

A TALE OF TWO CONTINENTS:

# Africa, Asia & the dialectic of Globalization

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*After five centuries of interaction among countries all around the rim of the Indian Ocean, how do they compare in levels of development and westernization?*

*What is the balance sheet of their cooperation, competition and conflict?*

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DID GLOBALIZATION BEGIN with Vasco da Gama? In 1498 this Portuguese navigator connected Europe to Asia via the African coastline. A tricontinental world of Europe, Africa and Asia entered a new phase of interaction, for better or for worse.

Almost exactly five centuries have gone by since Vasco da Gama. Although the word “globalization” is new, the process itself goes back at least that long. For Africa and Asia, the main arena of contacts in that time has been the Indian Ocean, involving countries in South Asia, West Asia and the eastern seaboard of the African continent. Let us examine

this arena in terms of five dimensions: interactive, comparative, competitive, cooperative and conflictual.

## THE INTERACTIVE DIMENSION

Geography is frequently the mother of history. One of Africa’s geographical impacts on world history was in preventing for so long European access to the Indian Ocean. European traders and merchants interested in the “fabulous and legendary Orient of silk, spices and pearls” wanted a sea route to the Orient. They wanted access to the Indian Ocean, but the African land mass was in the way, a huge stumbling block to

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European greed.

At long last, in 1488 Bartolomeu Dias reached the South African Cape, but could not easily round what he called “The Cape of Storms”. The Indian Ocean was so near and yet so far. It was not until Vasco da Gama in 1498 that Europeans fully circumnavigated South Africa, and gained access to the Indian Ocean. They had by then renamed the cape as “the Cape of Good Hope”; the presumed riches of the Orient appeared reachable across the Indian Ocean at long last. Globalization had begun.

The role of Africa as the closed gate to the Indian Ocean for Europeans also had consequences for the Western hemisphere. Had Africa been a smaller continent which could easily be circumnavigated by Europeans, there would have been no need to seek a Western route to the Orient for a long time. Even as it was, Christopher Columbus had a lot of trouble raising the money for his first trans-Atlantic trip in 1492. He would not have been funded at all if Europeans had gained access to the Indian Ocean much earlier. The European “discovery” of the Americas would have been delayed for at least another century.

European interest in access to the Indian Ocean had long-term consequences for Africa as well. The Portuguese colonization of Mozambique was partly motivated by oriental aspirations. They built trading posts, such as Fort Jesus, which still stands today in Mombasa, Kenya, to facilitate and defend

their routes to the Indian Ocean and the Orient. It was my own family (the Mazrui) who militarily helped to dislodge the Portuguese from Mombasa and who then ruled Mombasa as a city state from 1698 to 1837.

In the nineteenth century, European preoccupation with access to the Indian Ocean moved to the north of the African continent. Now that the Cape of Good Hope was indeed navigable, could there be a shorter access to the Indian Ocean? This ambition focussed on cutting a canal through the isthmus of Suez. Enter Ferdinand de Lesseps, the French engineer and the Vasco da Gama of the North. The Suez Canal took a decade to cut, and opened in 1869, providing Europe with access to the Indian Ocean. Moses had parted the waters to walk across the Red Sea. Ferdinand de Lesseps parted the land in order to sail into the Red Sea from the Mediterranean.

Much older than the three-way modern interaction of Europe, Africa and the Orient was the two-way ancient interaction between Africa and Asia. We are not sure whether the Semitic peoples were originally African and then crossed the Red Sea, or originally from Asia and then got Africanized in the Nile Valley. We do know that Semites are not only Jews and Arabs, but also such indisputably African ethnic groups as the Amhara and the people of Tigre in Ethiopia. Semitic peoples are distributed along both sides of the Red Sea, which de Lesseps parted at Suez.

In time, the rise of Islam provided additional globalizing complexity. Arabia's most important impact on Eastern Africa from the seventh century A.D. onwards turned out to be the religion of Islam. New civilizations flowered in Eastern Africa partly under the stimulus of Islam. City states Mombasa, Pate, Lamu, Kilwa and later Zanzibar responded to the clarion call of Islamic culture in partnership with African civilization. Some of these were also Vasco da Gama's ports of call on his way to India.

The interaction between the Arab world and eastern Africa was not only religious. It has had also profound long-term linguistic consequences. By far the most important has been the birth, consolidation and spread of the Swahili language during the last several centuries. Swahili culture provided da Gama with some of his guides and pilots to India. Kiswahili is not only the most successful indigenous language which Africa has produced, widely spoken and with a body of written poetry which goes back a number of centuries. Kiswahili is also the only language which is indirectly named after the Indian Ocean. The word Swahili is derived from an Arabic word for "coastal"—meaning the shores of the Indian Ocean (Swahili).

Islamic influence in eastern Africa inevitably also encompassed literature. Although Tanzania is clearly the vanguard of modern Swahili poetry, Kenya is the reservoir and custodian of classical Swahili poetry.

Islamic influence in eastern Africa was also architectural, encompassing mosques, palaces and ordinary houses. Elaborately decorated doors, furniture and chests were part of Islamization. Among the lost cities of eastern Africa is Gedi—a deserted city of Islamic architectural splendor. Historians still debate as to why its inhabitants left it in a hurry. But there is no doubt that this was once a very prosperous city, deeply influenced by both Islamic and African civilizations. Islamic architecture has been part of cultural globalization.

East African dress culture until the second half of the twentieth century was also partly a reflection of Islam. The *kanzu*, usually a white garment for males with some silk decoration, is still widely used not only by Muslims but also by non-Muslim Baganda and other Bantu peoples. It was developed as a garment by Swahili people under Arab influence.

Until the second half of the twentieth century the Arab impact in Eastern Africa also included the use of the Arabic alphabet and orthography for African languages. Kiswahili was written in the Arabic script for centuries before the triumph of the Latin alphabet under European colonialism in the twentieth century. Less well known is the fact that some of the earliest writings of Afrikaans in South Africa used the Arabic orthography.

Another major influence from Asia along the East African coast came from the Indian subcontinent. India's impact on Swahili cuisine came quite early,

beginning with the increasing use of spices and subsequently adopting whole dishes complete with their Indian names. Today words and dishes like *biriani*, *pilau* and *chapati* are as much part of Swahili culture as they are part of the Indian way of life.

Another South Asian influence was on Swahili music. The musical influence probably began with such instruments as the *tabla* (an Indian drum), the *harmonium* and the *sitar* (an Indian harp). In the first half of the twentieth century Indian influence on both Swahili and Arabic music accelerated, partly in response to the growth of the Indian music and film industries. Indian films became popular in east African cities from Dar es Salaam to Durban, Mogadisho to Maputo, and Asmara to Zanzibar.

## THE COMPARATIVE SCALE

When we look at Africa and Asia along the Indian Ocean comparatively, we are addressing both similarities and differences. Most countries in both continents emerged from World War II with the shared experience of colonial rule. Territorially, almost the whole of Africa was colonized, but only about 60 per cent of Asia. Temporally, on the other hand, African colonies were colonized for a much briefer period than Asian countries. When the British declared Kenya a crown colony, Jomo Kenyatta was already born. He was still alive when the British left—and fit enough to rule

Kenya for fifteen years after Britain's 1963 departure. So brief was the colonial period in Kenya.

In contrast, many parts of India had been under different degrees of British control (governmental and nongovernmental) for hundreds of years before India's partition and independence in 1947. Indonesia had similarly been under some degree of Dutch control for centuries. West Asia was colonized by the Ottomans before it was colonized by West Europeans. Although less of Asian territory was colonized than African territory, South Asia was on the whole colonized for a longer period than eastern Africa.

But here a paradox emerges. African cultures and values were disrupted much faster in spite of the brevity of the colonial experience in places like Kenya. Within less than a century, whole African societies were Christianized—whereas most Asians had resisted Christianization for hundreds of years. And African political and educational systems became more dependent on European languages than did Asian systems. We never refer routinely to “English-speaking Asian countries” or “French-speaking Asian states” the way we discuss Anglophone Africa and Francophone Africa. The legislative process in the majority of African countries would grind to a standstill without the use of European languages.

By religious, linguistic, and educational indicators Africa seemed to be Westernizing faster than most Asian

countries. Why then was Africa (outside South Africa) soon to be left behind by Asia in economic performance? If Africa was culturally Westernizing faster than Asia, why was Asia economically Westernizing faster than Africa? What is the relationship between cultural Westernization and economic Westernization?

We know that Western culture (including the Protestant ethic in Max Weber's sense) has been good for economic performance within the Western world. But we still do not know if Western culture is good for economic performance outside the West. On the contrary, some Asian examples outside of the Indian Ocean seem to demonstrate that the best approach is a combination of Western technique with indigenous culture. The Japanese after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 asked themselves, "Can we economically modernize without culturally Westernizing?" The Japanese said yes, and proceeded to adopt the strategy of what they called "Western technique, Japanese spirit". The first Japanese industrial miracle occurred (1868-1945), and Japan became a major industrial power while remaining culturally authentic.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Turks under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk also asked themselves, "Can we economically modernize without culturally Westernizing?" The Turkish answer was "No—cultural Westernization is the only route towards modernization". They substituted the Roman alphabet for the Arabic in writing the Turkish language; they Western-

ized the legal system; they outlawed the fez; and of course they abolished the monarchy and the caliphate. And yet in the final analysis, Turkey's pace of industrialization and economic transformation was far slower than Japan's.

As Africa has emerged from colonial rule she has asked herself, *de facto*, if she could economically modernize without culturally Westernizing. In reality Africa's answer so far has been "cultural Westernization without economic modernization." Africa has been in "double jeopardy"—first, Westernizing too fast; and second, Westernizing in the wrong areas of Western culture. Mozambique, for example, has been Westernized in prayer, but not production; in idiom, but not innovation; in costume, but not computer. Again the Republic of South Africa has to be treated differently.

Taiwan, South Korea, and Hong Kong adopted mainly the more productive elements of Western civilization, and linked them to their own methods of social organization and cultural modification. Taiwan was colonized by mainland China, South Korea by Japan, and Hong Kong by Great Britain. At the end of World War II the three of them were not very different in level of modernization from the more prosperous parts of Africa such as Ghana, Kenya, and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Much of Asia at that time was behind South Africa in economic performance.

Apart from Ethiopia and the Arab countries, African countries on the Indi-

an Ocean were slow to get independence. But when Ghana became independent in 1957, its per capita income was about the same as South Korea's (\$490 vs. \$491, in 1980 dollars); by the early nineties, Ghana had only \$400, while South Korea had shot up to \$6,000. And yet Ghanaians still speak better English than South Koreans, are more Christianized than South Koreans. Higher cultural Westernization in the Third World has not necessarily meant higher economic and developmental returns. Every civilian ruler of Ghana has been a highly Westernized intellectual, yet Ghana has not kept pace with South Korea's relentless industrialization and economic performance. The secret of economic development may not lie in culturally imitating the West. It may lie in combining Western innovation with local authenticity.

In spite of the economic reversals of more recent days, East and South-East Asia may have found that secret. Nuclear politics permitting, South Asia is catching up. The African elite is still stifled by excessive Western imitation without adequate indigenous authenticity. This is even worse among most eastern Africa countries than among West African states.

## THE COMPETITIVE FACTOR

While colonialism helped to turn African and Asian countries into political allies, that same colonial experience prepared the ground for their economic rivalry.

The European powers created in the colonies competing economies of primary products. In cotton production, Sudan was in competition with India; in rubber, Liberia with Malaysia; in oil, Libya with Indonesia; in tea, Kenya with Ceylon (Sri Lanka). In some products Africa clearly enjoyed a margin of advantage at one time. Palm oil, groundnuts (peanuts) and cocoa became bigger exports from Africa than from Asia. Little Zanzibar dominated the production of cloves. And Africa led the way in mineral exports—chrome, cobalt, platinum, asphalt, diamonds, gold, and even copper.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, Africa had lost ground to Asian countries both in levels of production and in degree of diversification. Even in those agricultural products in which Africa had once been preeminent, Asian countries had either closed the lead or outstripped Africa. Malaysia is now a bigger producer of palm oil than the Ivory Coast; Indonesia produces more cloves than Zanzibar. This is quite apart from the even more dramatic difference in pace of industrialization and mechanization between most African countries and most Asian. Outside the Republic of South Africa, Egypt and the Maghreb, Africa is now way behind almost all Asian countries in industrialization.

In spite of Asia's recent economic reversals, what enabled Asia to outperform Africa economically within less than three decades? We have already referred to two interrelated causes—that

African societies attempted to Westernize too fast, and were Westernizing in the wrong areas. One result has been a peculiar process of MAL-MODERNIZATION. Africa has experienced urbanization without industrialization, Western tastes without Western skills, capitalist greed without capitalist discipline, Western consumption patterns without Western production techniques, Western culture of letters without Western culture of numbers. To paraphrase the English poet, Alexander Pope:

*A little modernity is a dangerous thing,  
Drink deep or taste not the Western spring.*

Other factors have militated against African development as compared with Asia. Some sectors of labour costs in Africa have been higher than their counterparts in South Asia. A 1989 World Bank report, "SubSaharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth," put the disparities in the following way:

*In most African countries at the beginning of the 1980s, public sector wages, measured as a multiple of per capita income, were several times those of Asia. For instance, official Tanzanian wages, which were relatively low for Africa, were more than double those of Sri Lanka.*

The gross neglect of African infrastructure has also been very damaging to the wider strategy of development. Charges for infrastructure services in

Africa are not only lower than economic costs; they are even lower than what is needed for infrastructure maintenance. The World Bank sub-Saharan report mentioned above has argued that "moderate increases in financial terms would yield revenue equivalent to about 20 to 30 percent of current public revenues." Such a strategy would be easy to implement, administer, monitor, and audit. Increased charges on electric power, water, roads (vehicle licenses) and telecommunications could improve maintenance and expansion. The price increases would be charges rather than taxes—hitting higher income groups rather than the poor. They may arrest the relentless decay of roads, railways, and equipment for telecommunications, electricity generation and water supply.

Improved infrastructure may also help Africa narrow its growing development gap with most Asian countries. Africa and Asia are also in competition as magnets for foreign investment. With the end of the Cold War, additional opportunities have emerged for Western investment not only among the former members of the Warsaw Pact, but also among newly liberalizing Asian economies. For example, India, which had been suspicious of Western investment during much of its socialist years, has now been newly converted to the virtues of the market and become extra receptive to foreign investors. For foreign investors India's population of 900 million people constitutes a very attractive market.

The Cold War had been an asset in creating a bond of political partnership between Africa and most of Asia. The Cold War had made the nonaligned movement meaningful, as Asian and African countries sought solidarity in distancing themselves from the Warsaw Pact and the North Atlantic Alliance. On the other hand, the end of the Cold War has weakened the political partnership between Africa and Asia and heightened the economic rivalry. India became a rival for Western investment, and became less of an ally in nonalignment. China became less a solicitor for political influence in Africa, and more of a competitor for capitalist investment within its own borders. And even Vietnam, for so long a pariah state under 'Pax Americana', emerged in the 1990s as a magnet for American business, as well as a magnet for the investment of other Western powers.

The end of the Cold War has definitely weakened the forces of political alliance between Africa and Asia—and strengthened the prospects of escalating economic rivalry. This includes the area of foreign aid. On the other hand, the increasing prosperity of some Asian countries makes them less and less eligible for foreign aid. East and South-East Asia may become more aid-givers than aid-recipients before the end of the twentieth century.

However, most parts of Africa and large parts of South Asia are still within the poverty belt of planet Earth. But in

the post-Cold War era, foreign aid from the West is in any case declining. The question arises whether that aid is more likely to go to Laos than Liberia, to Azerbaijan rather than Burkina Faso, to Bangladesh rather than Nigeria. Is Asia outstripping Africa as a magnet for foreign aid in the post-Cold War era?

### **THE COOPERATIVE FACTOR: FROM AFRO-ASIANISM TO NONALIGNMENT**

Four interrelated political forces helped to bring Africa and Asia closer together in the twentieth century, at least for a while. One was the bond of being fellow victims of European racial and pigmentation arrogance (racial solidarity). Second was the bond of being fellow victims of European cultural and civilizational arrogance (cultural solidarity). Third was the bond of being fellow victims of actual and direct Western imperialism and colonization (anti-imperial solidarity). And fourth was the bond of attempted disengagement from the Cold War while it lasted (the solidarity of nonalignment).

The first two bonds (those of racial and cultural solidarities) resulted in several Afro-Asian movements. The most famous was the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955, which brought together emerging leaders of the two continents in a shared struggle against Western hegemony.

Clearly racial and cultural solidarity were closely linked to the struggle against imperialism—the third founda-

tion of Afro-Asian solidarity. But in time imperialism was defined not simply as old style territorial colonization and annexation by Europe, but also persistent Western hegemony and control, including the powerful and ominous shadow of the United States on other countries.

But by this extended definition of imperialism, it was not merely Asia and Africa which had been dominated by the West; it was also Latin America. The concept of “the Third World” entered the vocabulary of international politics in the 1960s. The First World was the world of technologically advanced capitalist countries economically led by the United States, Germany and Japan. The First World was politically led by the United States, Britain and France. The Second World was the world of technologically advanced socialist countries, led or dominated by the Soviet Union at the time, but encompassing such healthier economies as that of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Third World was the world of developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America - ranging from Brazil to Botswana, from Pakistan to Paraguay, from China to Chad. The People’s Republic of China insisted on being regarded as part of the developing world rather than being associated with either the Warsaw Pact or with the status of a potential superpower.

The extension of Afro-Asian solidarity to include Latin America had wide ramifications for the whole emerging

paradigm of “North-South relations” in the global domain. It affected alliances in such United Nations fora as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and cooperation in the Uruguay Round, GATT and the newly emerging successor to GATT, the World Trade Organization. It was also part of the foundation of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM).

The Nonaligned Movement was originally inspired by concern about the arms race between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact. The original 25 members of the Movement aspired to influence the world towards both disarmament and increasing decolonization. Over the decades, the Movement has retained the ambition of pursuing “peace, achievement of disarmament, and settlement of disputes by peaceful means”. It has also remained committed to self-determination and independence “for all peoples living under colonial or alien domination and foreign occupation”. But it has also increasingly emphasized “sustainable and environmentally sound development”, the promotion of “fundamental rights and freedom”, and the quest for strengthening “the role and effectiveness of the United Nations”. Above all, the Movement has been advocating “a transition from the old world order based on domination to a new order based on freedom, equality and social justice and the well-being of all”, as described in the Final Declaration of its 1989 Belgrade Conference.

Africa and Asia are still the senior continents in the Nonaligned Movement and have hosted most conferences to date. Indeed, until the mid-1990s only one conference had been hosted in Latin America—1979 in Havana, Cuba. Moreover, the largest country in Latin America, Brazil, has not been a member of the movement. On the other hand, in June 1994 the Movement admitted Africa's most industrialized and potentially most influential state on the world stage—the Republic of South Africa.

Just as the Afro-Asian solidarity movement suffered from a crisis of *raison d'être* as old-style European colonialism came to an end, the Nonaligned Movement has been suffering from a similar crisis of ultimate purpose in the wake of the end of the Cold War. Some members have gone as far as to recommend the dissolution of the Movement now that the world is no longer endangered by East-West tensions. Other members, in response, have championed a refocus on North-South relations at the global level with three paramount objectives: first, greater and healthier economic cooperation between North and South; second, greater and more self-reliant cooperation between South and South; and, third, a more general reform of the world system towards greater social justice and international equity. The countries of the Indian Ocean have been central to these movements.

## THE INDIAN OCEAN: A ZONE OF CONFLICT

Conflictual relationships between African and Asian countries also go back centuries, but some versions of conflict have mainly disappeared. An ancient form of conflict which is now rare is the slave raid. West Asia was extensively involved in the African slave trade almost a millennium before the trans-Atlantic slave trade began. The Indian Ocean side of Africa which was either the raiding ground or the transit area for the slave-trade conducted by West Asians. While this eastern slave trade was smaller scale than the trans-Atlantic traffic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was certainly a major cause of conflict between Asia and Africa.

If murder can be first degree and second degree, can slavery be similarly graded in depth of evil? Our own answer is that slavery can also be subject to a moral calculus. Just as virtue is subject to measurement, so surely is vice. Just as some social systems are more virtuous than others, surely some social systems are more vicious than others. What is the status of the West Asian slave trade tradition?

We have reached the conclusion that the least evil of the slave-systems in Africa was the indigenous system. It was the least influenced by racism (both the slaves and the masters were black), and the most ready to culturally assimilate the enslaved into the family of the master. The indigenous slave system was the least commercialized and the most

responsive to family values. We regard it as third-degree culpable slavery.

This essay regards the West Asian slave-system as second in culpability. It probably has the highest record of upward social mobility—from slave to Sultan, against the background of the Mamluks in Egyptian history. If indigenous slavery was mono-racial (black slaves, black masters), West Asian slavery had been multiracial (slaves and masters could be of any race). India also had a slave dynasty of its own in the eleventh century. Islam itself did not declare slavery an outright vice, but it did declare the emancipation of a slave an outright virtue time and again. On the whole, the West Asian system should be declared guilty of second-degree enslavement. The system had also been among the most racially assimilationist cultures in the world. For example, if the father is Arab, the child is Arab, regardless of the ethnicity of the mother.

As for the Euro-Christian trans-Atlantic slave-system, this was by far the most directly wedded to racism (white masters, black slaves). It was polarized across the colour divide. The geography of slavery, involving the Middle Passage, was almost as devastating as the history of slavery. In terms of assimilating the slaves into the master race, this slave-system was the least integrationist and least assimilationist of the three systems. In economic orientation, the trans-Atlantic slave-system was the most commercialized. In scale, it was by far the

most extensive coerced movement of human beings across long distances in human history. While there are indeed differences between Portuguese, Spanish, and Anglo-Saxon slave systems, the general picture is irresistible. If slavery is subject to gradation of culpability, the architects and main offenders of the trans-Atlantic slave system were definitely guilty of first-degree slavery.

Let us now return to the contemporary scene of slavery on the Indian Ocean. The situation in Sudan in the 1990s has posed a number of interrelated factual and moral questions. Is there indeed a new slavery, as some Western journalists and observers have claimed? If so, is it a revival of war-inspired enslavement, rather than a commercially inspired traffic? If it is an outgrowth of the war system, is this a revival of Arab-Islamic slavery or of indigenous slavery?

In the history of both Islam and indigenous Africa, war often resulted in prisoners and captives, who were sometimes held in bondage. The war in Southern Sudan is not only between Arabs and black Africans; it is also between Southern ethnic groups and between factions of “tribes”. If there is indeed slavery on any scale in southern Sudan, it involves both Arab capturing black and black capturing black, probably a partial revival of both Arab-Islamic and indigenous slavery. But is the Government in Khartoum implicated? Evidence seems to suggest it may be guilty of sins of omission rather than of

commission, perhaps not doing enough to stamp out traffic in captives and their being held in bondage. A strong indication that the Government is not involved in any slave trade is that so many southern Sudanese regard northern Sudan as a haven to run to for safety from the war in the South, as shown in figures of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees on distribution of displaced persons within Sudan; they see the Khartoum Government as their protector from the bloody consequences of war.

Outside Africa newer forms of slavery are rearing their ugly heads in Asia. Child prostitution in countries like Sri Lanka, Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia is resulting in the sale of boys and girls, sometimes by their own parents. Western pedophile tourists are among the pillars of this new form of enslavement. Fortunately some Western governments are beginning to take note of the atrocities of this new form of child enslavement. Tourists committing pedophile offenses in far away Thailand may find themselves liable to persecution on returning home to England or Australia.

The moral calculus of slavery is looking for legal sanctions in the modern age. We are already setting up courts to try perpetrators of genocide. In the twenty-first century there is a case for setting up international courts to try perpetrators of slavery—first, second, or third degrees of the crime of bondage. The Indian Ocean is only part of that

horrendous story.

More recent conflict situations include the racial relationships between Africans and South Asians in Eastern Africa. South Asians became commercially and financially successful in eastern and southern Africa, and generated a combination of class conflict and racial antagonisms. One of the more dramatic explosions was the mass expulsion of Asians by Idi Amin's Uganda in 1972, many of them merchants and professionals who were born in Uganda. There have also been periodic anti-Asian demonstrations in the streets of Nairobi, Kenya.

On the other hand, South Africans of South Asian origin have long been part of the vanguard of the struggle against racism and apartheid, going back to campaigning by Mohandas Gandhi, when he lived in South Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century. Many South Asians have since been among the leading activists of the African National Congress, including the woman who became the speaker in parliament, Speaker Jimwalla.

Large-scale war situations between Asia and Africa go back to many fluctuations in power between ancient Egypt and its Asian neighbors. Then came the momentous conquest of Egypt by the Arabs in the seventh century of the Christian era, followed by the Arab conquest of the rest of North Africa. A remarkable aspect of this historical saga was that those who were conquered by the Arabs became themselves Arabs.

Over the centuries Egyptians became not only Islamized in religion, but also Arabized in language and identity. Egypt became the largest Arab nation in population, the most advanced in know-how, the best endowed culturally, and potentially the mightiest militarily. Al-Azhar University in Cairo became the most distinguished centre of Muslim learning in the world, and one of the oldest.

War can indeed lead on to creativity and innovation. This happened in North Africa after the Arab conquest. It happened in Zanzibar after the establishment of an Arab Sultanate. It happened in Ethiopia after centuries of interaction between Southern Arabia and the Horn of Africa. More recently, conflict situations between Africa and Asia included competitive territorial claims to islands between Eritrea and Yemen, nearly leading to war in 1996.

## CONCLUSION

The historic role of the Indian Ocean as an arena of African-Asian interaction is as vibrant as ever. Vasco da Gama gave the Indian Ocean a new Euro-significance, but the Afro-Asian bond was much older. In culture the relevant forces include Islamization, the birth and spread of new languages, and the impact of Indian music and cuisine. Politically African-Asian interaction has included both friendship and conflict, and has ranged historically from the slave trade to the post-colonial nonaligned movement. The economic contacts between

Africa and Asia go back to at least the dhow trade with the monsoons, culminating today in such modern transactions as South Africa's arms sales to Asian countries. The great saga between Planet Earth's two largest continents is still unfolding. The Indian Ocean has encapsulated much of the action.

In the second half of the 20th century African and Asian countries have been both political allies and economic rivals. As economic rivals Asia has been winning. As political allies both continents have been beneficiaries.

A number of paradoxes characterize their respective experiences under the colonial Raj.

**The Time-Space Paradox:** Although Africa was colonized for a much shorter period than Asia, a much bigger percentage of African space was put under the colonial yoke than the percentage of Asian space. Less of Asian territory was colonized than African, but Asia was on the whole colonized for a longer period.

**The Time-Change Paradox:** Although Africa was colonized for a shorter period than were the colonized parts of Asia, African societies were changed and disrupted more fundamentally than were those of Asia. Within less than a century whole African societies were Christianized—whereas most Asians had resisted Christianization for hundreds of years. African political and educational systems became uniquely dependent on European languages.

**The Culture-Economy Paradox:**

Although Africa has, by some indicators, seemed to be culturally Westernizing faster than Asia, nevertheless Africa has been slower in economic modernization. Asian experience seems to indicate that, while thoroughgoing Protestant ethic and Western culture may be good for economic modernization in the West, they are not necessarily the best prescription elsewhere.

Some Asian examples seem to demonstrate that a combination of Western technique with indigenous culture is the secret of dramatic modernization and development - the Asian spirit for Asian development. Higher cultural Westernization in the Third World has not necessarily meant higher economic and developmental returns. As the Ghana-South Korea comparison shows, in reality, genuine development equals modernization minus dependency, especially cultural dependency.

**The Paradox of Divisive Peace:** Unfortunately peace is divisive. Asian and African countries were greatest allies when they really perceived shared dangers or common enemies. They were united against Western racism when the West was really bigoted (Afro-Asian racial solidarity). They were united in defense of non-Western civilizations when the West demeaned them (Afro-Asian cultural solidarity). Asian and African countries were of course also united against Western imperialism and colonialism (Afro-Asian anti-colonial solidarity). Asian and African countries

were also united against the risks and dangers of the Cold War before it ended. (Afro-Asian solidarity behind the non-aligned movement, joined by Latin America). The Afro-Asian movement got weaker and weaker as the struggle against direct racism and imperialism receded into history. The nonaligned movement has lost its original reason for existence with the end of the Cold War—so there is a gallant struggle to transform the movement from its historic East-West concerns to the more enduring North-South issues.

Is East-West reconciliation bad for North-South relations? The end of the Cold War and the triumph of market ideologies is turning Africa and Asia away from the old political solidarities and more and more towards new economic rivalries. As Vietnam increases liberalization and the spirit of welcoming foreign investment, Vietnam becomes a rival to Africa for some of the investment and some of the aid. China is experimenting with market Marxism—and has become a much more attractive magnet for many Western investors than any part of Africa. India too is liberalizing, marketizing, and has begun to entice foreign investment with greater vigor. With a population significantly larger than all the 50 African countries added together, the Indian market is very appetizing for many foreign investors, though there are still some impediments.

**The Roots-Goals Paradox:** Every society seeks to develop two kinds of

national myths—the myth of ancestry (to emphasize its heritage from the past) and the myth of purpose (to emphasize its reason for existence and its goals for the future). The myth of roots is tied to sense of history and identity. The myth of purpose is about sense of social direction. Societies which totally lose a sense of their past have a hard time realizing their future goals.

One reason for the failures of the Soviet Union experiment was that its sense of socialist purpose tried to deny if not destroy its sense of Russian heritage, starting with the execution of the royal family at the revolution's outset. A denial of the Russian past helped to sabotage the Soviet future.

Western imperialism undermined Africa's own sense of ancestral heritage more seriously than it undermined Asia's sense of its own glorious past. African school children were taught to believe that they were a people without history. A Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford University as late as the 1960s was capable of proclaiming in a televised lecture: "Maybe in the future there will be African history, but at the moment there is none. There is only the history of the white man in Africa. The rest is darkness, and darkness is not a subject of history." Of course, Trevor-Roper was speaking nonsense. I hope since then he has had time to read the multi-volume Cambridge History of Africa and the 8-volume UNESCO General History of Africa.

In Asia, China's cultural revolution under Mao was a denial of roots and definitely resulted in damaged goals. Vietnam's communist experiment was for a while a denial of roots—with the consequence of damaging developmental goals. Both China and Vietnam have now retreated from an assault on their own ancestral heritage.

The partition of India was a partial denial of the subcontinent's shared religious heritage (Hindu plus Muslim). It released passions and rivalries which heightened a sense of sectional heritages (Hindu vs. Muslim). Goals suffered as a result for both India and Pakistan—and subsequently for Bangladesh, when it became separately independent. Mahatma Gandhi and the Nehru family in power tried to help India build a new myth of national purpose—"The Seven Pillars of a New International Indian Moral Order." The four domestic pillars were non-violence, liberal democracy, socialist development, and church-state separation. The three international pillars were: non-alignment in a world divided by ideology, the arms race and military alliances; solidarity with the peoples of Asia and Africa and the dispossessed everywhere, in a search for a world without racism or imperialism; and a commitment to the United Nations system, including a struggle to liberate it from big power manipulation.

These were the seven pillars of wisdom which independent India's found-

ing fathers seem to have had in mind when constructing the post-colonial myth of national purpose for India. The question is: how many of those seven pillars of wisdom are still left standing? Have others been added? Are the pillars still enough to ensure India's special historic role as a leader in vision and a vanguard of international moral standards? Are the pillars still enough to maintain India's role as a diplomatic bridge between the concerns of Asia and the aspirations of the African peoples?

**The Cultural Paradox of Greed:**

Among the cultural casualties of the colonial experience was the underdeveloped nature of greed in Africa before the coming of the white man. Outside the Nile Valley, Great Zimbabwe and a few other exceptions, there were hardly any African equivalents of the Taj Mahal, or the Palace of Versailles, or the Temples of Cambodia. It takes a love of luxury, a pursuit of surplus, or a hunger for profit to produce a civilization of comparable monuments. It takes the exploitation of simpler people to build palaces, temples and pyramids. Most precolonial African cultures were neither greedy enough nor

exploitative enough.

This underdeveloped greed was a casualty of European colonization and imperialism. Postcolonial African elites have learnt the attractions of luxury, surplus and profit with a vengeance! They have learnt capitalist greed, though not always capitalist discipline.

In his response to me, Robert McNamara has argued that if African problems require a culture change before they can be solved, then we are lost!! McNamara believes that culture change simply takes too long. "Africa's problems are too urgent to wait!" My answer is that not all Africa's problems require a culture change, and that culture change need not take too long. An example is post-war Japan where, after a brief American occupation that brought a new constitution, Japan experienced a rapid and fundamental transformation in its political culture, and a liberal competitive multi-party system has taken root.

It just goes to show that fundamental culture change need not take too long. There is therefore hope for Africa too as the new century unfolds, and globalization takes one more step forward. ■