

WHY AFRICA?

By Bob Geldof

Delivered at the Bar Human Rights Commission bi-annual lecture at St Paul's Cathedral on 20th April 2004.

When I returned from my last trip to Africa I asked the Prime Minister to commission a new version of the Brandt Report. Dismayed at the continuing chaos of Africa and our confused response to the many tragedies I had witnessed yet again I felt that an attempt to understand the newer factors at work in Africa was necessary before we could even begin to compose a workable solution to the terrible conditions of the lives of the poorest and most wretched people on our planet.

Willy Brandt along significantly with Britain's Ted Heath had written the seminal development document of his time. He had tried to analyse the structural and economic differences between our world the successful North and theirs, the impoverished South. It is possible to argue now that Brandt's task was perhaps easier than our own. He lived in a political world of fixed certainty. A stasis of terror. The apparently predictable solidity of the Cold War powers, where the agreed battleground would be us in Europe but the battle would be held in abeyance for now under the damocletian threat of what was called Mutually Assured Destruction, with the wry but perfect acronym MAD. A rare example of Pentagon humour.

Whatever pertinence Brandt had for his time - and it was significant, the unfortunate reality was that at that point of their lives, although all of Brandt's commissioners had influence, none held power. Brandt could only suggest, he could never implement.

Besides, the fixed world of which Brandt spoke soon dissolved in the collapse of the Soviet Union and a newer stranger more fluid, less predictive world emerged from

the generally benign chaotic aftermath of the unlamented Cold War and our own murderous 20th century.

It was into that world that I stepped when I returned again to Africa. 20 years ago when I had first pitched up in Ethiopia almost by accident and frightened by what I was doing and feeling out of my depth and sickened by what I saw, I still understood that this was Brandt's world. Here was the tyrannical Marxist regime, here a civil war played out by competing proxy interests, here was grotesque environmental degradation and here the biblical millions, huddled in their hungry misery suffering under the common historic whip of the African condition.

It was difficult to see a resolution to the slow crucifixion of a continent then. What influence could one possibly have upon the great powers. How were the Kremlin walls to be broken down, the Pentagon to be breached. Live Aid was a decent attempt at a Jericho like trumpet blast but although we then began talking seriously at the highest level about Africa (and it seems almost ridiculous now that the first time the UN debated Africa was in 1986), very little could be moved, conditions could be temporarily tempered, but African thug puppets or racist regimes would remain in power bankrupting their people, we could ameliorate some of the effects of our onerous trade policies, but Africa that almost overwhelmingly beautiful continent would stay in a convenient chaotic state enabling us to shrug and turn, and leave it to its misery, removed from the stately progress of the rest of our world. And that can be no longer tenable.

20 years ago next year I stood in the death camps of northern Ethiopia. As far as I could see in the denuded and blasted moonscape about me, people, often naked streamed out of the hills and plains in long lines to a place they'd heard others had come to sit and wait and die perhaps, until someone found them and could maybe help. Often they were tiny scraps of humanity, aged 5 or 6 whose parents had long since collapsed on the unmarked trails but had urged them to continue on.

In the camps nations huddled. Elders tried to look after the youngsters until they died of the many diseases rampaging through the weakened immune systems of the starving. Grain was consumed whole. For the tiny ones in the throes of starvation and dehydration the effect of the unhusked grain was to tear the lining of the stomach walls so that in the next spasm of diarrhoea the child would shit its stomach directly onto the dirt floor in a violent, bloody and agonising purge.

These wizened old men and women aged 2 or 3 died about me in a thick stew of foul stench and a pandemonium glut of delirious flies. Pity was too soft, too, too indulgent that people should die of want in a world of surplus seemed so intellectually absurd, so morally repulsive that an absolute rage, an entirety of anger, a consuming shame in my and our complicity was the appropriate response. This was not the happenchance of environment, nor the accident of an indifferent God, this was the malignant hand of humanity laid bare. That anger has lasted 20 years.

I tell you this and describe it thus not to shock but to engender again that shame within me. Long years of becoming acquainted with the theories and statistics of development serve ultimately only to numb the senses to the agonising end of those small 3 year olds.

For in order to help us live, the mind must censor the senses. And this had become my awful, unwanted expertise. So tonight I need to recharge again those batteries of shame, in order to be able to speak to you.

On my most recent visit to Africa journalists would ask ‘Was it worth it, nothing has changed in the 20 years since Live Aid? It was a decent if inevitable question. But things had changed utterly, it was of little interest to the poor and weak, because the consequences of change - death for the poorest and weakest - remained the same.

But in those 20 years things had got worse. Africa had uniquely grown poorer by 25%. A typical African country today has the GDP of a town of 20,000 in the UK. Half of its people subsist on 65 pence or less a day, this at a time when we grotesquely pay each individual cow in the EU \$2.50 per day in subsidy. The U.N. was spending \$1.3billion a year on peacekeeping but a fifth of all Africans lived in countries riven by civil war. This instability helped spread Aids which unknown in 84 was now killing 6000 a day. The dead can't plant so people were starving again. Only one in 400 victims was taking anti-retrovirals. Net investment south of the Sahara was a pathetic \$3.9 billion and was worse than in the past 6 years. Why?

The conditions I encountered 20 years ago were largely those of the Cold War. Proxy states in Africa were doing the dying for us. If they had Mengistu, we had Mobutu; and all had the ancient hunger, poverty and instability still with them.

But now amongst the southern peoples of Ethiopia last year I felt a different, newer despair. Here everything was green, but about me the ruined people of a ruined land. They were used to the irregular rain falls, and would normally allow for the subsequent crop failures and food shortages by profitably selling their coffee on the world market and buy in whatever food they needed to make up that year's shortfall.

Except this year coffee had collapsed by 70% because Vietnam, a country they had never heard of, had entered the market a continent away and depressed the world market price. They began to starve. Donors responded generously enough to allow the government to feed them 68 percent of what is required for human beings to live, but is in fact a policy of slowly managed dying. So far so normal.

The superhuman heroics of the few young African doctors and nurses in the ill-lit shed they called a hospital *defies* description. This shack served a million people with no equipment or medicine of any note.

This then was a people in trauma. They were utterly bewildered. They had never heard of this new economic fetish everyone outside called globalisation and which in theory should help them. But now the old certainties - yes even hunger, seemed hopelessly out of kilter.

There was a terrible natural metaphor to this place. You see it everywhere. It appears huge and green and bountiful and yet it is barren. They call it the False Banana, It looks like it, feels like it, grows like it but it produces nothing. Like the pregnant women about them carrying life but giving birth to death. The fertile ground with nothing to eat. The cash crop that produces no money. The men making all the decisions and doing nothing. One big False Banana.

In the years of hunger they strip the bark of the False Banana, pound it into a stringy mass of inedible fibre and cellulose then bury it for a year to soften it. Then they dig it up, clean it and grind it into a stringy flour. Then they eat it. It fills your stomach but it has no nutrients whatsoever. Another false banana. Food that doesn't feed you,

We want to stop this happening to others, we ask for it to be stopped, and to mollify us rather than alleviate them, our institutions offer the false banana of "Development". We toss them the token of aid that helps no-one.

When I returned I began to write some pieces for the newspapers outlining ideas as to why perhaps none of what we had tried had any effect whatsoever. Indeed did we actually mean any of the, to me now tired rhetoric of aid. Was it there to hide our indifference, or simply mask our failures.

I could not think of a single project implemented by any NGO that had lasted longer than 10 years or longer than the designated time of the project itself.

I could not think of a single example where the imposed bromides of the IMF had had anything other than a net negative outcome. Not a single project. What were we all doing? I suggested that what we needed was a new Brandt report. To which

correctly there were loud groans from all and sundry. And frankly yes none of us need another ineffectual, document, report, analysis etc., the Tony and Bob show as some wag called it last week.

But what Brandt did back in the late 70's was to begin to define the clear disparity that had emerged between us and them. What he defined as the North-South divide. What we needed was a re-definition for this different age.

It is well to pause here and remember that Brandt himself emerged from the wreck of another ruined, bankrupt and starving continent of just 40 years previously. Our own. He had borne witness to savageries, and genocides and mad ideologies and mass murder, that put anything that happened in Africa into a brutal context.

In his later years, and in his retirement he paused and took stock and realised that within a tiny space of time Europe had come from utter devastation to being a continent with the highest standards of living and the second largest economy in the planet. But Africa, and the rest of the third world, remained mired in a hopeless poverty.

He set out to see what could be done to introduce a measure of social equity between the ever richer us and the ever poorer them. The Brandt report was often incisive, brilliantly intuitive and prophetic but ultimately futile. Neither Brandt nor his co-writers including Ted Heath held power any longer. They could no longer influence nor implement and though the report was widely read and became a benchmark for development it was ultimately instantly redundant within a short space of time by the revolution of glasnost and the demise of the Soviet empire. Everything changed.

Except I don't think our mindset has. I don't think we have fully grasped that we are in a wholly different universe to the one which formed the intellectual ideas through which we live, act and view the world. As such everything we determine or enact is by definition bound to fail. To be specific we imagine the world to be governed essentially around the notions of the 1960's\70's. Like we are all actually living in the

Brandt Report. But that was 40 years ago. We live in other times and it requires new definitions and ideas.

The trigger points of chaos - debt, trade, Aids and aid and their bitch cousins of political instability, war and corruption are only symptoms of the giant roaring undertow that is the globalised, politically uni-polar world of trading blocs on the whizz bang 24\7 planet. It is not the symptoms we must deal with but the cause. That cause needs to be defined explicitly, for only then can the chaos of Africa be looked upon as a totality. Then perhaps, there may be a single, massive, coherent response to the individual overwhelming horror.

Yet in Africa or Europe, all solutions and remedies are piecemeal bromides, all useless as one tragedy impacts unpredictably upon another disaster compounding both into catastrophe. The individual agencies with their local, jealously guarded initiatives are heroic and an invaluable help to the few communities they manage to help, and Band Aid will continue to support them The big guys yer Red Crosses, IMFs and World Bankers etc, they have a place, but what that is needs to be readdressed. Yer multi and bi-laterals, yer Institutions, yer ITS NOT WORKING.

It is no longer appropriate to deal with each issue on an individual basis. Even here no matter how vast the lobby the momentary enthusiasm for one campaign leads rapidly to public boredom and the focus changes to the next conundrum. I was involved in the drop the debt issue, a hugely successful public lobby to deal with the laceratingly cruel, ridiculous and immoral debt slavery into which we had pushed the continent.

The troops were summoned, banners raised, the unions and churches sounded the clarion cry of that greatest *of* political lobbies - middle England, the Pope pronounced and Presto a third of debt was wiped out, to no obvious discomfort to us but equally as it turned out to not much gain to them. A little bit, in some countries sure but in general new acronyms and devices were implemented making countries who could

never pay who produced less than their debt burden leap through ever more arcane financial hoops and hurdles.

Conveniently the lobbyists and activists to the G8's satisfaction and almost at their bidding moved smartly along to the next clarion call. This year its trade by the way. And that will last up to the British G8 where we'll get a few concessions and then its something else.

Certainly every incremental step can be deemed progress, but in reality how willing are we to actually find the political will to implement fundamental change?

I suggest not at all. But why? The truth is that throughout economic history those who succeeded economically, 'kicked away the ladder' beneath to prevent others from scrambling up behind. That is why today we are imposing so many impossible conditions, in the form of benign interference, which in truth, actually prevented them developing. Perhaps it's not conscious but this is the manner in which all wealthy countries have always behaved.

That's what was so unusual about the United States Marshall Plan which after the Second World War rescued Britain and Wily Brandt's Europe. Yet the reality is that, without taking away from Americas legendary generosity, the Marshall Plan was devised to further America's self-interest and security.

The US at that time needed a viable trading partner for their uniquely booming post war economy and a bulwark against the Soviets threatening Stalinism. Whatever...it worked.

I asked the Prime Minister to consider Marshall and Brandt. I asked the Prime Minister to bear in mind the extraordinary year of political coincidence and confluence that is coming. 2005 will see Britain as president of Europe and chair of the G8 at a time when Live Aid celebrates its 20th anniversary.

In the last few years the UK has flexed its considerable financial and military muscle. Perhaps we should now exercise our intellectual ones and turn London into the intellectual capital of the world. Summon the thinkers, and writers and culture geeks, philosophy wonks and development freaks, the economists and anthropologists and report back not only directly to the 7 richest nations in the world but also that generation that 20 years ago took Africa and the worlds poor from nowhere on the global political agenda and placed it right at the top where it has remained to this day. This would be a report card back to them who in a survey of two months ago cited Live Aid as the second most memorable day of two generations lives.

And this from a Prime Minister who began his parliamentary career by setting up the Band Aid cross party parliamentary group. A true Live Aid baby. This time importantly and completely unlike Brandt the commissioners would largely be the major serving leaders of the richest nations or their personally appointed representatives within a partnership of the affected countries political and civic leaders.. Oh and er...me.

By accepting the idea Tony Blair would at very least keep Africa at the forefront of the political, developmental and media mind throughout 2005 but much more importantly the commission would, unlike Brandt have real power and be reporting directly to these leaders on a newer, contemporary understanding and implementation of what we will see are ancient and historic dilemmas.

He seemed fairly unimpressed by my pitch, as did the chancellor. But they considered a moment and said “as long as there’s equal pain on both sides”, meaning it must define and tell the truth not just of ourselves, but from Africa too. Exactly.

It is potentially an immense opportunity. Let me explain.

Imagine if instead of 2004 we are in 1904 and we are all Edwardians. We have decided to gather and try and work out this new century we were in. Could we have imagined the world of only half a lifetime away - the world of 1950? Would that have been possible? Indeed not. It would be literally unimaginable. Only 46 years from where we sat but an entirely different moral and material universe. Utterly different, wholly changed.

Would we have understood for example the implications of the car and the phone? Would we have invited Mr. Darwin or Professor Freud or Dr. Marx to our table? It would have been difficult as 2 of them were dead but would we have considered their books. I doubt it, yet we should have. We were twentieth century Edwardians but we were behaving like post- Waterloo nineteenth century Victorians. It informed our world totally but wrongly. Things, ideas, moralities were afoot and already shaping the murderous, world-erasing, god denying world of my monstrous century.

What is our phone and car? What will they mean? Who and where is our Darwin, Freud and Marx and the others? They are amongst us. They have written but where are they? What have they defined our world as being and what will its import be?

Will the Commission for Africa achieve this. You could be forgiven for being sceptical. Will its terms of reference embrace this idea. Perhaps not, but that's the pitch I sold. Will it narrow itself to the very piecemeal solutions that conjured it into being as opposed to the totality of fear in the south. More than likely. But I will fight non-stop to prevent that happening and should I fail I'll leave.

But to avoid that failure we still need to know exactly how we got to this awful pass. And there will be in the Prime Ministers words 'A great deal of pain on all sides.'

Explanation of what has happened in Africa requires a broad historical sweep that risks simplification. But recognition of the historical developments that shaped the

continent must inform any understanding of contemporary Africa. That being said, Africa's problems are not solely the result of what came from outside. Africa's unique geography came first of course and then the baleful litany of slavery, colonisation and its alien institutions, flawed independence and flawed government - all circumstances in which there have been sufficient Africans in position of advantage willing to participate in the spoilation of their continent.

It has long been a mantra of development experts that with the correct mix of pro market policies, poor countries will eventually prosper. Yet for some countries the fate of geography and politics may actually preordain failure.

(Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia argues that geography may indeed be more important than policy in determining the developmental potential of nations. And Harvard academic Ricardo Hausmann says, tropical landlocked nations may never enjoy access to the markets and new technologies they need, to flourish in the global economy.)

And while geography nor climate is destiny, it certainly plays a role. Unlike the latitudinal climate belt of Eurasia, Africa's regions limited the transferability of agricultural systems and thus the growth of population. And the adverse ratio of coast to hinterland cuts one percent off Africa's potential for growth compared with other world regions. Africa had to develop in ways utterly different to other continents, constrained by environment, topography and disease. In fact it may be said that the true African genius is in knowing how to survive and flourish on a continent that seems so inimical to human needs.

There is much to be gained from exploring the complexity of the history of slavery in Africa, though this is not the place to do that in detail. Suffice it to say that the interaction of European economic and cultural templates and Africans complicity in

their own impoverishment set a model which neither colonialism, post-colonialism nor modern neo-colonialism have been able to shake off.

In one 18th century report a woman walking along the Ghanaian beach snatched a boy playing on the shore and sold him to a Portuguese 100 yards away. This is more than a terrible metaphor.

Consider the extent to which the Second World War of just 6 years duration has pervaded the consciousness of our developed world for 2 generations and now imagine how 4 centuries of enslavement might have seized the entire social and cultural ethos of an undeveloped continent. In order to ship 9 million Africans, 21 million required to be captured, of which 12 million died in the first year. Indeed prior to the arrival of the Europeans Africans had shipped 4 million people north to the Arab lands. No society, coastal or inland, was left untouched by the African raiders. It was a continental trauma. It is this terror I believe that is at the heart of the destructive and dispiriting African fatalism that permeates the continent.

It was Africa's misfortune not only to have been plundered by Europe, but also to have been colonized at a time when the concept of the nation state was firmly entrenched as a primary determinant of the historical process. This process was in the eyes of the Europeans of the day logically carried overseas to wherever the nation states saw commercial or strategic interests. With the consequence that today the continent is divided into 46 states, more than 3 times the number of Asia, (whose land mass is 50% larger), and nearly 4 times the number of South America.

More states are entirely landlocked in Africa -15 - than in the rest of the world put together, and no country in Africa is free from problems of access, security, and economic stability that is directly attributable to the boundaries they inherited from the colonial era.

Indeed only last week in the Johannesburg newspaper Business Day an academic asked ‘Are all African states viable? Or are some states, for a variety of ecological, geographical and locational climatic reasons and indeed for long term political circumstances that relate to history, ethnic and religious composition simply, non-viable.’

Where previously Europe had been content to trade for Africa’s commodities, now the European intended to take control of production and distribution as well. The change was vast and all- embracing and while the rural families that constituted the vast majority of the African population had little choice in the matter, their leaders saw a fundamental change in the relationship between Europe and Africa that had existed now for 300 years but one in which they had no language available to deal with their conquerors. Culturally and intellectually there was no understanding of the concepts being dictated. Which again has a bizarre similarity to our time.

But at the same time, and as still occurs today, colonial economic structures, totally at odds with the reality of Africa and the ways Africans had worked out to sustain themselves there, laid the groundwork for yet more of Africa’s endless, historic great natural disasters whose scale overwhelms the human bestialities we have come to know.

Given that Africa was wrongly assumed to have had no history of their own before the arrivals of the European it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Europe created the image of Africa that the colonial period bequeathed to the world. Europe drew boundaries and undertook to establish a civilizing government in each with hierarchical administration and military support -- according to the prevailing capitalist model of the nation state.

Under Adam Smith’s theory of comparative advantage, which says that a country produces that which it can produce cheaper than any other and sells it to others in exchange for that which they can produce cheaper than us, the invisible hand of the

market will of itself sort out any inequities in this system allowing for the appropriately correct level of development to any particular producer.

The colonies distorted this view by deciding that Africa's comparative advantage was its poverty, rather like we do today with our global brand footwear, clothing etc. As a result in Africa, existing patterns of farming were wiped away and huge plantations of single non-native crops were developed, always with the need of European processing industry in mind.

There was a global transfer of foreign plants to facilitate this - tea, coffee, cocoa, rubber etc., The result was the erosion of the soil, forerunner of the desertification evident today. And with the erosion came steadily decreasing quantities of already scarce local food grown on marginal lands by labourers working for pitiful wages. This concentration on a few major cash crops or the extraction of an important mineral source left the countries on independence incredibly vulnerable to dramatic fluctuations in the prices of those commodities on the world market.

Adam Smith also suggested that the market was free within reason. It could never be laissez faire. Indeed he suggested infant economies be protected from the chill winds of the financial gales as we did in our development but prevented in others. The Navigation Acts the were wholly anti-competitive policies --which at that time prevented American colonists from making their own woollen or iron goods, and were like their equivalent today when we impose on a Third World producer of pineapples who wants to sell in the EU a tariff of 9% for fresh fruit, 32 % for tinned pineapples and 42% for pineapple juice – so in the seventeen hundreds we were already planting the seeds of today's disparities between Northern and Southern economies.

To establish a type of nationwide government, colonial administrators effectively set about inventing African traditions for Africa, that would make the process more

acceptable to the indigenous population. The most far-reaching inventions of tradition in colonial Africa occurred when the administrators believed they were respecting age old African custom whereas a commentator notes “What were called customary law, customary land-rights, customary political structure and so on were in fact all invented by colonial codification.

By creating an image of Africa steeped in unchanging tradition the colonizers condemned the continent to live in a reconstructed moment of its past A vast continental theme park – Africa-land, that hindered development for decades. But perhaps the most pernicious of the traditions which the colonial period bequeathed to Africa was the notion of Tribalism. Just as every European belonged to a nation, every African must belong to a tribe, a cultural unit with a common language, a single social system and established customary law. In Zambia the chief of a little known group once remarked – ‘My people were not Soli until 1937 when the Bwana D.C. told us we were.’ The concept of the Zulu as a discrete ethnic group did not emerge until 1870.

These were the dangerous sands upon which the colonialists imposed a new political geography. Contained within these arbitrary boarder lines were many ethnicities. The result today is that African wars are nearly always internal rather than external, thus preventing any sense of national coherence. However once in motion, the process was enthusiastically reinforced by the Africans themselves. Tribes became the object of passionate African imagination. Some chroniclers have endowed their tribes with a retrospective primordial essence. Rather like Yeats did with the similarly disenfranchised Irish.

The British ruled through these local hierarchies, a process which unconsciously promoted the most malleable, collaborative or corrupt local chiefs and where none existed, as we’ve seen, they simply created one, enabling ambitious individuals and

groups to achieve positions of status, dominance, and wealth that might otherwise have been unattainable.

To counter this tribalism some African leaders proclaimed the single party state to be the only means to control the excessive, ethnically based competition for the global goods of modernity - education, health, and the eradication of poverty. Competitive democracy they said would only lead to penury. Yet one-party rule unrestrained by the moral check of shared community had the same result.

It proved to be a mask for oppression, ethnocracy and kleptocracy. Of the 107 African leaders overthrown between 1960 and 2003 two-thirds were murdered, jailed or slung into exile. Up until 1979 59 African leaders were toppled or assassinated. Only three retired peacefully and not one was voted out of office. No incumbent African leader ever lost an election until 1982. Some voters have even grown accustomed to corruption and ask only that they should receive a cut - an exchange of political support for concrete help.

This is the only way politics makes sense to them. This often means a vote for a member of their own tribe on the assumption he is more likely to share with them what he snaffles from the treasury. *Les politiques du ventre* as the French who looked on with detached cynicism called it. The politics of the belly. They should know. Chirac, Juppe, Berlusconi, Kohl, Haughey, The EU. One must ask from whom did they learn it.

A relativism of corruption is unhelpful however for we don't die of our cosy version. We're rich - it doesn't impact upon us. Down there it kills them - they're poor.

Post independence the leadership elite pursued policies of industrialisation and modernisation which involved inappropriate capital intensive investment, and looked to extravagant and often tragically comic Western symbols as proof of their nationhood; huge dams, power stations, the high-rise capitals and their rotting,

blackened concrete and state universities in countries which had no networks of secondary schools.

It was all a bit ridiculous and completely supported, endorsed and encouraged by the international financial institutions and development theorists of the time. Decades of mis-rule had left most African governments flat broke, so they agreed to do whatever the IMF asked. The results have been dismal. Africa is poorer now than when the reforms began. This failure is trumpeted by the anti-globalisers as proof that market forces are bad for developing countries and the liberals tend to blame the grudging and haphazard way reform has been implemented.

Well yes - to both of them. Neither works because the specific African conditions were never considered, thought through and full political will brought to bear on their implementation. And if the IMF and World Bank were more accountable at board level for their advice would it have truly been so awful?

Still if the bigwigs in the banks were secure, this was also a protected time for dictators. So long as they were obedient to their global patrons, the Cold War superpowers, and kept the local peace they could rule much as they chose with no question asked by the international community. In all of this lay the roots of the wholly damaging and destructive debt nonsense of today.

Northern entrepreneurs who seek to profit from Africa do not open the continent to a free world market so much as negotiate exclusive concessions whether to drill for oil, or trade arms for diamonds as the Portuguese did 500 years ago for gold.

The poverty of Africa and the resulting lack of education or health and therefore development which perpetuates the elite, corrupt few makes it hard to resist these glittering temptations of past or present globalisation.

That's it. That's what Africa is - fucked - and why aid has done so little. But there is more - and for that, we must look to ourselves. What has our hypocritical notion of economics done for Africa? What about human rights? And what about globalisation itself?

And as for us, well, the policies we pursue in the First World are almost perfectly designed to ensure our economic and therefore political supremacy. We are unlikely to sacrifice these time honoured mechanisms of achieving economic success and then when successful preventing others from joining us by, as I've said kicking away the ladder that we have so recently scrambled up. Whether this works anymore, whether now we are acting against our own self-interest is a moot point.

21st century modernisers (like the commentators in our daily papers) talk in the dated accents of 19th century Europeans who mistook their parochial hopes for universal historical laws. The new shibboleths, the latest tablets to come down from the development mountain all call for democracy, free markets, free press, private property, disinterested civil institutions, a state under the law.

All excellent I'm sure, and all things which gather my enthusiastic support but also all things it took us centuries to develop, and are anyway, like the colonial African inventions, a completely false romantic view of our own histories. We forget that the peace and prosperity of one generation stand on the injustices of earlier generations. The delicate sensibilities of liberal societies are always the fruits of war and empire Dr. Ja Hoon-Chang of Oxford writes:

“Many institutions that are these days regarded as necessary for economic development were actually in large part the outcome rather than the cause of economic development in the now developed countries. Indeed the net result of adopting such institutions might be irrelevant or harmful in developing countries, given their stage of development and to the extent they are costly to run.”

For example, where there is a crisis of legitimacy in many developing states the authorities find it difficult to tax their populations, which in turn makes it difficult to govern and show the advantages of central stability through increased health or education benefits and thereby bestowing the necessary legitimacy. But the cost of setting up a tax-collecting agency may be greater than the total collected in the first place. The exercise becomes a net negative, which impoverished states must submit to in order to fulfil the IMF criteria. Such institutions, in our own political culture, took a long time to develop.

Democracy, in its current universal suffrage form arrived generally only since the Second World War. Modern professional bureaucracy only came about in the middle of the 19 century when we were already at our economic peak. Limited liability institutions came about at the same time, and central banking occurred in England only in 1844 and the famous Federal Reserve of the USA was inaugurated as late as 1913 and even then only in a limited version. We simply cannot parachute these mechanisms onto rural peasants often living in feudal or subsistence societies. These societies cannot benefit from them for there are no institutions or culture, never mind economies, to support them. To offer a starving man a ballot paper is a sick joke and politically meaningless for people will worship whomever gives them bread, for they need their rulers to be Gods.

In the orthodoxy of today it is also believed that the stronger the protection of property rights the better it is for economic development, as such protection encourages the production of wealth and in today's Africa less than 10% of the continents land is formally owned. But to change this structure in some societies means tipping people from a common system of land tenure into a far worse land owning few with an attendant feudal serf tenantry.

But there are many examples in history in which the violation of personal property rights was beneficial to development. The Enclosure Acts in Britain violated existing

communal rights by enclosing common land but contributed to the woollen industry which spearheaded Britain's huge economic leap forwards by promoting sheep farming on the confiscated land.

Yet there are also counter-examples: the imposition of squatter's rights in the American West when the covered wagons arrived and over-rode the existing property rights of the native Indian was crucial to economic development. The conclusion seems to be that what matters is not simply the protection of all property rights regardless of their nature, but which property rights are protected under which conditions.

And as for human rights, our version of them too grew out of our economic successes and therefore our culture with its vision of the supremacy of the individual which we hold in our exceptionalist view to be universal, but is in fact accepted almost nowhere else in the world.

Our refined paradoxical view, which I completely endorse by the way, is that individualism only works when there is agreed individual undertakings on the common behalf for the common good. However imposing these cultural beliefs on other people, whether by economic muscle or cruise missile, so that they can be more like us is a farce, particularly when the obvious external purpose is regional control of resources and political influence.

It is an oxymoron to impose rights. You cannot give a version of freedom to another who already believes themselves to be free. Even when free itself may be a difficult construct. Or a freedom achieved within one's own chosen chains. We appear blind to others' version of freedom for we cannot understand their lives.

As Professor John Gray remarks "saying that because some people sometimes seek freedom, all human beings want it, is like thinking, because there are flying fish, it is in the nature of fish to fly." Like in the colonial period when the Africans had no

language in which to negotiate with the Europeans, that is, they had no knowledge or cultural understanding of the concepts being discussed, so too in our time our insistence on what we hold to be true becomes often a monologue conducted with the uncomprehending.

The question cannot be: do Africans have human rights, but what do Africans understand and desire their human rights to be? Otherwise we are yet again remaking Africa, and Africa's struggle, in the image of our own modernity, or more truthfully our own recent past.

And what of globalisation itself, another term we appear to have always created in our own image and whose consequences, whether we understood them or not, are imposed on the poorest and weakest?

In principle one could argue that slavery and colonialism were all in effect simply earlier disastrous impositions of a globalised nature upon the weakest.

The pros and cons of globalisation are largely academic, what is not is that it exists and is not behaving in a predictable manner. *If* the demise of the nation state is signalled by the emergence of Globalisation it should in principle lead to a new re-invigorated multilateralism, but instead threw up the phenomenon of a fervent bilateralism. America believing there was no need as the victor of the 20 century to consider anybody else except as a fig leaf for their imperial ventures. This is the exceptionalist, end of history view and it is a mistake. As the globalised, porous border, non-nation state phenomena of Aids, Al-Qa'ida, Resource Wars, Markets and Media have taught us, history never ends – it's too busy beginning.

Everyone assumed that with globalisation modern values, i.e. ours, were in the ascendant. But if it means anything it is the chaotic drift of new technologies and if it has any overall effect it is not to spread these modern values but to consume them.

The reality is we are finding it increasingly difficult to deal with our political problems in a unilateral fashion. And most of what we are facing whether in the world's first globalised disease like Aids, or the 21st century globalised war of terror which operates outside the nation state and in its operation ignores it, is the realisation that the nation state may not be up to the resolution of these crises.

Perhaps the nation state is now simply a fossil of an earlier political exigency. A very simple way of looking at it is this; were the UK alone to donate its entire GDP to Africa it still would not resolve the misery of those people and simply compound ours. Britain like most everywhere, including America can no longer function in isolation. And neither can Africa.

On the other hand the 'Leave Africa Aloneists' have a point, but it's too late. There is no going back. There is no time to develop over time, as we did, cultural, economic and politically appropriate systems and once gone traditional ways of life cannot be retrieved. You cannot leave Africa alone to its own devices when there are no devices to leave it alone to.

History is cumulative and for good or ill, Africa, whether they like it or not, has been plugged into and they, nor us can unplug ourselves from each other. We are like it or lump it engaged in an interdependent world. The latest whizz-bang idea of these neo-Primitives is the saving arm of the African diaspora.

According to this model the remittances returned annually to Africa (and they are very substantial) will create through the available cash an entrepreneurial grassroots economy free of the interfering hand of government corrupt or otherwise. This is farcical. Though the Irish returned millions annually to an Ireland only a few miles away it did not engender a discernible increase in economic activity. The same is true of Israel and Italy or any other of the great migrations. And will certainly be true of a continent of a billion people.

This year then we will begin I hope to attempt a response to the miserable cumulative effect of our mutual histories on that sublime continent. That deathly tango we began dancing centuries ago and which now exhausts us. I have talked at length of the empirical economic problems of development and less of the cultural and philosophical. But it is only through a knowledge of the latter that we will grope towards a policy that could be realistically predictive through an honest appraisal of who we are and what we want.

Now. Today. It should be very different from the ideas of yesterday. This Commission should arrive at a holistic response to the totality of the African misery. We must include the many voices within Africa but equally elsewhere where they are thinking about this new century.

There is a danger that independent and non-western voices will not be given the attention they deserve and by censoring thinkers who stray too far from the current orthodoxies we preserve the comforting illusion of a single established world view. If this happens the term globalisation will become a euphemism for the perceptions, aspirations and anxieties solely of the West, and the wealthy of the planet will be allowed to apply a provincialism of the mind to the problems of the world.

The task of the commission must be to examine all contemporary trains of thought and direction with a view to making predictive policy as opposed to that which is entirely reactive, and as a result, always too late. Besides the obvious empirical problems and solutions to debt, trade, aids, food security, conflict resolution, governance, aid flows etc., what is it Africans actually want for their continent? What is the intellectual and philosophical view of Africa's leaders and thinkers? What is it they want from us that's new or different, and what will we give, and in exchange for what?

And what are we doing about our own institutions, habits of thought? Are we ready to dig up our false bananas and replace them with something that is at least edible? I am not calling for a re-invention of the world or even a renewal. Simply a re-adjustment toward equity and re-alignment towards the marginal, dispossessed, hungry and poor. Those who inhabit the economic outlands.

The new world is here we just have to recognise it, understand it, define it and work with it under newer institutions.

New indicators of progress are needed to monitor the economy wherein the natural world and human well-being, not just economic production are awarded full measure. We have reduced the idea of progress to the single word more. But more of what? To what end? More stuff? Everything all the time, while we secretly suspect we are useless and are left empty? This is not only stupid and self-defeating but quite literally unsustainable.

This is what must be considered by the commission. We cannot as Brandt said in the final week of his report - 'I should never have left this to the economists.' It was too late for him. We must now make sure that it is not too late once again for the people of Africa.

For the future, though governed by old men Africa is a young continent. Half of its people are under 16 and more than 70% were born after independence. The born-frees are more inclined to blame their current rulers than past histories for the state their continent is in. Perhaps as they grow older they will start voting for the kind of pragmatic rulers they want and need. Surely they cannot buck the world trend towards greater prosperity forever.

Africa will probably find itself with a new strategic importance as the West seek to extract 25% of its oil from Nigeria and Angola over the coming decade.

Impoverished Africans will begin trying to come to us in their thousands which we

will not tolerate. Raw materials may become more difficult to obtain in other parts of the world. But beautiful Africa cannot escape its or our past. It will still be weak from disease and the environment, under population, lack of infrastructure and lousy governance.

We could level the trading playing field and even tilt it slightly towards them. We could cancel all their debt that will enable them to actually get onto the pitch to play. We should dispense whatever medicines are necessary to stem the horror of their Aids, malaria and TB pandemics, we could make aid flows completely predictive... but will we?

The work needed to deliver Africa is vast. Indeed it is limitless since as one plateau is reached another looms up and the totality of misery is such that once again I believe that only a Total Plan for the continent will succeed.

One that will need, like Marshall, easily achievable, with little cost to ourselves but nonetheless massive aid flows at its core and understanding that our institutions came after our wealth and were not preconditions to it, that we don't hinder or impede them with the ideas we espouse but which may already be out-moded.

That they may develop their own appropriate systems of justice and governance for ideas of justice are as timeless as fashions in hats. That we will not tolerate brutality and murder even when we connive with it. That the continent will live with us and not apart from us if only on the basis of our clear self-interest and those 8 miles that separates Europe from the vast human intellectual and cultural capital of an Africa, that lives on the very borders of our own alien world. A world that is deaf to its music, and is indifferent to its hope as it is to its suffering and crimes.

Africa has slipped out of the world safety net. They drift away from us propelled by the enormity of their poverty and our exhausted indifference. The consequence of this will be so extreme that finally perhaps there will be action commensurate to the

tragedy. They have entered a category of their own, one composed of the most vulnerable and marginalised, most put upon and ignored, most wretched and hungry and pitifully poor of the earth, they have become a new category of misery, a continental underclass – a 4th world. This is a disgrace. We cannot accept nor tolerate the Orwellian image of people dying on our screens every night forever.

In Africa with its wars and aids and great hungers and its poverty beyond measure we are witnessing the silencing of histories, the death of cultures, the quieting of language and the endless queues of its unburied dead. And when the thinkers, and the workers, and the farmers and labourers are gone and the producers, the teachers and the doctors and the nurses and the mothers and the fathers and then the children ... and then the children die, what then? What then?

Africa can live and breathe and flourish. This can happen. It can start in this country, in this city, in this year. But it can only happen when we begin to think afresh. When we begin to think like 21st centurions.

20 years ago in North Mali a morose regional governor gestured about him silently. All was bare. Gone. ‘Once,’ he said to me ‘This was forest and fields’ he stooped and ran some sand through his hands and we sat on a log. ‘There were people here and amongst them they spoke over 100 languages. Now there is silence.’ I never heard those languages but I miss them. In these ways the lights of human genius wink out.

In his book *Bad Samaritans* of 1990 Paul Vallely wrote correctly; ‘For all his skill as a populist Bob Geldof could not shift the agenda from one of Charity to one of justice.’

Well maybe after 20 years we’ve finally got there