate an increase in real economic growth rates of more than 1 percent in the next ten years. But population growth in Africa, the most rapid in the world, is likely to remain so high that, despite ten years of economic growth, the World Bank predicts that standards of living in sub-Saharan Africa will decline, and per capita income in the year 2000 will be less than in 1980.

This is Africa's stark future by way of statistical forecasts. Serious discussion of this crisis is essential, and I would like to thank Mr. Mkandawire for his richly argued analysis which initiates our conversation about Africa's development prospects in this era of rapid globalization.

Our dialogue has ramifications far beyond just Africa. Thoughtful inquiry into Africa's predicament has universal significance, especially in this time when the manifestations of globalization are being made concrete. Challenges that face Africa and the world include: escaping economic dependency, political instability, democratic consolidation, environmental threats, and refugee repatriation; the list is endless. We must be imaginative in constructing prescriptions. Regarding Africa, we must escape traditional disciplinary boundaries, and approach the continent and its development dilemmas more holistically—not only

from an economic perspective but also from the observation points of politics, society, and environment.

My response to Mr. Mkandawire's essay uses political economy and development discourse as framing references. At the center of my investigation is the paradox that informs Mkandawire's thinking: the African state is both a root *cause* of and a potential *solution* to Africa's development dilemma. In my three-part analysis, I first will review Mkandawire's thesis and some of his major contributions to the topic. Second, I will articulate concerns that arise from his conceptions of "state" and "nationalism." Third, I will add my own perspective by grappling with two concepts that are implicit in our conversation, *development* and *economic space*. I conclude optimistically that Africa's unfinished agenda can indeed be realized.

The fact that development either leaves behind, or in some ways even creates, large areas of poverty, stagnation, marginality and actual exclusion from social and economic progress is too obvious and too urgent to be overlooked.¹

Thandika Mkandawire argues forcefully that globalization and economic development have passed Africa by. This marginalization has an external origin—international financial institutions (IFIs) and other international actors have imposed detrimental policies upon Africa—and an internal impulse—Africa's lagging development is blamed upon weak states and poor leadership. Africa's unfinished development agenda thus demands an examination of state-building through the prism of African nationalism.

The strength of Mkandawire's work is that it initiates a serious conversation on development in Africa in a global context by integrating a complex array of economic, political, social, and historical variables into a comprehensive and provocative analysis of Africa's economic and political marginalization. His criticism of the role of IFIs in Africa is remarkably prescient, given the current discussion of their role in global economic space. He cogently argues that IFIs have long been

problematic in Africa and are to blame for much of the development dilemma of the continent.

In constructing an approach to development in Africa, he breaks the situation into five “tasks”: decolonization, nation-building, economic and social development, democratization, and regional cooperation. This breakdown greatly enhances our understanding of the complexities of Africa’s marginalization and of its strategies to promote development. This allows him to present very solid solutions, and emphasizes the vital importance of regional cooperation to take advantage of economies of scale and, particularly, the building of the state to provide the foundations for development.

Much as I appreciated Mkandawire’s thoughtful writing, I believe our understanding of globalization and Africa’s unfinished agenda could be enhanced by examining two large fronts: first, the African state as problem and as solution and, second, African nationalism as the model for state rebuilding.

The African State

The idea of *state* is at the center of Africa’s development problems. Two paradoxes inform Mkandawire’s work. First, the state is part of the problem, as well as the solution. Second, state-building is a critical exercise in an era when the logic of globalization undermines the authority of state structures.

What is the condition of the postcolonial African state? Patrick Chabal writes that it is “both overdeveloped and soft. It was overdeveloped because it was erected, artificially, on the foundations of the colonial state. It did not grow organically from civil society. It was soft because, although in theory all-powerful, it scarcely had the administrative or political means of its dominance.”²

Robert Jackson amplifies this with his concept of “quasi-states,” which are independent largely through international courtesy. Particularly in Africa, the state exists as a political entity by virtue of an externally conceived right to self-determination that does not demonstrate significant capacity for “effective and civil” government. Jackson contends that there is a dual international civil regime in which two standards of statehood exist: the empirical standard of the West on one

hand and the juridical standard of many of the African states on the other. The historical perspective is that the major African colonial powers were economically devastated following World War II. This, concurrent with a growing acceptance of the right to self-determination, led the core powers to slowly open what had once been exclusionary institutions of state to local participation as a preparation for democratic self-government. For the most part, colonized people seized the chance for apprenticeship in state-building, recognizing it as a way to hasten independence and legitimize their claims to be able to rule themselves. Upon independence, however, many of the fragile constitutional frameworks were weakened, and one-party states and dictatorships prevailed; governments were party to their own ruin through incompetence and "kleptocracy." Ironically, these dictatorships also served a valuable purpose by concentrating authority and securing external boundaries.

The African state continues to be problematic, with only a tenuous grasp on power and authority. This situation results from a lack of experience with institutions of state, as well as being undermined by a combination of local and international forces. Vivid illustrations of this instability are the implosion of the Somali state and the breakdown of the state in Liberia, Zaire, Sudan, and Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the state has enormous resiliency. It occupies a central space in organizing Africa. As the wave of democratization sweeps across the continent, the tenets of statehood are becoming embedded in political and economic life.

African Nationalism

Offering African nationalism, a powerful ideology articulated in the early postindependence days of Africa, as a strategy for aiding state-building and development makes me uneasy. Robert Cox writes powerfully that "as reality changes, old concepts have to be adjusted or rejected and new concepts forged." The African reality has changed. African nationalism seems bankrupt, a relic of times and leaders long since dead, that is irrelevant today.

Using African nationalism as a lens for understanding contemporary Africa creates a trap. It creates a paradox: greater *relative* freedom from Europe actually subordinated Africa further to the intellectual premises of Western political philosophy and development. Renewing an ideology of African nationalism traps Africa in Western concep-

tions, what Fukuyama calls “historical” societies dependent on the posthistorical world, in a relative situation defined by comparison to Europe and the West. African nationalism is a macro-theory that detracts attention from what is central to development — an escape from external and internal, urban-biased colonialism.

A nationalism that is truly indigenous and local must be constructed so that attention can focus on domestic sectors and agriculture, the foundations of development initiatives. Benedict Anderson’s language of imagining communities, of constructing social order, allows for dynamic and varied definitions and applications of ideas of nationalism that free the collective imagination from domination. This sense of nationalism shores up of state structures, which are central to development.

Development and Economic Space

Concerning Africa and the implications for its development in a complex, global world order, it is essential that we consider two fundamental concepts: development and economic space.

How should we think of development? The United Nations offers this clarification: “The problem of the underdeveloped countries is not just growth, but development... Development is growth plus change. Change, in turn, is social and cultural *as well as economic*, and qualitative as well as quantitative.... The key concept must be improved quality of people’s life.”

Transformative change is fundamental. The impetus for such change—development—has to be an *internal* impulse generated when local people marshal their collective resources in order to transform their situation economically, politically, socially, and environmentally. Positive development results when domestic forces initiate long-term, directional structural change and progress.

Development is neither automatic nor spontaneous nor inherent in globalization. Deepak Lal argued optimistically that economic growth would diffuse through the global economy by means of the “trickle-down effects of trade;” that is, a demand for primary products by the developed countries would stimulate economic growth in the developing world. Obviously, the “trickle” stopped before it reached Africa: the continent became mired in stagnation. Think also of Rostow, who

argued that countries can expect to go through five stages of economic growth, beginning with the traditional economy and progressing from preconditioning and economic take-off to eventual maturity. The second stage of development, preconditioning, should witness the emergence of a strong central government with respect for law and order. It is at this second stage that Africa stalled. African states have historically been weak and unable to sustain economic growth by reinvesting percentages of output each year, a necessary step by Rostow's reckoning.

Successful development depends upon the commitment and skills of human actors. Mkandawire's characterization of globalization as a process that is not completely inexorable but is affected by human agency confirms this realization. A critical question, then, is: What agents/actors are best suited to promote development? Any externally motivated development strategy has potentially devastating effects. Foreign aid, for example, is an external impulse that limits the opportunities for internal transformation by attempting to alleviate suffering and restore some preexisting equilibrium. But its lack of transformative power and its tendency to create and perpetuate aid dependency combine to diminish its usefulness. International investment is another external force and a favorite prescription for encouraging economic development. Yet international investment and transnational capital flows too often weaken the state by creating multiple and overlapping spheres of authority and accountability that undermine the state's traditional control over sources of power and capital. Thus, the paradox: Foreign investment, vital to the process of building states and institutions in the developing world, simultaneously undermines these same states and institutions. I support the solution that Mkandawire offers, which is similar to one proposed by Samir Amin. Both agree that the superior agent for developmental change is the actor that can best marshal internal resources—the state. A state is a geographically bounded political entity with some recognition of its legitimacy and authority as a regulatory structure over its citizens. Simon Kuznets highlights the importance of a coherent state for development to occur:

Clearly some minimum political stability is necessary if members of the economic society are to plan ahead and be assured of a relatively stable relation between their contribution to economic activity and their rewards. One could hardly expect much economic growth under conditions of political turmoil...and unpredictable changes in regimes.³

This proposed solution to the problem of development assumes that states have control over “economic space” within their boundaries. The necessity for mapping this space takes on special significance because of the powerful transformative effects of globalization. Traditionally, the discipline of economics has largely dealt with *homo economicus* and market transactions anchored in states. Now, however, the rapid globalization of economic life has profoundly altered the traditional relationship between state and economy. The contemporary market system is “lifted above” the states where its operating units are located, extending economic relations beyond the political authority of any one state. This great transformation of economic organization, to use the language of Karl Polanyi, feeds into the “divisive dialectic” that is globalization. The global economy appears to threaten the foundations of the local, precipitating an identity crisis in which the dominant capitalist logic and mass consumer culture promises to crush the local and indigenous. Conceptions of identity and culture, therefore, become contested spaces, where the global clashes with the local. The almost Newtonian reaction is the assertion of difference that prompts nationalist responses.

Thus, the vicious circle begins. Nationalism feeds the process of state-building which is central to the process of development. Yet the continued pressures of globalization, especially in economic space, contribute to the undermining of the traditional authority of the state. Indeed, Africa’s predicament illustrates how the spatial reach of the modern state does not fix borders impermeable to other networks of interaction.

But the state is a logical starting point for analyzing development and policy. Events in Africa justify my confidence and optimism. Samuel Huntington writes encouragingly of the “second wave” of democracy that is securing state-building exercises in Africa. There are bright spots on the horizon: South Africa, Botswana, Uganda, Mauritius, Namibia, and even Mozambique are now making rapid strides. Africa’s future leaders are now more likely to be democratically elected.

Perhaps we should think of Africa’s development prospects as an African renaissance. Nelson Mandela, in his farewell address to the

United Nations, offers hope for Africa's future by recalling the amazing process of transformation in South Africa:

As I sit in Qunu and grow as ancient as its hills, I will continue to entertain the hope that there has emerged a cadre of leaders in my own country and region, on my continent and in the world, which will not allow that any should be denied their freedom as we were; that any should be turned into refugees as we were; that any should be condemned to go hungry as we were; that any should be stripped of their human dignity as we were.... I will continue to hope that Africa's renaissance will strike deep roots and blossom forever, without regard to the changing seasons.⁴

Notes

1. *International Social Development Review*, no. 3 (1971).
2. Patrick Chabal, cited in Young 1994, p. 6.
3. Simon Kuznets as quoted in A. Fosu, "Political Instability and Economic Growth: Evidence from Sun-Saharan Africa," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 40, no. 4 (1992).
4. *New York Times*, 22 September 1998.

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