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ESSAY REVIEW

AFRICA WORKS: DISORDER AS POLITICAL INSTRUMENT*

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Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz have combined to produce a thought-provoking analysis of the problem of development in Africa, a continent which they describe as in crisis. Both authors are European based academics with experiences in Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone Africa. They acknowledge that the problem of African development has a long history and has been particularly topical in the post-Second World War era. While theories and prescriptions abound, progress has been limited. Sub-Saharan Africa has now assumed the dubious reputation of being the "the poorest region in the world".¹ This is a reversal of progress that the region appeared to be making in the mid-1970s when per capita incomes in Africa exceeded those in most of the developing world, including Asia. Many of the countries that appeared to be on course for development have experienced spectacular reversals, particularly from the 1980s onwards.

The book comes in the wake of a renewed interest in the development of Africa from Western capitals.² A recent World Bank report³ highlights a series of 'dire' facts about sub-Saharan Africa as we enter the new millennium: income levels are lower than in the late 1960s; it is racked by war, disease and corruption; and its share of global trade has been shrinking; and it contributes only 2% of the world trade. It is in this context that Chabal and Daloz have re-visited the question of development in Africa and have proposed an analytical framework which they believe can help to explain the developmental crisis in Africa better than traditional theories. As they say in their introduction, the book:

is an attempt to make sense of what is happening in Africa today.
Simple as this aim may appear to be, it is in fact fiendishly challenging

* By Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, The International African Institute and Indiana University Press, 1999, ISBN 0-253-21287-1 (Paper), 0-253-33525-6 (Cloth).

¹ World Bank, *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?* (The World Bank, May, 2000).

² See for example, World Bank, *The Hopeless Continent* (World Bank, May 13th-19th, 2000). The story is the main focus of the issue: 'World Bank cites itself in study of Africa's bleak performance' *New York Times*, June 1, 2000; 'Incomes in Sub-Saharan Africa seen as backslicing: World Bank report cites failure to diversify economies, foreign aid dependence and debt burden', *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 2000.

³ World Bank, *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?*

for reasons having to do with both the diversity of the continent and the complexity of the events currently taking place there.⁴

THE THREE MAIN PREMISES

The book is structured around three main issues and related premises. First, they argue that sub-Saharan Africa has the problem of pervasive corruption and ineffective institutions that affects all sectors of the society. Second, the African condition can be explained in terms of a unique culture and 'mindset' that constrains its peoples to follow a developmental trajectory which is distinct from that of other countries that modernised first. Third, while African countries and institutions appear to be in a state of disorder and corruption, this situation is functional, and defines Africa's unique developmental path. This theoretical position defines a new theoretical paradigm for analysing African development. The authors call the new paradigm the *instrumentalization of disorder*. We now examine each of these claims in turn.

THE PROBLEM OF CORRUPTION AND INEFFECTIVE INSTITUTIONS

Chabal and Daloz argue that the fundamental problem facing Africa is that of corrupt and ineffective institutions. They define institutional effectiveness in terms of ideal type 'Weberian type' bureaucracies. Under this assumption, the effectiveness of institutions is obtained by organising their structure, purposes, and resources so as to provide rule-based governance that is fair, rational and predictable. A properly structured bureaucracy protects institutions from domination by interest groups and discretionary authority. The primary problem with African institutions is "patrimonialism", which is defined as the widespread use of public assets or resources for private gain by officials who manage them. There is an instrumentally profitable lack of distinction between the civic/public and private/personal spheres. In order to be effective, African institutions must function on the basis of neutral and rational decision making procedures.

The issue of neutrality of institutions raises the question, what does it mean for a bureaucracy to be neutral? It has been argued that bureaucratic neutrality is not possible. As Knott and Miller have observed, "institutions shape outcomes by creating incentives that lead to one decision or another".⁵ There is empirical evidence that changing

⁴ P. Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (The International African Institute and Indiana University Press, 1999), xv.

⁵ J. H. Knott, and G. J. Miller, *Reforming Bureaucracy: The Politics of Institutional Choice* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall, 1987), 255.

institutional arrangements affect decision making processes independently of the individuals involved. Knott and Miller therefore conclude that, "as long as different institutional arrangements lead to different outcomes, then those institutional arrangements cannot be regarded as neutral".⁶ They also maintain that "institutional structures are the result of political choices of politicised actors". It is therefore "pointless and perhaps harmful to maintain the myth of administrative neutrality. Rather, the issue is and must be 'who gets what' from the political system."⁷ The interest and value free model of policy formulation that Chabal and Daloz advocate is therefore problematic. Their rhetoric serves to conceal/mask the role of hegemonic politics where particular interests are dominant, not only in Africa, but in industrialised countries.⁸ Beyond this, the analysis of bureaucratic effectiveness must take into account the power relations in the environment in which institutions are situated. The problem of recruitment into elite civil service jobs is a case in point. How, for example, are civil servants in key decision making positions recruited in bureaucracies in Western countries that Chabal and Daloz describe as interest/value free models? Arguments have been made that recruitment in these bureaucracies tends to be biased against minority ethnic/racial groups as well as women. In the British civil service, for example, power is mostly wielded by white, middle-to-upper class, public school educated males. The British Labour party's campaign to reform the civil service recognises this problem⁹ which is due to past discriminatory policies against women and minorities.¹⁰ The implication of this in terms of policy is an empirical question. However, there is evidence that, when properly managed, diversity has a positive impact on an organisation's effectiveness by "introducing varied perspectives and approaches to work". The failure to diversify concentrates power in the hands of an elite with a particular world view. As Long has argued, "Power is only one of the considerations that must be weighed in administration, but of all it is the most overlooked in theory and the most dangerous to overlook in practice."¹¹ Institutional effectiveness should be addressed in terms of the power structures to which it is accountable. This perspective is missing from the book.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁸ B. Fay, *Social Theory and Political Practice* (London, Unwin Hyman, 1975).

⁹ 'Modern Government' Cm 4310 (London, The Stationery Office Limited, March 1999).

¹⁰ See for instance, the 'Royal Commission on the Civil Service 1929-31 Report' (London, HMSO, 1931) and 'The Employment of Women in the Civil Service: The Report of a Departmental Committee' (London, HMSO, 1971).

¹¹ Long, N., 'Power and administration', *Public Administration Review* (1949), 9, 257-264.

Chabal and Daloz's conclusion that African institutions face a crisis of effectiveness is a broad generalisation, which, as all generalisations do, tends to conceal some consequential differences. Comparative studies may assist in this endeavour. Local government in Zambia and Zimbabwe is a case in point. At independence, the Zambian government dismantled the colonial administration system at grassroots level, and unwittingly created an institutional vacuum.¹² The remaining system, largely co-ordinated by the ruling United National Independence Party, was over-centralised and lacked co-ordination. While there were many agencies with responsibilities for rural development, there was no multi-sectoral approach to development. Beginning with the Local Administration Act of 1980, the state has been working to remedy the deficiencies in the system. More recent reforms include the introduction of district administration. Zimbabwe, on the other hand, followed a different path and chose to reform rather than dismantle the colonial local government system. The reform process, whose goal was to democratise the local government system was "consistent with the ruling party's articulated ideology of the liberation struggle period".¹³ The local governance system in Zimbabwe has been relatively more efficient than that in Zambia. However, institutional effectiveness has been undermined by over-centralisation of control from the state.¹⁴ Communities are not sufficiently empowered to raise and manage revenue, allocate resources, and to make policy decisions. The problem of over-centralisation has been identified in Botswana as well¹⁵ but there are differences of degree. Botswana has a tradition of multi-party democracy of over 20 years. Consequently, elements of civil society working through the political system have over time made some progress in forcing the political elite to restrain a dominant bureaucracy and make it more responsive.¹⁶ In the case of Zimbabwe, some observers have noted a decline, over time, of the ruling party's control, as citizens challenge its control over local government and other institutions.¹⁷ What these cases illustrate is that there are some similarities in how comparable institutions function. One such similarity is the problem of over-centralisation of power. However,

¹² See M. Bratton, *The Local Politics of Rural Development: Peasant and Party State in Zambia* (Hanover, New Hampshire, University Press of New England, 1980).

¹³ J. Mw. Makumbe. *Democracy and Development in Zimbabwe: Constraints of Decentralization* (Harare, SAPES Books, 1998).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ J. D. Holm and P. Molutsi. 'State-society relations in Botswana: Beginning liberalization', In G. Hyden and M. Bratton (eds.), *Governance and the Study of Politics* (Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Makumbe, *Democracy and Development in Zimbabwe*.

the degree of concentration of power varies. In the cases discussed, it has been strongest in Zambia, and least concentrated in Botswana. Furthermore, in all the countries, the situation is dynamic. Beyond the common elements, there are other country and sector specific factors that account for variability. For example, independent Zambia and Zimbabwe approached local government reform in radically different ways. These cases indicate that some generalisations are useful, but each case must nevertheless be studied in detail to provide insights into the problem of institution building in Africa. What Chabal and Daloz have described is the average case scenario. They nevertheless admit that there are 'significant' differences in bureaucratic norms and effectiveness across Africa. Countries such as Somalia and Liberia are on one end of the spectrum while others such as Zimbabwe are at the other end. In addressing the tension between detailed case studies and generalisations, they argue as follows:

It serves no purpose to generalise excessively and to reduce all African political systems to their lowest common denominator. At the same time, however, let us avoid the opposite excess, which consists in arguing that no generalisation is possible because there are in Africa, fifty irredeemably different countries. Beyond the existing diversity, it is clear that any serious study of the state in Africa brings to light a number of analytically significant similarities.¹⁸

Despite the word of caution about excessive generalisation, it appears that Chabal and Daloz have done exactly that. Hoogvelt, Phillips and Taylor warn against this tendency which has come to dominate relations between African states and Western institutions and governments. They observe that,

it has become standard practice in the literature, not least that flowing from World Bank staff pens, to treat sub-Saharan Africa as one continent: forty-five extremely diverse nations which are nevertheless thought to have common characteristics, common features, common problems and common prospects. Increasingly, the entire edifice of internationally sponsored aid programmes, such as, for example, the IMF/WB jointly sponsored Structural Adjustment Programmes, has been built on this classification of commonality.¹⁹

Chabal and Daloz's failure to address the issue of diversity of countries and institutions is compounded by an exclusive focus on state institutions. This is an important oversight. Institutions may be divided into state and civil society institutions. State institutions include national, regional, and

¹⁸ Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 8.

¹⁹ A. Hoogvelt, D. Phillips, and P. Taylor, 'World Bank in Africa: A case of mistaken identity', *Review of African Political Economy* (1992), 19 (54).

local governments, the judiciary, and the police. Civil society institutions include non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trade unions, churches, community based organisations, social associations, kinship networks, and so forth.²⁰ Civil society institutions play an important role in service delivery in sub-Saharan Africa. Examples include local farmer organisations in Zimbabwe,²¹ and tree planting activities for fuelwood in rural Kenya.²² Many of these institutions are controlled by Africans. There is evidence that many civil society institutions receive more favourable ratings from communities than state institutions.²³ Beyond their functions as agencies for service delivery, civil society institutions have played an important role in the democratisation process, for example trade union movements in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe,²⁴ and the Catholic church in Malawi.²⁵ These are important developments in the historical process of promoting effective and responsive institutions.

The discussion now turns to the problem of corruption and disorder.

CORRUPTION AND DISORDER

Chabal and Daloz argue that corruption in Africa is pervasive and affects all sectors of the society. They make a distinction between a pervasive form of corruption in Africa and a more limited form of corruption in Western societies which they term *horizontal corruption*. Horizontal corruption involves the exchange of favours between economic and political elites.

In the West, as in other developed countries, such practices generally occur at the top, where deals are struck between, on the one hand, the main industrial and financial sectors and, on the other hand, the political classes . . . By contrast, corruption in Africa concerns the whole population and operates essentially according to vertical relations of inequality.²⁶

²⁰ D. Narayan et al., *Voices From the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000).

²¹ L. Zinyama, 'Local farmer organizations and rural development in Zimbabwe', in D. R. Fraser Taylor and F. Mackenzie (eds.), *Development From Within: Survival in Rural Africa* (London, Routledge, 1992).

²² N. A. Chavangi, 'Household based tree planting activities for fuel wood supply in rural Kenya', in D. R. Fraser Taylor and F. Mackenzie (eds.) *Development From Within: Survival in Rural Africa* (London, Routledge, 1992).

²³ Narayan et al., *Voices From the Poor*.

²⁴ The trade union movements in Zambia and Zimbabwe have, with varying degrees of success, challenged the political hegemony of the ruling parties in their countries.

²⁵ See for instance, K. N. Hungwe, 'Breaking the silence: Fax transmissions and the movement for multi-party democracy in Malawi', in A. Devaney, S. Gance and Y. Ma (eds.) *Technology and Resistance* (New York, Peter Lang, 2000).

²⁶ Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 102.

Society-wide corruption is seen as a uniquely African phenomenon and a key cause of Africa's economic woes. The argument that the scale of corruption in African societies is atypical has been contested by other observers, for instance by Bayart, Ellis and Hibou. They argue as follows:

It is not that the societies or the political systems of the sub-continent are more corrupt than others, as is often believed. There is no reason to suppose that Japan, China, India, Russia, Turkey, Italy (or France for that matter) are any less tainted by this phenomenon. But in Africa, the interaction between the practice of power, war, economic accumulation and illicit activities of various types forms a particular political trajectory which can be fully appreciated only if it is addressed in historical depth. One of the characteristics of this trajectory is the exploitation by dominant social groups, or by dominant actors of the moment, or a whole series of rents generated by Africa's insertion in the international economy in a mode of dependence . . . Current examples include rents derived from diplomatic and military alliances, from the control of exports of agricultural goods and oil and of imports of all kinds, as well as from the management of external financing and aid.²⁷

The importance of the corruption of the dominant social groups in African economies suggests that a distinction be made between what may be called *primary level corruption* (by the elite), and *secondary level corruption* by the average person in Africa. Primary level corruption precedes secondary level corruption and the two are causally related. Secondary level corruption results from the strategies that people develop to cope with dysfunctional institutions and service delivery systems. A case in point is Zimbabwe, which faced a fuel crisis, beginning December 1999.²⁸ The crisis was officially attributed to corruption at the state run oil procurement company, the National Oil Company of Zimbabwe (NOZCIM), and to shortages in foreign currency. Several high ranking executives at NOZCIM were charged with corruption, but no convictions had been effected at the time of this review. At the height of the crisis, when supplies nearly dried up, there were indications that some oil products were being sold on the black market. In addition to this, some attendants at petrol service stations took bribes from motorists in exchange for preferential treatment. A situation of shortage therefore encouraged a new form of corruption that was unknown before the crisis. The corruption at NOZCIM was an example of primary level corruption,

²⁷ Jean-François Bayart, Stephen Ellis and Beatrice Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (Indianapolis, The International African Institute and Indiana University Press, 1999), xvi.

²⁸ The crisis has been extensively featured in the local press. See *The Herald*, *Daily News*, *The Independent*, and the *Financial Gazette*.

while the corruption at the retail/distribution level was secondary because it was causally related to corruption at the national oil procurement company. When such practices are rampant, disorder ensues. There is reason to believe that a significant proportion of society-wide corruption in sub-Saharan countries is primarily driven by primary level corruption and much of the corruption at the lower levels of society reflects the coping mechanisms that people use to deal with ineffective institutions and malfunctioning service delivery systems. This is not only true in Africa, but in other parts of the world as well.²⁹ As Narayan *et al* have observed:

When formal institutions break down, people employ a variety of strategies to meet their needs, including working around the system that is perceived to be unjust or exploitative through active sabotage or passive resistance. Especially in case of state breakdown, few people express hesitation about employing whatever means are necessary to survive, including overtly illegal or dangerous ones.³⁰

In one typical case, informants said, "The government has ripped us off, so why shouldn't people steal a bit on the sly? We don't steal but we don't judge others who do. You have to survive!"³¹

The discussion now turns to the third issue raised by Chabal and Daloz. They argue that the apparent state of disorder and corruption in Africa is functional and defines Africa's unique developmental path, and that this theoretical position defines a new paradigm.

TOWARD A NEW PARADIGM OF DEVELOPMENT?

The paradigm proposed by Chabal and Daloz explains development in Africa in terms of what they call the "instrumentalization of disorder". The basic claim is this: Africa's institutions appear to be in a state of 'disorder' because of apparently ineffective institutions and corruption. However, the state of disorder is functional and is indicative of a uniquely African developmental path where everyone is a participant, and everyone has something to gain from corrupt practices.

In sub-Saharan Africa, corruption is rarely centralised: everyone everywhere tries to benefit. Examples abound: in airports, each official (passport, health, customs, baggage, etc.) wants his or her cut making progress to the exit an obstacle course. Driving from Lagos to Cotonou,

²⁹ Narayan *et al.* *Voice From the Poor*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

³¹ *Ibid.* See also A. Nkhoma-Wamunza, 'The informal sector: A strategy for survival in Tanzania', in D. R. Fraser Taylor and F. Mackenzie (eds.), *Development From Within: Survival in Rural Africa* (London, Routledge, 1992).

for instance, the traveller is likely to encounter at least a dozen road blocks, manned by different police forces, various army corps, flying custom officers, local authority officials, etc., each duplicating the same control of papers and documents...³²

Corruption and disorder are therefore instrumentally profitable. Nevertheless, there are big time losers in the politics of corruption. A recent emphasis on poverty alleviation strategies by aid agencies, the World Bank and the IMF is confirmation of concern about deepening poverty in Africa.³³ One only has to recall the haunting images of Africa's poor that regularly feature on international television. The majority are victims, especially the women and children.³⁴ That there is some instrumental value in the disorder for some is not surprising. What is more important is to identify who the winners and losers are.

Given the problems of development in the sub-region, what does the theory of 'instrumentalization of disorder' mean? Chabal and Daloz argue that:

We have confused development and Westernization, thus making it difficult to grasp the singularity of what is taking place on the continent in terms of modernisation. Not only have we been prone to explaining current events in Africa as a process of 'backwardness', but we have been slow to understand the complex ways in which political change is taking place in Africa.³⁵

We are compelled to ask: If Africa is not developing along 'Western' lines, then what is its developmental trajectory? While the authors argue that Africa may have its own unique path to development which is different from that of the West, they have not clearly defined this alternative path. As they see it:

It is difficult to conceive of what a non-Western, particularly 'African' path to modernisation is, both because we live in a Western world and because historically, the West modernised first.³⁶

Others have argued that what Africa needs is increased foreign aid.³⁷ The authors dismiss this argument claiming that, "Africa continues to receive massive assistance from the major Western donors. Aid fatigue

³² Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 102.

³³ See for example, recent policy papers from the World Bank, IMF, and Department for International Development, and other donors that focus on poverty reduction strategies as an integral part of aid.

³⁴ See for example Narayan *et al.*, *Voices from the Poor*.

³⁵ Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 50.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ The case for increased foreign aid was a central issue at the Earth Summit in 1992, where donors were urged to increase aid.

has not yet set in".³⁸ That is a questionable argument. Concern about aid flows was expressed at the Earth Summit in 1992, where donors committed themselves to making progress towards the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GNP allocated to aid. Since then, overall aid has fallen to its lowest-ever level — falling to 0.22 per cent of donor GNP in 1997.³⁹ Following the end of the Cold War, the geographical distribution of aid flows has altered and sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and south Asia have experienced a reduction in the share of aid. While Africa as a whole appears to receive comparable levels of aid to other parts of the world, "this picture is heavily influenced by large flows to North Africa (notably Egypt)".⁴⁰ Chabal and Daloz do not justify the conclusion that Africa is receiving adequate aid. In fact they are not consistent in their argument about levels of aid because they also contend that:

full-scale Westernization would require at the very least a gigantic (financial and cultural) investment on the part of the North, which in the present international circumstances is hardly realistic. Nor is there evidence that such an injection of resource would have the desired effect.⁴¹

It is not clear why injection of aid would not have the desired effect. What is interesting to note is the argument for a 'cultural' investment, a point we will address momentarily. For now we stay with the economic question.

What is missing from the text is an adequate analysis of the economic context in Africa and its relationship to the problem of institutional inefficiencies and corruption. Historically, one of the reasons for the development of bureaucracies was as tools for managing economic growth and development. The argument that is made by the authors is that African countries should create efficient bureaucracies first in order to foster development. Our view is that the development of institutions and economic development have historically occurred in parallel, and not independently of each other. Putnam's study of southern Italy helps us to refine the observation. He observes as follows:

Economic modernity is somehow associated with high-performance public institutions — that much is clear. What our simple analysis so far can not reveal is whether modernity is a cause of high performance (perhaps one among several), whether performance is perhaps in some

³⁸ Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 105.

³⁹ See for example [online] URL: http://www.oxfaminternational.org/educationnow/tied_hands/aid.htm.

⁴⁰ J. Beynon, *Assessing Aid and the Collier/Dollar Poverty Efficient Aid Allocations: A Critique* (DFID, 1999).

⁴¹ Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 136.

way a cause of modernity, whether both are influenced by a third factor (so that the association between the two is on some sense spurious), or whether the link between modernity and performance is even more complex.⁴²

The relationship is therefore complex and answers must be based on empirical studies, and in particular historical case studies. Cross-sectional studies, that focus on a particular point in time are not likely to provide adequate data and insights. This is a major problem with Chabal and Daloz's book. It lacks a historical perspective and fails to clarify causal relations between institution building and economic development.

We now turn to the cultural question which we alluded to earlier. This issue takes up the concluding chapters of the book. Chabal and Daloz use psychological/cultural reasons for arguing that Africa has its own unique developmental trajectory. The central claim is that to understand the problem of African underdevelopment, we need to take a closer look at African culture and 'mentalities'. The primary basis for that argument is psychological/cultural. There is a "post-colonial cultural order" which "constitutes a distinct universe"⁴³ and explains the developmental process in Africa. There is a "mindset" that is "shared by all layers of the population".⁴⁴ Chabal and Daloz approach the cultural/psychological aspect of their study with some caution because the study of 'mentalities' is a "virtually taboo" question in academic circles. Writing elsewhere, Lassiter has summarised the problems facing this line of inquiry as follows:

Many, in fact, consider such inquiry to be no more than unscientific stereotyping, usually with malevolent intent and effect. Some argue that group personality studies are an anathema to cultural relativism and the particularistic study of singular populations and topics. Still others go as far as to assert that all culture and personality studies obscure the uniqueness of the individual, and divert attention and resources from more fruitful lines of inquiry such as the dynamics of class struggle and the scientific study of particular social structures and functions. At its worst, critics and social advocates say group personality studies and inquiry into broad patterns of cultural adaptation on the part of social scientists exacerbate racism and bigotry.⁴⁵

⁴² R. D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1993), 86.

⁴³ Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 132.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ J. E. Lassiter, 'African culture and personality: Bad social science, effective social activism, or a call to reinvent ethnology?' *African Studies Quarterly*, 3 (2); [online] URL: <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v3/v3i2a3.htm>.

Chabal and Daloz nevertheless argue for the importance of the cultural/psychological perspective as an important variable in explaining Africa's developmental crisis. They are encouraged by a number of African academics who have, in recent years adopted the same approach. They argue that when the psychological factors are taken into account, then it becomes clear that "Africa is not degenerating, nor is it 'blocked', but... it is forging ahead, following its own path, although assuredly at great variance with existing models of development."⁴⁶ Africa will map out a unique developmental path which is consistent with a specific African psychology (mindset). On the other hand, Chabal and Daloz characterise that very same mindset as defective. For example, in one place the authors claim that:

. . . African elites, even when they use their own private jets and speculate in the world's major financial centres, remain prey to 'irrational' beliefs long disappeared in the West.⁴⁷

In another place the psychological defects of the Africans are described as "the inability to institutionalise more formal and impersonal relations".⁴⁸ These are hardly the characteristics of a people on a rational path to development. We therefore see a contradiction between, on one hand, the claim that Africa will find its own unique developmental path, and on the other, the characterisation of the African mindset as defective. If the problems of Africa are to be explained in terms of their psychological attributes, then we need a more consistent argument. A broader question is whether it is legitimate to talk of an African psychology independent of the lived conditions in Africa. Other researchers have advanced a different view, taking the relation between psychological attributes and societal development to be dialectical.⁴⁹ The assumption is that societal change and psychological development are co-determinant. In other words, psychological realities are constructed and sustained through social activities. It follows, therefore, that changes in societal arrangements have consequences for the psychological constitution of individuals and vice versa. From this point of view, it is retrogressive to use models that explain poverty in terms of the psychology of the poor, when that very same mindset can be explained in terms of the conditions under which the people live and work. What is called for are comprehensive models

⁴⁶ Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 135.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ K. N. Hungwe 'Becoming a Machinist in a Changing Industry' (Michigan State University, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1999); L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1978); S. Scribner and M. Cole, *The Psychology of Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1981).

that take into account the individuals, their knowledge, skills and beliefs, as well as the context in which they live and work.

Generally, questions can be raised about Chabal and Daloz's work in three areas. First, the book ultimately blames the poor and vulnerable for their problems and does not pay attention to the national and global network of dependence in which they are locked. The book would have been strengthened by paying attention to the role of conflictual social relations in African societies, and in particular the role of unequal power relations in African societies. The elites may be a small minority in African societies but they hold disproportionate power and control over resources. Second, the book assumes an African culture that is not only static but resistant to change. It is more plausible to assume that African societies are characterised by an "abundance of distinct and sometimes contradictory cultural repertoires, at the same time stable and subject to change, which are vehicles of both transformation and continuity".⁵⁰ Third, a gender perspective is missing from the book. There is evidence that culture has differential effects on males and females. Gender and other social relations are regulated through the practice of culture. Introducing gender brings to focus unequal power relations that characterise the practice of culture in African societies that are predominantly patriarchal.⁵¹ It has been observed that "patriarchy and poverty combine to limit women's political participation and the inclusion of their concerns in official political agendas".⁵² Unequal power relations have consequences for institutional effectiveness. As the literature demonstrates, institutions in Africa have been particularly ineffective in responding to the developmental needs of females.⁵³

⁵⁰ Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*, 32-33.

⁵¹ See for example C. Hungwe, 'Women and Democracy in Zambia' (Unpubl.); Narayan *et al.*, *Voices From the Poor*.

⁵² Hungwe, 'Women and Democracy in Zambia'.

⁵³ See for example *Ibid*; Narayan *et al.*, *Voices From the Poor*.